

*Draft Meeting Minutes  
South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force  
South Florida Water Management District  
West Palm Beach, Florida  
June 29, 2016*

**Welcome and Introductions**

Mr. Michael Bean, Task Force (TF) Chair, called the meeting to order at 11:33 am. He recognized the following individuals:

- Mr. Greg Langowski, Senator Rubio's Office
- Rep. Gayle Harrell, Florida House of Representatives
- Ms. Michelle McGovern, Senator Bill Nelson's Office
- Rep. Marilyn Magar, Florida House of Representatives
- Mr. Ed Fielding, Martin County Commissioner
- Mr. Ron Bergeron, Commissioner, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
- Ms. Sarah Hurd, Martin County Commissioner
- Mr. Cicero Osceola, Seminole Big Cypress Tribal Council
- Ms. Jacqueline Gould, USGS - SE Regional Director

Mr. Bean noted the large turnout and proposed adding an additional public comment period in addition to the two regularly scheduled sessions. There were no objections. Mr. Drew Bartlett, TF Vice Chair, added they did have a large audience because of the significant and devastating algal blooms and impacts to the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee estuaries. TF members were asked to introduce themselves and provide some brief introductory remarks. Ms. Shannon Estenez provided some administrative instructions.

To view the webcast of the meeting in its entirety, please visit:

[http://evergladesrestoration.gov/content/tf\\_minutes.html](http://evergladesrestoration.gov/content/tf_minutes.html)

*The following members were in attendance:*

*Michael Bean, Chair, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks, U.S. Department of the Interior*

*Drew Bartlett, Vice Chair, Deputy Secretary for Ecosystem Restoration, Florida Department of Environmental Protection*

*Peter Antonacci, Executive Director, South Florida Water Management District*

*Amy Castaneda, Water Quality Technician and Betty Osceola, Tribal Member, Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida*

*Billy Causey for Lois Schiffer, U.S. Department of Commerce*

*Jo-Ellen Darcy, Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works, U.S. Department of the Army*

*Jose 'Pepe' Diaz, Commissioner, Miami Dade County*

*David Hawk for Camille Mittelholtz, Acting Director, Office of Safety, Energy and Environment, U.S. Department of Transportation*

*Patty Power for Jim Shore, General Counsel, Seminole Tribe of Florida*

*Kevin Ruane, Mayor, City of Sanibel*

*Lisa Russell for John Cruden, Assistant Attorney General, U.S. Department of Justice*

*Jeff Schmidt for Ann Mills, Deputy Under Secretary, Natural Resources and Environment, U.S. Department of Agriculture*

*Cesar Zapata for Stan Meiburg, Acting Deputy Administrator, U.S. Environmental Protection*

## *Agency*

*Shannon Estenoz, Director, Office of Everglades Restoration Initiatives*

*Jim Moran, Special Advisor, Water Resources Advisory Commission*

*Nick Wiley, Special Advisor, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission*

*Nick Aumen, Chair, Science Coordination Group*

*Barry Rosen, Chair, Working Group*

## **Comments from Elected Government Officials**

Rep. Gayle Harrell (District 83) said that she along with many of the attendees were there to voice their tremendous concern over the devastation they were suffering as a result of the releases from Lake Okeechobee. The impacts on their rivers and lagoon are devastating to the economy, environment and health of their people. The State of Florida has made significant investment in Everglades restoration and has spent over \$2 billion since 2000. This year they passed Legacy Florida which will provide a dedicated funding source for Everglades restoration. She asked the federal partners to do whatever is needed to solve this problem once and for all. She provided a letter addressed to the Corps proposing they re-address the Lake Okeechobee Regulation Schedule (LORS), halt the releases from Lake Okeechobee, hold more water north of the lake and release water south.

Rep. Marylynn Magar (District 82) said there is a serious economic problem and it was affecting fishermen, bait shops and paddleboard companies. There are serious health issues and people are getting sick. She begged they take action and implement the suggestions in the letter.

Commissioner Sarah Heard (Martin County) reported Martin County has declared a state of emergency. Since January over 140 billion gallons of highly polluted water has been discharged from Lake Okeechobee into their estuaries, more than was discharged during the last summer of 2013. Current conditions are worse than they have ever been and for the first time ever they have closed their public beaches. There are health risks associated with the toxins produced by the cyanobacteria in the green algae that can cause serious neurological diseases such as Lou Gehrig's, Alzheimer's and Parkinson's. They need to ask the President and Governor to create a research team to explore the health threats from the cyanobacteria. They need additional storage north and south of Lake Okeechobee, accelerated funding and completion of approved projects. She circulated photos taken the prior day in Martin County and also asked the Corps to halt discharges from the S-80 structure.

Commissioner Ed Fielding (Martin County) said the pictures reflect the problems. As Chairman of the Indian River Lagoon (IRL) Council, they too are extremely concerned that this will be the death deal for all of the fish, grasses and other animals in the south part of the IRL. The fish are rotting below the surface and they are unable to determine the extent of the damage. He has lived in Florida his entire life and what he is seeing is unbelievable. He asked for the locks to be closed immediately and for the release schedule for the Upper Chain of Lakes to be addressed.

## **Public Comment**

Mr. Michael Breen (The Green Bullet) offered The Breen Bullet as a solution he believed was credible. It was recently tested and approved for use. They have to do something right now about the algae in their waters and he offered to help with a pilot study.

Mr. David Preston (Bullsugar.org) said moving up of the purchase of lands in the Everglades Agricultural Area (EAA) is a good start but they are a little skeptical. They have had the chance to buy this land many times over the years and here they are again, facing a catastrophe. He

implored them to buy enough land in the EAA to stop the discharges and send enough water south to save the Everglades.

Mr. Mike Glynn (Stuart resident) noted he was a lifelong Floridian. He expects leadership from himself every day and said he expected the same from everyone sitting on the TF. They need to get Governor Rick Scott involved and the State of Florida needs to buy land south of Lake Okeechobee to store, clean and convey water. It is like they are living in a third world country and they demand clean water.

Mr. Newton Cook (Tequesta resident) said the truth is they cannot store themselves out of this problem. There is a tremendous amount of water coming down into Lake Okeechobee and it is going to go either to the Atlantic, the Gulf or Florida Bay. Today that water cannot go under Tamiami Trail because there is no structure south of the lake that can take the water. He asked that these people be told the truth.

Ms. Cara Capp (NPCA) reported she delivered a letter on behalf of the Coalition to the SFWMD and Corps leadership requesting that EAA storage planning be moved up in the Integrated Delivery Schedule (IDS). Aside from the ecological crisis, they are having a crisis of community. People are scared because they don't know when the water crisis will end, whether it will get worse or if it will come back next year. People in communities south of Lake Okeechobee are also concerned because they don't understand how they will be affected by Everglades restoration. The TF has an opportunity to initiate a planning process that brings everyone together to look at options for storage, treatment and conveyance desperately needed in the EAA. During the IDS planning process last year all four of the alternatives had EAA storage reservoir planning set to begin this year, however, the final agency alternative has it starting in 2020. She urged them to begin the planning.

Ms. Tiphany Manzi (Palm Springs resident) said her children are children of the tide who live and play in the sea. They do everything they can to help conserve their planet and it is appalling that officials aren't doing the same. Her son Mason and daughter Avery read their letters asking for their waters to be saved.

Ms. Lee Skinner (West Palm Beach resident) said her message is that they need something done yesterday. This algae is so toxic that they lose the ability to live in their communities. She asked that a Czar be appointed to get this done since these meetings are not working.

Ms. Elle Rappaport (Boynton Beach resident) said she was glad there were so many people present. They are very concerned with what is happening and they have expectations of the people they have put in office. She asked they speak to the governor about their concerns. They need to send the water south and start the planning now.

Mr. Mike Baldwin (Ding Darling Wildlife Society) said the solution to the problem already exists, in part, in the IDS. The planning to move the water south is not included in the schedule until 2020 and that is unacceptable. Planning needs to start right now and the issues with moving that water south need to be addressed. He urged the Task Force to support the planning effort start now.

Ms. Jennifer Hecker (Conservancy of SW Florida) requested that planning for water storage in the EAA begin in 2016. Her organization was one of those that nominated the Caloosahatchee when it was selected more than a decade ago as one of the most endangered rivers in the U.S.

Today it continues to be severely degraded by the same dumping of polluted water from Lake Okeechobee. It has wreaked havoc on the aquatic life causing die-offs of oysters and seagrasses. It has contributed to harmful algae blooms that have shut down water supply sources and have resulted in the closure of riverfront parks. The ripple effect of this unhealthy river and estuary on the quality of life has been devastating to the community. Studies are showing that hundreds of millions of dollars are being lost in tourism and real estate. The UF Water Institute Study clearly shows there is no way to stop these harmful discharges without large amounts of storage both north and south of Lake Okeechobee. If they don't take action now, those lands won't be available for restoration in the future.

Ms. Rae Ann Wessel (Sanibel Captiva Conservation Foundation) said they see the damage that is done each time there is an event and it gets worse each time. They have less recovery and less resiliency. She noted the goals of the Task Force seem like the perfect formula for the discussions they need to have on where to put the excess water. This week the Caloosahatchee is getting 70% of the unwanted water from the greater Everglades ecosystem and this is a common occurrence. They have two dynamic, productive estuaries being blown out while optimal water conditions are being managed in the EAA. She asked the TF to move up the EAA storage for north and south of the lake.

Mr. Drew Martin (Sierra Club) noted he is seeing blue-green algae in Lake Worth where he lives. They are being told the EAA cannot take any water even though that was the area that historically took almost all of the water. That water would have never gone east or west, it was always intended to go south. For thousands of years the Nile Valley was the best agricultural land in the world because the flooding gave it the nutrition it needed to grow crops.

Ms. Andrea Africano (Boca Raton resident) said the toxic water is affecting their tourism and is an impeding health crisis with the algae being linked to skin infections and Alzheimer's. The Governor has evaded his responsibilities and blames the federal government when it is the state that is responsible for water quality. They have gross negligence by the Governor and other officials who have not worked for their citizens but for Big Sugar and other interests. They want EAA planning now not in four years.

Ms. Cara Jennings (Lake Worth Florida resident) reported Lantana Beach was closed because of the toxicity levels. She supports the efforts of the people from Martin County who raised the red flag and called everyone to action. They can buy land endlessly but if they keep polluting the water and the Governor continues to allow endless development and mining then their beaches will be closed. The regulatory agency needs to stop the pollution from going into Lake Okeechobee.

Mr. Ryan Driggers (resident) said he represented the younger generation. He grew up in the area and it was sad to see how Singer Island is no longer the same. There are health issues and it's affecting tourism. He also asked that they not allow fracking to happen here in Florida which will make things worse.

Ms. Nyla Pipes (Port St. Lucie resident) said residents are concerned with the blue-green algae and the nutrient pollution throughout the greater Everglades system. They need to address the nutrients that are being put into this system in addition to the Lake Okeechobee discharges. It is impossible to separate the volume of water from the nutrient pollution within the water. She encouraged them to work on these problems simultaneously. She also supported moving up storage planning options.

Ms. Jeanne Kenney (Martin County resident) said her family moved to Martin County in 1969 for her father's health. This issue is affecting everyone from east Stuart to Sailfish Point from every socio-economic level. It is time to stop the talk and start the action.

Mr. Robert Lynn Browning (resident) said he hears the people at the table say they are working with their partners and asked why they weren't partners as well. They feel they are all being paid off by the Sugar Industry. He demanded they buy the land now.

Ms. Tamlyn Willard (Jupiter resident) noted they are not affected yet but its coming. She is worried about her children who swim on the water. A year ago she bought her dream home on the Loxahatchee River and every day she checks the water quality. It is a political issue affecting every single one of them. This is their land and they love Florida. Their community needs help.

Mr. Mark Perry (FL Oceanographic Society) said they have had blue-green algae blooms coming into the estuary since 2004. This is the eighth event and the worst he has ever seen. Besides the 140 billion gallons of water that came into the St. Lucie Estuary, it also brought 2.5 million pounds of Nitrogen, 800,000 pounds of Phosphorus and over 40 million pounds of total suspended solids. The pollution is unacceptable. The Martin County Commission and others are standing up and saying shut down the S-80. He urged them to buy the land now and move the water south.

Ms. Julie Hill-Gabriel (Audubon Florida) noted the emotion in the room was palpable. She reminded them that they are not asking for them to do anything they are not already planning to do they are just asking that it be done sooner. Planning efforts that start this summer will make up the next generation of Everglades restoration. In order for it to be a comprehensible solution that next generation has to include storage options north and south of Lake Okeechobee. She urged them to move the planning effort up to 2016.

Ms. Diana Umpierre (Sierra Club) noted that when this Task Force was established in 1996, its charge was to make recommendations for the purpose of restoring, preserving and protecting the south Florida ecosystem. Twenty years later, action needed to store, treat and convey water in the EAA keeps being put off despite repeated ecological collapses in the estuaries due to the excessive discharges and insufficient flows of fresh water going to ENP and Florida Bay. The coastal communities along the IRL and SW Florida Gulf Coast are facing complete devastation if quick action is not taken. The Sierra Club asks the TF as a body and individually to exercise political and moral courage to purchase the lands needed in the EAA.

Mr. Mike Conner (resident) brought in algae samples taken from the St. Lucie Estuary. He said he used to introduce himself as a struggling fishing guide from Martin County but he is no longer a fishing guide. Today, his business is dead in the water. Martin County residents have been told about the term "shared diversity", but they are the sacrificial lambs. Florida is no longer the sport fishing capital of the world. Human health trumps everything and Martin County needs safety and protection. Lake Okeechobee is the smoking gun and they demand the locks be closed.

Mr. Matthew Schwartz (South Florida Wildlands Assoc.) said he agreed with everything adding it is hard to figure out who is to blame. If they look at the greater Everglades they see how tiny Lake Okeechobee is compared to the 3 ½ million acres in intense agriculture to the north and the 700,000 acres in the EAA to the south. They need wetlands to store and clean water.

Ms. Melissa McCranels (Lake Worth resident) said she attempted to teach paddleboard yoga in Martin County before access to the water was shut down. She moved to Lake Worth but never thought she'd see the algae problem there as well. She would love to see people in a room hashing it out rather than pointing fingers. She asked Gov. Scott, the Corps and SFWMD to figure out a common solution and asked for stronger regulations for runoff.

Ms. Liz Earl (resident) said she originally lived here in 1961 and returned recently after retiring. She can't believe what has happened in 25 years and is shocked that people have allowed this to happen. She urged them to stop the pollution.

Mr. Kenny Hinkle (Bull Sugar.org and Martin County resident) said it is God awful right now. They have six inches of blue green algae floating on their docks and marinas. They are not going to take this anymore. Shared adversity is what they need and suggested they flood the cane fields.

Ms. Jo Neeson (Jensen Beach resident) as one of the founders of the River Warriors, has done her best for the last three years to get as much information and share the truth. Not doing this for money and is sick and tired of bought and paid for people saying that it's okay for the kids and neighbors to be sick. They are unable to make money because they can't do what they used to do. Urged for this to stop.

Ms. Mila deMier (Key West resident) noted the Governor claimed he has created a lot of good jobs and asked what the jobs were worth if the people were contaminated. The natural resources will all go to waste by putting a band aid on the problem. She asked where Mr. Putnam from the Department of Agriculture was. She asked they think about future generations and take extreme actions and not postpone this any longer.

To view any of the following presentations in their entirety, please click on the handouts/presentations link for the June 29<sup>th</sup> meeting:

[http://evergladesrestoration.gov/content/tf\\_minutes.html](http://evergladesrestoration.gov/content/tf_minutes.html)

### **Leadership of the Working Group**

Mr. Bean noted Mr. Ernie Marks served as Chair since 2013 and Mr. Barry Rosen served as Vice Chair since 2012 and he thanked them for their service. Although they do not have set terms, it has been their practice to rotate these positions and exchange leadership between federal and state agencies. COL Jason Kirk and Mr. James Erskine have expressed a willingness to serve. COL Kirk said it was an honor to step forward as Chair of the WG as they work together for the restoration of the Everglades. Mr. James Erskine said he was honored to serve next to the COL as Vice Chair. There was a motion which was seconded and approved without discussion for COL Kirk and Mr. Erskine to serve as Chair and Vice Chair respectively.

### **Strategy and Biennial Report**

Ms. Estenoz provided a brief presentation to update where they are on the report. She reviewed the primary audience, report purpose as well as how the report is organized. The reporting period is from July 1, 2014 through June 30, 2016. In response to the National Academy of Sciences' comments in 2014 that the government do a better job of addressing the potential impacts of climate change and the interaction with Everglades restoration, they have been working with a subset of the WG member agencies to include a high level discussion in this report. They will also be considering a process to review the system-wide ecological

indicators and whether they have the right suite of indicators. She reviewed the schedule and noted the Task Force will be asked to approve the report by the end of October.

### **Everglades Restoration Briefing**

Commissioner Ron Bergeron noted he entered the Everglades when he was three years old when his grandfather was a Game Warden. The goal in 1948 was to drain part of the Everglades and here they are today with a whole different generation being affected by those earlier decisions. He introduced Mr. Nick Wiley, Executive Director, Mr. James Erskine, Everglades Coordinator and Mr. Tom Ryan, Regional Director and noted they are fully committed to working with the Corps and others to save the global Everglades.

#### *Water Conditions and Emergency Operations Update*

Mr. John Mitnik noted the dry season of 2014 was well below average getting only 51% of average rainfall. The wet season of 2015 ended with slightly below average rainfall. As they entered into the dry season of 2015 they had excessive rainfall with 7 inches of rainfall for the month of January alone. Overall, the dry season for 2015 ended with 168% above average rainfall. That dry season ended as the second wettest dry season on record since record keeping began in 1932. A lot of that rainfall was attributed to the rainfall effects brought on by El Niño. He provided an in depth presentation reviewing the recent El Niño event as well as the one that occurred in 1998. He reviewed in detail the series of emergency operations that were implemented after the State of Florida requested an emergency deviation from the Corps.

Mr. Moran said that as they attempt to operate the system and implement flood control they face certain constraints with the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA). For example, the Kissimmee River Restoration (KRR) project goals are often in conflict with the ESA and the MBTA. Many times it is impossible for them to operate the system the way it was designed to be operated and still be consistent with the ESA. They need to take into consideration the changing science and population of the birds that are being protected when the constraints are imposed on the SFWMD. He suggested that perhaps this TF should ask Congress to amend the ESA to allow them to fully use the investments they have made in the ecosystem.

Mr. Antonacci added that every time they try to operate the system in an aggressive way, they are met with objections. He offered to bring forth some ideas on how they could live more compatibly with the ESA as well as some examples of how the ESA has inhibited them in dealing with flood control adding that the ESA is not just a constraint but an obstruction. Mr. Bean said Interior would welcome any suggestions noting the FWS and the Corps have been engaged in an effort to try to reconcile the Corps' various tasks under the restoration program with the ESA. He believes they are close to having a path forward that allows for consideration of both environmental and human needs and offered it as a model for how these sorts of problems could be resolved in the future. It has been successful throughout the country to find ways to adjust or make minor changes to projects to ensure those projects could go forward while avoiding adverse impacts to endangered species.

#### *Environmental Conditions Update*

Ms. Terrie Bates provided an in depth presentation on environmental conditions in the Kissimmee, Lake Okeechobee, St. Lucie Estuary, Caloosahatchee, STAs, Biscayne Bay and Florida Bay. In the dry season they typically look for the flood plain to slowly dry out and as it does the wading bird usage kicks up getting ready for the breeding season. Most significant

from an ecological standpoint for the Everglades is that because of those very high stages throughout the dry season there has been significant impact on wading bird nesting. They had very poor nesting year last year which will be exacerbated with conditions this year. For example, because the WCAs were well above their regulation schedules, they never got the stages down enough to support the foraging by wading birds to have successful nesting conditions throughout. They expect poor nesting success this year as well.

She reviewed the water level, flows and total phosphorus trends for water years 2014 through 2016 in Shark River Slough and Taylor Slough. Minimum flow and level thresholds for Florida Bay were also reviewed. On the seagrass die-off she noted that one of the concerns is that a year or so after this kind of die-off they have a lot of organic material decomposing that can lead to algal bloom conditions in the bay. The good news is they haven't seen that happen to date and the water is clear with no sign of blooms.

#### *Long Term Actions*

*SFWMD Update* - Mr. Ernie Marks provided a presentation that reviewed the status of the Restoration Strategies Program, Western Basins Water Resource Evaluation, C-44 Reservoir/STA, C-43 Reservoir (Cell 1), Picayune Strand Restoration Project, Biscayne Bay Coastal Wetlands, Lakeside Ranch STA and the Central Everglades Planning Project: Old Tamiami Trail Removal. He reviewed the high water relief efforts that were undertaken as part of the February 2015 emergency order as well as CERP planning efforts for Lake Okeechobee and Western Everglades that will start this summer.

*Corps of Engineers Update* – Mr. Jeff Couch provided a presentation and highlighted the progress made since the last TF meeting with a number of things being completed in addition to the signing of two Project Partnership Agreements for the C-43 and a PPCA for CEPP. They had transfers into O&M on Kissimmee River Restoration, Picayune Strand and projects for IRL South. The Corps and the SFWMD are updating the Nov. 2015 Integrated Delivery Schedule (IDS) to reflect the FY16 budget and the FY17 President's Budget. He reviewed the status of the foundation projects, Generation 1 and 2 projects as well as current and future planning efforts.

#### **Public Comment**

Ms. Michelle McGovern (Senator Bill Nelson's office) reported Sen. Nelson signed a letter to Sec. Darcy regarding the blue-green algae plume forming off their coast. To prevent this environmental and economic crisis from spreading, Sen. Nelson strongly urges the Corps to take immediate action. Earlier this year the Corps was able to effectively lower Lake Okeechobee's water level and send more water to the southern end of the system by raising the water level in the L-29 canal and Sen. Nelson strongly urges the Corps to do that again. While this is a short term solution, he urged the Corps to evaluate storage options in the entire system as a long term solution. Restoring the natural flow of water south into the Everglades is a fundamental component of Everglades restoration and must be addressed immediately.

Ms. Kimberly Mitchell (Everglades Trust) urged the member agencies to put the planning for the southern storage in the EAA on the fast track. Her dad was on the Apollo 14 and the sixth man to walk on the moon but Apollo 13 was the most important mission because it taught all of them how to deal with a big problem. She urged everyone who makes these decisions to understand the significance and severity of their actions and inactions.

Ms. Lisa Interlandi (Everglades Law Center and FL Wildlife Federation) said it was encouraging to hear about the progress being made but the environmental conditions are still continuing to degrade. She urged that projects that can alleviate the damaging discharges to the estuaries be expedited since they no longer have the time to wait. They need storage in the EAA combined with storage north of the lake. They also need to move Modified Water Deliveries forward and get the contracts completed.

Ms. Roxanne Howard (Hobe Sound resident) said she was a third generation Floridian and was there because it is obvious the dark forces of greed have a grip on their politicians. She is passionate about children, health and life and doing what is right and these are things that are priceless. Gov. Scott said he was going to make Florida a profitable state and he is failing miserably. This problem is affecting the entire state financially. The Huffington Post, the news and the internet know what is going on. She would not want to plan a vacation here and get a flesh eating disease. The entire state needs to stand with Martin County. She implored the members to buy the land and move the water south.

Ms. Kristin Bauer (Sacred Water Tribe) said she studied water crystal photography in Japan and learned that water is influenced by any energy it is connected to. They are at war with each other and she encouraged them to work together to create something powerful in their community.

Ms. Betty Osceola (Ochopee resident) noted her people talk about healing and fostering care for the environment and instead of fighting each other and pointing fingers she suggested they all be a part of the solution. Unless the water is clean it will not be allowed in Everglades National Park. While she was getting flooded in January and the tree islands had a foot and a half of water they were doing legal wrangling with private property owners about their flooding. They had no problem flooding her tribe's areas. She asked them to look for solutions adding that buying the land alone will not solve the problem.

Ms. Maggy Hurchalla (Stuart resident) reported that Congressman Patrick Murphy asked EPA to join with Florida agencies to do whatever was necessary to define the health risk of the various forms of toxins they are seeing with cyanobacteria. A representative from Florida's Health Department confirmed to her that there is no ongoing testing for neurological toxins that come from cyanobacteria in the sediments of Lake Okeechobee, in the fish or the people who eat the fish. They are the poster child for cyanobacteria. Whether the water goes east or west or south this problem has to be addressed. They can't wait 30 years to see the epidemiological effects of something they know can cause ALS, Parkinson's and Alzheimer's. She asked the TF to help them address it now. CERP won't work if it's not addressed early.

### **Big Cypress Team Report**

Ms. Patty Power noted the sub group was formed by the TF in December 2012 after the Tribe objected to CEPP moving forward without consideration of the impacts in the western Everglades area. They were told they couldn't be included in the way CEPP was being formulated because they didn't have the data. She provided a presentation reviewing the footprint of the western Everglades as well as what is needed. The team has had good discussions over the past few years regarding the data and the Corps is looking to launch the Western Everglades Restoration Project (WERP) effort in August 2016. The Tribe needs this project more than ever given that the whole system is under a lot of pressure.

Ms. Estenoz reviewed the draft statement from the team to the TF for transmittal to the Corps as input on the Western Everglades CERP project. It states that it is good that restoration of the quality, quantity, timing and distribution of the water is coming to the Western Everglades. It lists those prior studies and work that, at a minimum, should be taken into consideration. It also states that during the development of the Western Everglades CERP project, the team agrees it is important for the agencies to continue the work identified by the team including, for example, the collection of relevant field data and the development of new analytical tools. The team recognizes this type of work can inform not only this initial pre-authorization phase of planning, but also future implementation phases. If the TF is comfortable with the language, her office would finalize it and transmit it to the Corps as part of the record. Ms. Darcy echoed the sentiments reflected in the statement and hoped they could all support it. Motion made and seconded, all voted in favor to finalize the statement and transmit it to the Corps.

### **Implementing the Strategic Action Framework: Early Detection Rapid Response (EDRR) – Invasive Exotic Species**

Ms. Estenoz noted one of the big gaps identified was the need to detect an invasion early and rapidly respond to it. Mr. Nick Aumen added that USGS has a Cooperative Agreement with FAU's Center for Environmental Studies to conduct a series of workshops on important topics. Once the Strategic Action Framework group developed their priorities they convened the initial workshop on EDRR.

Ms. Christina Romagosa provided a presentation reviewing the goals of the Strategic Action Framework, one of which is EDRR. In October 2015 folks came together to discuss how they could improve the EDRR decision making framework for the greater Everglades. One of the success stories for EDRR has been with the Sacred Ibis which was released in 1992 during Hurricane Andrew. The Greater Everglades Ecosystem Rapid Response Screening Tool (GEERReST) was introduced. It is a decision support tool so that decisions to act are quick, transparent, standardized and defensible. It can be used across all agencies and cooperators and across all taxonomic groups. Many of the components of the tool were taken from existing ranking systems. She reviewed the GEERReST process and how it would deal with uncertainty. A second USGS/CES meeting will be scheduled later in the year and provide an opportunity for potential assessors to evaluate the tool. Use of the tool is meant to be ecosystem wide.

Ms. Estenoz added the next step for them, not the scientists, is to decide who wants to use it, the governance around it, and whether it is a tool that can be used by anyone who is in the business of/ concerned with invasive species. Ideally they would convene, either at the WG level or TF level, a conversation about how it would be used, who would be the lead agency, how it will be funded, how do they determine who manages this process. The good news is that they have existing capacity that would plug right into this tool.

Mr. Moran said the SFWMD has had good success at controlling exotics and would be available for consultation. Mr. Erskine said that FWC had a \$2.4 million Legislative Budget request this year and of that \$1.2 million is reoccurring, \$500,000 is focused on Python management and to leverage technologies to support innovation to increase the ability to detect Pythons in the wild.

### **EvergladesRestoration.gov**

Ms. Estenoz noted the website was overhauled the prior year with the help of High School students through a partnership with G. Holmes Braddock High School. She introduced Mr.

Rafael Hernandez, a former student with Braddock who is now doing an internship with her office through Florida International University (FIU) and working on the website to make it compatible with mobile devices. A live demo of the website was provided.

### **Assignments, Next Steps and Closing Comments**

Motion made and seconded to approve the minutes which were approved without objection. Next TF meeting is scheduled for December 2, 2016. Ms. Darcy assured the public they have been listened to and they all need to remind themselves how far they have come. They would not be where they are today if it wasn't for the partnerships they share. She hoped they not lose sight of the fact that they all have a common goal, Everglades restoration. They have some latitude in what they can do going forward. They are currently updating the IDS and they could use that opportunity to look at what could be moved forward. Mr. Bartlett echoed Ms. Darcy's comments adding that there is a lot of anxiety around the discharges, a tragic event, along with the Florida Bay event last summer. As they are updating the IDS, perfect forum to look at things that can be done quicker.

Meeting adjourned at 3:46 PM

Handouts:

1. Administrative Items
  - a. Agenda
  - b. Draft meeting minutes, November 2015
2. Task Force Roster
3. Working Group Charter
4. Strategy and Biennial Report presentation
5. Everglades Restoration Briefing
  - a. Water Conditions and Emergency Operations presentation
  - b. Environmental Conditions presentation
  - c. SFWMD presentation
  - d. Corps presentation
6. Big Cypress Team
  - a. Presentation
  - b. Draft statement
7. Invasive Species EDRR presentation
8. Letter to the Corps re: Lake Okeechobee discharges (dated 28 June 2016)