

Final Meeting Minutes
South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force
South Interior Building
Washington, DC
December 2, 2016

Welcome, Goals for the Meeting and Administrative Items

Mr. Michael Bean, Task Force Chair, called the meeting to order at 9:33am. He noted the enjoyable time had by those who participated in the reception and walking monuments tour the prior evening. This would be his final meeting as Chair and he thanked his fellow members for their service. Secretary Sally Jewell is scheduled to join the meeting later that morning and the agenda will be accommodated upon her arrival. Members were provided with briefing books which contained the agenda and draft minutes from the June meeting. Mr. Drew Bartlett, Task Force Vice Chair, recognized the incredible amount of leadership demonstrated by members of this Task Force. Ms. Shannon Estenoz provided some logistical announcements and reminded everyone that the meeting was being webcast.

To view the webcast of the meeting in its entirety, please visit:
<https://livestream.com/usinterior/events/6642791/videos/143258652>

Task Force Member Introductions

The Task Force members were asked to introduce themselves and provide some brief introductory remarks.

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
Billy Causey for Lois Schiffer, General Counsel, 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
Gene Duncan, Water Resources Director, Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida
Len Lindahl for Peter Antonacci, Executive Director, South Florida Water Management District
Stan Meiburg, Acting Deputy Administrator, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
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
Lisa Russell for John Cruden, Assistant Attorney General, U.S. Department of Justice
James Tillman for Ann Mills, Deputy Under Secretary, Natural Resources and Environment, U.S. Department of Agriculture
COL Jason Kirk, Chair, Working Group, Commander Jacksonville District Corps of Engineers
Nick Aumen, Chair, Science Coordination Group, U.S. Geological Survey
James Erskine for Nick Wiley, Special Advisor, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
Shannon Estenoz, Director, Office of Everglades Restoration Initiatives

Power Point presentations and handouts from the meeting are available at:
<https://www.evergladesrestoration.gov/content/tf/archives/120216/>

Invasive Exotic Species: Implementing the Strategic Action Framework

Ms. Estenoz provided a presentation on how the Invasive Species Team is working with their partners to implement portions of the Task Force's Strategic Action Framework. The team identified some significant gaps in the work they are doing, one of which is that the lack of an effective early detection and rapid response (EDRR) system. They did not have a good decision support tool to quickly assess the threat when an animal or plant is detected on the landscape and work had been happening on an ad hoc basis. Florida Atlantic University (FAU), Office of Everglades Restoration Initiatives (OERI) and U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) hosted a workshop where they pulled together 75 experts to develop a coarse screening tool that could be used for all taxa to get to a "go" or "no go" decision quickly. As a result of the workshop, Ms. Christina Romagosa, from the University of Florida, along with others have been working to develop the Greater Everglades Ecosystem Rapid Response Screening Tool (GEERRest). The tool can be used by any agency and data can be shared and become part of a larger EDRR program as well as part of the database of knowledge that they develop for that species. This screening tool is currently being beta tested and has been recently used on the *Veiled Chameleon* and the *African Clawed Frog*. It can be completed within a matter of hours to several days. Next steps for the screening tool includes a hands on event by a number of experts to test drive it. The tool will be ready for widespread use in Spring 2017. The team will also work on the governance piece and coordinate the management level response to the recommendation produced by this tool.

Mr. Bean asked about the capacity to recognize novel species in the environment such as a beetle or moth. Ms. Estenoz replied that this goes back to the gaps in the outreach efforts. They rely heavily on the public to report these animal species. They currently have a couple of tools such as the "I've got one" app that is downloaded on a phone and when a person sees something that looks strange, they take a picture of that animal and send it through the app. A GPS coordinate for that location is assigned and the information goes into a central database. They have also been partnering with local governments such as the City of Coconut Creek. Commissioner Sandra Welch reached out to Pet Supermarket and they recently had their second outreach event at Pet Supermarket. It is a tremendous opportunity to reach and educate the community.

20th Anniversary of the South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force

Secretary Jewell joined the meeting and thanked everyone on the Task Force for their incredible work noting the Everglades is an extraordinary and imperiled ecosystem within the U.S. Everglades restoration has given us an example of what happens when they are honest with each other about decisions that were made in the past that turned out to be, not so smart. She had the opportunity to see the Kissimmee River and witness firsthand what happened when its natural flow was restored and what an extraordinary difference it made. There is a unique opportunity with the Everglades to tell a bigger story because the health of the economy of south Florida is tied to the health of the Everglades. It has been critical to the Miccosukee and Seminole Tribes since time immemorial. Now with sea level rise, algal blooms, seagrass die-offs and the

encroachment of saltwater into the water supply of south Florida, everyone is paying attention. Every Florida Governor and every President since the 1980s has been supportive of Everglades restoration. It is a model of how they should behave in conjunction with local and tribal governments, stakeholders in the region, scientists and people that can help them understand what is happening on the ground. As they go through this Presidential transition, ideology will meet a bucket of cold ice water when they hit the realities on the ground. Her advice to whomever succeeds her is to listen to all points of view, genuinely listen before making a decision.

She recognized Ms. Darcy for her leadership at the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers which has re-shaped how it works with environmental groups. She also recognized Mr. Rock Salt who was a great Deputy. She along with President Obama, Vice President Biden and former Secretary Ken Salazar have all been to the Everglades many times. She also recognized Secretary Vilsack (USDA) and Secretary Fox (USDOT) for their support. Everyone can take pride in the \$2.3 billion of federal money that has come in over the last 8 years including \$113 million from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (AARA), the stimulus package and over \$800 million for the Herbert Hoover Dike rehabilitation. In addition, the Central Everglades Planning Project (CEPP) was completed in record time, they broke ground on eleven major restoration projects, settled water quality litigation and enrolled more than 100,000 acres of agricultural lands into easement and conservation programs. A lot of work remains to be done and the mission of this Task Force is really import. She said she hoped Ms. Estenoz would continue on and thanked her for her leadership.

A short photo diary of the restoration effort over the last 20 years followed.

Secretary Jewell recognized the restoration effort as a model for conservation for the whole world not just the U.S. She congratulated the Task Force on the work so far. She acknowledged Commissioner Jose Pepe Diaz, Task Force member since 2002, and Mr. Gene Duncan and Mr. Billy Causey who have been involved for decades.

Mr. Bartlett said they still have a lot of work to do and they are absolutely committed to getting it done. He provided a handout showing the Everglades restoration projects since 2011, intended to be a recent reflection showing the remarkable things they have accomplished by working together. With these projects they have 520,000 acre feet of storage, are removing 330,000 pounds of phosphorous pollution and are restoring 137,000 acres of wetlands. It is an amazing accomplishment with many working together to make this happen. He thanked everyone for their time on this Task Force.

Ms. Jo-Ellen Darcy noted that in her previous life she worked on Capitol Hill and worked on the legislation that created this Task Force because they recognized the importance and value of Everglades restoration. This restoration effort would not be possible without the work of the Army Corps of Engineers and she recognized folks from both headquarters and at the Jacksonville District including Mr. Rock Salt and COL Jason Kirk.

Mr. Stan Meiburg, reminded members of the lawsuit they had in 2009 and the underlying question was whether they had the technical skill and political will to reduce nutrient loading

using Stormwater Treatment Areas (STAs) in the Everglades. Eight years later, they have STAs that are actually meeting stringent effluent limits and the system is responding. It is important for all of them to recognize they did this through collaboration. Collaboration does not mean the absence of conflict but that they work through these conflicts and come up with solutions that work for all of them. Much work remains to be done, but if the framework of collaboration that this Task Force represents continues, they can make great progress in getting more clean water to the Everglades. He thanked the many friends in the audience as well as the folks in Region 4 who have given heart and soul to this effort, including Ms. Gail Mitchell and Mr. Jim Giattina.

Mr. Len Lindahl noted he was a lifelong resident of south Florida and there is an unparalleled quality of life that he gets to enjoy being surrounded by the ocean, lakes, rivers and the unique Everglades ecosystem. He joined the SFWMD four years prior because of his passion for the Everglades and he truly believes in the mission of the SFWMD to provide and improve a balance of flood control, water supply, water quality and natural systems. In fulfilling this, he has had the privilege and honor to participate in the work of the Task Force on these objectives. He was grateful to join everyone in celebrating the 20th anniversary. The Task Force has served as a venue for dialogue with senior policy makers on complex challenges. It has been a vehicle to exchange ideas, have public communications with agency leadership and to document the progress. By participating on this Task Force, members get to personalize their relationships which enables them to be successful in Everglades restoration. He thanked Secretary Jewell, Chairman Bean and all the other Task Force members.

Secretary Jewell recognized Ms. Patty Power from the Seminole Tribe of Florida for her service on this Task Force for 20 years. Ms. Power said it was an honor and Mr. Shore asked that she pass on how much the Seminole Tribe appreciates being included as a key member of this Task Force. One of the early discussions she had with one of the Tribal elders was on why the Everglades and this effort was so important to the Tribe, the elders believe that the health of the land and the water determine the health of the Tribe. It was critically important that the Tribe invest its energy and efforts and is what drove the Tribe to enter into what she believes is still the largest full partnership with the Corps of Engineers to build a water resources project. She said it was an honor to be a part of this effort and work with such talented and dedicated folks.

Secretary Jewell presented Ms. Power with a Clyde Butcher print and a challenge coin. She also presented a challenge coin to Mr. Bean who then presented the other federal Task Force members with challenge coins as well. A group photo followed.

SFWMD Program and Project Update

Mr. Matt Morrison noted the State of Florida is making great progress on their water quality treatment features and they are seeing some really good trends in their natural areas. He provided a presentation reviewing the localized drought from May 2014 through August 2015 where they received half the normal rainfall which made it difficult for them as water managers to move water into Florida Bay. He reviewed several ongoing projects, the C-111 Spreader Canal Western Project, C-111 South Dade Project and Modified Water Deliveries to Everglades National Park, which will mitigate this in the future. The SFWMD initiated the South Dade Study which identified opportunities to operate existing infrastructure to benefit both agricultural

land uses and natural systems. They are now in the process of moving forward on the construction of additional features to optimize the system in order to move more water to Florida Bay. With regards to water quality treatment features, he provided an in depth review of the STAs which have been put on the landscape since 1994. STAs, which are basically man-made marshes that are compartmentalized and comprised of emergent and sub-emergent aquatic vegetation to improve water quality. As of 2012, they had 57,000 acres of permitted STAs on the landscape. STAs have treated about 17.5 million acre feet of water from 1995 - 2016 and the performance data was reviewed.

The state continues to embark on the Restoration Strategies initiative and they are continuing to build facilities to improve water quality. From 2012 to date they have focused on two flow equalization basins (FEBs), the L-8 and A-1, expansion of their STAs and improvements are planned from 2018 - 2024. The FEBs are upstream of their STAs and are designed to attenuate flows by capturing and storing the water that comes off the landscape quickly. Since the A-1 FEB has come online they have seen a phosphorus load reduction of 86%. The L-8 FEB is an in-ground facility and construction completion is expected this month. Mr. Morrison reviewed the CERP construction activity on the C-44 Reservoir/STA that will allow the SFWMD to store and treat water before it is released to the northern Estuaries and mitigate some of the damaging discharges to the St. Lucie Estuary upon completion. Facility due for completion in 2018. The C-43 West Basin Storage Reservoir on the west side of the state will provide static storage that will be used dynamically to help mitigate some of those undesirable discharges that come from the lake that damage the Caloosahatchee Estuary. Recently broken ground on the construction of this reservoir. Facility will be ready to operate in December 2022. He thanked the Task Force for all it have done adding that the SFWMD really appreciates it.

Corps Program and Project Update

Mr. Howie Gonzales provided a presentation highlighting the FY16 accomplishments and FY17 goals. They have work ongoing in every geographic location within their program. He provided an update on the foundation projects such as the Kissimmee River Restoration (KRR), Modified Water Deliveries (MWDs) and C-111 South Dade. Construction on the KRR will be completed in the next 3-4 years and they are now awarding the final construction contracts. The KRR is their crown jewel and the results are visible on the ground. MWDs efforts focused on moving water from the WCAs into Northeast Shark River Slough in ENP. They are moving forward on an incremental fashion towards an overall operations plan for the southern end of the system. They also completed consultation of the Everglades Restoration Transition Plan (ERTP). For the C-111 South Dade project, the post authorization change reports were completed; and Contract 8 and 8A were awarded. An update was provided on CERP projects (Picayune Strand Restoration and SW Florida Comprehensive Watershed Plan). SW Florida Comprehensive Watershed Plan is a watershed scale report released to the public for consideration. They executed Project Partnership Agreements for the Caloosahatchee River (C-43) West Basin Storage Reservoir, Biscayne Bay Coastal Wetlands (BBCW) and Broward County Water Preserve Areas (BCWPA). For CEPP, in addition to waiting anxiously for a WRDA2016, they worked with the SFWMD to execute a Pre Partnership Credit Agreement which allows the SFWMD to initiate work on the south component in advance of authorization. They have also initiated three SMART Planning

Project Implementation Reports for Loxahatchee River Watershed Restoration Project (LOX), Lake Okeechobee Watershed Restoration Project (LOWRP) and the Western Everglades Restoration Project (WERP). The FY17 President's Budget includes \$106 million for SFER design and construction and \$299,000 for O&M in addition to the FY16 funds that will be carried over. FY17 goals were reviewed. The Integrated Delivery Schedule (IDS) was updated to reflect FY16 budgets and the FY17 President's Budget. Mr. Gonzales anticipates an annual process where they continue to update the IDS based on the Corps and SFWMD budgets. Ms. Estenoz clarified that whenever there is an update to the IDS, there will be consultation with the Task Force.

Report on WG Sponsored Public Workshops

COL Kirk noted the Task Force has played a special role in facilitating the public workshops on the 3-year smart planning efforts which allow for fully incorporating public input in addition to the NEPA process.

Ms. Allyn Childress provided a presentation on the interactive workshop process which was initiated for the CEPP and used for the 2015 update of the IDS. Process is intended to enhance opportunities for meaningful public engagement. Workshops were held for the WERP and the LOWRP. Ms. Childress reviewed the workshop format which allows everyone to have a seat at the table and work together. Information is funneled back to the implementing agencies and all of the information from the workshop process is posted at www.Evergladesrestoration.gov. Approximately 80 participants at the Aug 23rd WERP workshop conducted early in the process. Aug 31st - LOWP workshop conducted later in the process with approx. 100 participants. The Project Delivery Team had gotten a little further along in the process. Benefits of the workshop is allowing different stakeholders to talk amongst themselves in addition to the agencies. She thanked Mr. James Erskine and Mr. Nick Aumen for chairing the meetings. Mr. Erskine said it was a rewarding experience for himself and folks who participated. Mr. Aumen noted he recently participated in the Bay Delta Stewardship Council effort in California and they were looking at how large restoration programs are organized and they are very interested in this public participation workshop model. Ms. Estenoz noted the Task Force is able to convene these workshops since it is exempt from Federal Advisory Committee Act.

Water Quality Update

Mr. Bartlett provided a presentation reviewing the phosphorus concentration levels in WCAs 1, 2 and 3 for water years 1979-83 and 2012-16. The comparison shows a decrease in concentration levels with many stations now meeting the standard. Many levels were in triple digits and they are now seeing single digits. They are also seeing an improvement in phosphorus concentration levels in Everglades National Park. They are still building STAs such as Lakeside Ranch, north of Lake Okeechobee and also funding public/private partnerships.

Mr. Gene Duncan commended the SFWMD adding the STAs are doing phenomenally well. They were designed to achieve 50ppb and the SFWMD got them to achieve 20ppb, that's the good news. The bad news is that it is still twice the amount of phosphorus the Everglades can handle and there is still a lot more to be done. In WCA 3, the Miccosukee Tribe has been collecting data for 30 years. The Tribe's data from the prior month show all the interior marsh

stations look great but if they include stations at the point of discharge and measure where it enters the conservation areas, they get a whole different answer. An area over on the west, coming in from the interceptor canal is horrible as there is no STA. He did not want to leave anyone with the misperception that the water quality problem is solved.

Improved Communication and Outreach - 2016 Highlights

Ms. Shannon Estenoz reported her office along with the interagency partners have been working on trying to improve communication on the topic of Everglades restoration. There is so much work happening in the Everglades that when they talk to folks about it, they are constantly challenged on how to explain it. They revamped the website to make the information more easily accessible to the public. She provided a live demo of the updated website.

Public Comment

Ms. Deb Drum (Martin County Board of County Commissioners) congratulated the Task Force on behalf of the Commissioners. The Everglades has captured the imagination of generations and the important work of this Task Force underscores the commitment by all levels of government and stakeholders to restore and protect the famed River of Grass. Martin County has been an active partner in Everglades restoration focused on the northern Everglades region. Martin County has acquired 45,000 acres of land for various CERP projects, the funding for which was voluntarily assessed by the residents of Martin County. They are grateful for the incredible progress that was reported at this meeting. Their communities are situated on the banks of the St. Lucie estuary which was ground zero for massive toxic blue-green algae blooms this past summer which necessitated beach closures on the July 4th, 2016 weekend and throughout much of the summer. Their algae crisis drew much national and international media. Many elected officials toured the area to observe the deteriorating conditions for themselves and could later attest to the adverse health impacts of the algae as they left the area with sore throats and respiratory irritation. Clean water is the foundation of Florida's tourism based economy and their waterways and health of their citizens cannot sustain such conditions. They continue to strongly advocate for dedicated funding sources for Everglades restoration at both the federal and state levels. They need to continue progress on the authorized components of the CERP particularly the Indian River Lagoon South project. Martin County urges the continued support of projects that will increase storage regionally and around Lake Okeechobee and create the necessary conveyance features to move water away from the estuaries and to the Everglades and Florida Bay where it is desperately needed.

Mr. John Adornato (NPCA) congratulated the Task Force on 20 years. The discussion and coordination that happens at the Task Force is very important to advance their quality of life in south Florida and bring attention to the folks in DC that make so many critical decisions. Delivering more, clean, fresh water to ENP and Florida Bay is a national priority for NPCA. They have long been involved in restoration efforts championed by the agencies and individuals on the Task Force. NPCA remains concerned with the SFWMD's plan for moving water into Florida Bay. It will be a modest increase in water to Taylor Slough with serious risks of water quality impacts by phosphorus loading into areas of the ENP that are vulnerable to cattail invasion. They need to keep moving forward with the projects on the books such as Modified

Water Deliveries, Tamiami Trail modifications and the other CERP projects that are critically necessary. NPCA is pleased to see progress with the expedition of those projects specifically. They need to keep moving forward with planning and are hopeful a WRDA bill will be passed this year so they can move forward with those projects that are in line. NPCA is supportive of the Lake Okeechobee watershed and Western Everglades basin planning efforts. NPCA asks the Task Force to continue to review, support and help expedite those efforts to advance project planning for the Everglades Agricultural Area (EAA) Reservoir. NPCA also supports the effort proposed by Florida State Senator Joe Negron to buy land south of Lake Okeechobee in advance of the 2021 IDS timeframe. Members of the Task Force were invited to attend the 32nd annual Everglades Coalition Conference scheduled for Jan. 5-8, 2017 in Ft. Myers, FL.

Mr. Eric Eikenberg (Everglades Foundation) on behalf of Mr. Marshal Field IV and the Board of the Everglades Foundation congratulated the Task Force on 20 years. He thanked Ms. Darcy for being a champion of the Everglades. He also thanked Mr. Bartlett for his leadership at the state level and COL Kirk for everything he does each and every day. He also recognized Ms. Kim Taplin and Commissioner Diaz. As the Task Force celebrates 20 years it is also important to look at what restoration will look like on the 40th anniversary of this TF. 2016 has provided some challenges which have yielded opportunities. Many have dedicated themselves each and every day to see a restored and protected Everglades. He recognized their friends in Martin and Lee County who have experienced the damaging discharges from Lake Okeechobee from which the state has been under a state of emergency since February. The Everglades Foundation is encouraged by President Joe Negron who calls for land to be purchased for storage and those efforts need to be accelerated. They just completed a 12-day, 22 city bus tour across Florida and it is heartening to him that this remains a unifying issue and the political persuasion does not matter. They are all Floridians, all Americans and they want to ensure that this national treasure is protected. Thanks to Amendment 1 and the Congress, they have the money and they need to make sure those vital projects come online sooner than later.

Ms. Julie Hill Gabriel (Audubon of Florida) said she loved the logo and also congratulated the Task Force. Audubon of Florida hopes the cooperation and efficiency to talk over issues will continue. Nothing attracts success like success. The Task Force is held to a high standard and they need to explain why it is worth it and why all the progress they have made is so impressive and that this is a winning team that one wants to be a part of. 2016 got a lot of attention for the Everglades, most not positive, and it has been an opportunity to highlight that while they have so much to be proud of, they have much more work to continue doing. While water quality improvements are impressive, there is a lot more work to be done. As they continue to move along with the IDS, they are still looking to see that storage in the EAA is moved up earlier than 2021. They have to keep looking at the big picture and as they are planning projects they have to keep in mind the fact that their problem is not necessarily too much water but that do not have the infrastructure to put it in the right place where nature intended. Legacy Florida legislation, where things in the bill are being interpreted in a way that will limit funding, the opposite intent of the bill, will also have to be worked through. She gave a special thank you to Ms. Darcy, noting that she found out in a newspaper article that she was a previously an elementary school teacher.

Ms. Sara Barmyer (NPCA) thanked the Task Force for its work over the last 20 years. This is a model that other watersheds look at as to how federal and state partners and tribes can come together to solve problems. The CEPP will hopefully be authorized in a WRDA bill. NPCA looks forward to supporting future funding requests for important restoration projects. They also look forward to working with the incoming Trump administration on an infrastructure package and getting Everglades projects funded. NPCA believes that these projects are worthy of receiving those types of funds as well. In addition to new faces on the Task Force they will also have a lot of new faces on the Florida Congressional Delegation. NPCA is committed to educating those new members on the importance of funding Everglades restoration projects and keeping WRDA on a 2-year cycle. They are currently working with the leaders of the Everglades Caucus to have a meeting in the spring to educate and unite the delegation.

Assignments, Next Steps and Closing Comments

Mr. Bean presented the draft minutes from the June 2016 meeting. A motion to approve the minutes was made and seconded. There was no discussion and the minutes were approved without objection. Mr. Bean thanked Ms. Estenoz and her staff as well as the members of the Task Force. Ms. Estenoz noted that as the Presidential transition moves forward it is uncertain how quickly the principals will be in place and Task Force members appointed so she will stay in touch with everyone with regards to the next meeting.

Meeting adjourned at 12:27pm.

Handouts:

1. Briefing Books
 - 1) Administrative Items
 - i. Agenda
 - ii. Meeting minutes, 29 June 2016
 - 2) Introductions - Task Force membership
 - 3) Photo diary (can be viewed as part of the meeting video:
<https://livestream.com/usinterior/events/6642791/videos/143258652>)
 - 4) SFWMD Update - Power Point presentation
 - 5) Corps Update
 - i. Power Point presentation
 - ii. Integrated Delivery Schedule Placemat
 - iii. SFER Program Placemat
 - 6) Public Workshops - Power Point presentation
 - 7) Invasive Exotic Species Power Point presentation
 - 8) Water Quality Update Power Point presentation
2. Everglades Restoration Projects since 2011