

*Approved Minutes
South Florida Ecosystem Restoration
Task Force Meeting
Jensen Beach, FL
June 24, 1998*

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Patricia Beneke opened meeting at 2:15p.m. She highlighted the Restudy briefing that would take place later in the afternoon and recognized Donna Melzer Chairperson for Martin County Commission. Rock Salt presented the Success In the Making document (Enclosure 2) which is the basis for the current Working Group's effort to develop a strategic plan.

The Following Task Force Members Were Present:

Patricia Beneke, U.S. Department of the Interior - Task Force Chair
Mike Davis, U.S. Department of the Army
Roger Griffis for Sally Yozell, U.S. Department of Commerce
Richard Harvey for Robert Perciasepe, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Sandy O'Neil for Alex Penelas, Metropolitan Dade County
Patty Power for Jim Shore, Seminole Tribe of Florida
Terry Rice for Dexter Lehtinen, Miccosukee Tribe of Indians
Keith Saxe for Lois Schiffer, U.S. Department of Justice
Rick Smith for Buddy MacKay, Lt. Governor of Florida
Richard Van Klaveren for Craig Cox, U.S. Department of Agriculture
Virginia Wetherell, Secretary Florida Department of Environmental Protection
Sonny Williamson, South Florida Water Management District

The Following Task Force Members Were Not Present:

Clarence Anthony, Mayor City of South Bay
Craig Cox, U.S. Department of Agriculture
John Horsley, U.S. Department of Transportation
Dexter Lehtinen, Miccosukee Tribe
Buddy MacKay, Lt. Governor of Florida
Alex Penelas, Mayor, Metropolitan Dade County
Robert Perciasepe, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Lois Schiffer, U.S. Department of Justice
Jim Shore, Seminole Tribe of Florida
Sally Yozell, U.S. Department of Commerce

C&SF RESTUDY

Working Group Recommendations

Sam Poole presented the Working Group recommendations on the restudy goals (Enclosure 1). He stated that the goals are intended to give broad guidance to the Army on the Restudy.

Sonny Williamson suggested editing "provide comparable flood protection or augmented flood protection where ancillary to other benefits" by inserting a semi colon. Rock Salt noted that this statement is intended to reflect the Governor's Commission recommendation that all current services would be maintained and not diminished as a result of the Restudy. He agreed that Sonny's

recommendation made it clearer. Task Force members were asked to provide comments to Rock Salt. The goals will be presented for Task Force approval at the July Task Force meeting and once approved, the goals will be transmitted in a letter from the Task Force to the Secretary of the Army for consideration.

Initial Draft Plan

COL Joe Miller and Stu Appelbaum reviewed the Restudy process in formulating the alternative plans. The web site has been useful in providing a medium for anyone to provide comments to the various iterations. All of the iterations used 970 performance measures to compare the alternatives with the future without project conditions and determine which comes closest to the desired goals. The Restudy Team selected Plan D 13 with the intent that the plan be improved in WCAs 2 and 3; Shark River Slough; Florida Bay and the St. Lucie Estuary. It represents major improvements in the WCAs and Everglades National Park without compromising Lake Okeechobee water levels or water supply to the Lake Okeechobee Service Area and Lower East Coast Service Area. It also provides for an additional 1.4 million acre feet of storage by maximizing surface/in ground; ASR (as needed to reach the goals as a supplement); and wastewater reuse. The plan will provide significant improvements to the level of service, water supply and water restrictions as well as to the health of Lake Okeechobee. Additional modelling to achieve the desired conditions for the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee estuaries will be done.

Next steps include further refinement of plan D 13 as well as project elements; risk and uncertainty analyses to be conducted; NEPA analyses for the EIS are underway; draft feasibility report and integrated EIS are being prepared. This is a twenty-year process that will include the comprehensive plan and congressional authorization; detailed planning and design; PCA, plans and specs.

Keith Saxe asked how the \$162 million annual O&M figure compares to the present project O&M. Stu stated that the current SFWMD O&M budget is \$55 million per year. The Corps of Engineers also provides an additional \$13 million per year to operate the Lake Okeechobee outlets as well as pay for delivery of water into Everglades National Park. This would be a greater magnitude of what is currently being spent. These projected O&M costs factor in the facilities to meet regulatory standards. Sam Poole added that the two reuse facilities in Dade County have an annual O&M cost of \$100 million.

Mike Davis asked Stu Appelbaum if he was confident that D - 13 meets the nine goals that were provided by the Working Group. Stu stated that he was comfortable that "we are where we want to be" and felt that D-13 is in the ball park of restoration. Rock stated that the only area where additional work may be needed is in the self sustaining populations of animal and plant species and it is hoped that the Multi Species /Endangered Species will be in Volume II will be useful in getting us to where we need to be.

Roger Griffis noted that the model currently does not address the West Coast and out into Florida Bay into the Keys and asked what plans will weave those into the future Comprehensive Plan. Stu stated that performance measures have been established to look at how we are getting fresh water inflows to Florida Bay, it does not give a complete picture. Need to come back and re assess once other studies have been conducted.

John Ogden described the major ecological benefits of plan D 13. There was a great sense of satisfaction among the team that a good plan was chosen. He explained that the system has changed tremendously and many changes are

irreversible or only slowly reversible and preferred to use the word *recover*. He felt confident that D 13 " would take us to an Everglades type system" bring the system back to a new Everglades, different, a new beginning, which recovers and sustains the ecologic characteristics.

Dick Ring agreed that D - 13 represents an enormous advancement, but there are a number of areas where issues remain especially in the central part of the system. Sandy O'Neil stated that Dade County understands the mission and is willing to commit the technical and community resources needed to get this done, however, they are concerned over the costs involved and preservation of their own natural resources within their boundaries.

Governor's Commission Update

Maggy Hurchalla welcomed the Task Force members to Martin County. Eight Restudy Issue Teams have been meeting to resolve stakeholder issues, some solved and some questions remain. The teams have dealt with the following issues: water storage; land procurement and connectivity; improving water quality; assurance to water users; maintaining the level of service to users; southwest Florida Issues and coordination of ongoing activities; and modified water deliveries.

The Commission feels that the Holey Land and Rotenberger tracts should not be developed into storage reservoir areas as they consist of important remnants of the northern sawgrass plains of the historic Everglades. A long term dedicated funding source is needed at the Federal and State levels. The Southwest Florida team had two recommendations: conduct a Feasibility Study for the entire southwest and accelerated land acquisition for storage on the Caloosahatchee and St. Lucie Canals.

The Commission requested a declaration of taking for land acquisition in the Everglades Expansion Area as well as a full cost accounting study for the 8.5 square mile area. The study would show all the costs to all the players. The Governing Board of the SFWMD reviewed the proposal and decided not to move further with it. They currently have a contractor currently at work developing alternatives a final decision will be made based on that information. The Governor's Commission will continue working on these and other issues and encouraged the Task Force to provide comments and feedback.

ASR Update

Richard Harvey stated that EPA has been working the Aquifer Storage and Recovery issue. Surface water or ground water will be injected deep underground (depth of about 1,100 feet) for use in a wide variety of purposes. The ASR proposal is to store and retrieve 1.7 billion gallons of water a day. It will be broken down to 1 billion gallons of capacity around Lake Okeechobee, 220 million gallons near the Caloosahatchee River and 445 million gallons in the Lower East Coast area. There are two major areas of concern: regulatory and technology. The ASR program is part of the underground injection control program authorized by the Federal Safe Drinking Water Act delegated to DEP. The primary purpose of the Safe Drinking Water Act is public health protection by controlling the quality of the finished drinking water and protecting underground sources. ASR projects can only be permitted under the Safe Drinking Water Act if it is determined that they will not endanger public health.

To deal with those concerns the Corps has included in the Restudy, the cost of first treating this water to meet drinking water standards before it is injected.

However, because of the cost associated (hundreds of millions of dollars) EPA has been asked to re interpret the endangerment provision. EPA has decided it can come up with flexibility and is concerned that this interpretation be translated and used for other wells (such as Class I) and EPA is not ready to make that leap yet." EPA also feels that if it can get comfortable with the quality of the data it has the possibility of advancing ecosystem restoration and saving a lot of money.

There are a number of successful ASR systems in South Florida that uses finished drinking water quality. In this scenario the magnitude of using ASRs is being "super sized" with a potential to install 200 wells around Lake Okeechobee with a capacity of 5 million gallons each per day. This is unprecedented and has never been done anywhere else in the world. Need to ensure that an ASR system can be operated at a regional scale. The Working Group has formed an Issue Team to address those concerns. A workshop was held the previous week at the DEP office to address the technical issues associated with a regional ASR system.

Mike Davis stated that many in Washington are feeling the effects of "sticker shock syndrome" when the \$7.5 billion figure was announced and asked for a timeline for the regulatory issue and suggested using a range instead of a set number. Richard Harvey answered that EPA is working this issue and added that a key element is initiating the monitoring efforts to be comfortable with the quality of the water source. Monitoring will be required during both the dry and wet periods. Sam Poole stated that the ASR capital cost is \$1 billion. Stu Appelbaum clarified that there are high contingencies related to uncertainties and the unknowns (40% has been added to account for the uncertainty), treatment costs, and some storage areas may have multiple pump stations (which are very expensive). There is a team working on how to present the information in a range. Richard VanKlaveren added that ASR is a spectacular challenge that should be pursued. He expressed concern over shutting the water until this is proven. Stu Appelbaum stated that there is work underway to identify the back up plan.

Rock Salt stated that the Task Force will consider letter the Task Force will send to the Secretary of the Army, duration and linkages (Dade Corners), the need for improvement in the St. Lucie area, ASR assumptions and O & M costs. Roger Griffis suggested the Plan could include a statement noting that "*there are parts of the ecosystem this does not address and subsequent action of some kind will be necessary*". Rock Salt will also include language for Florida Bay and the Estuaries.

IFP AND COORDINATED BUDGET REQUEST

Rock Salt reviewed the draft Integrated Financial Plan which had previously been provided to the Task Force at the April 1998 meeting. Federal and State agencies are currently putting together their budgets and this information would prove useful. The Task Force approved the Coordinated Budget Request and the IFP.

UPDATES

Concerns in the St. Lucie Estuary - Ernie Barnett and Ann Ertman (DEP) stated that the past El Nino event resulted in above normal rainfall which caused high lake level stages causing serious emergencies and public safety concerns. A great number of fish lesions and diseased fish were reported in the St. Lucie Estuary among 33 species of fish a four - month period. Sampling is ongoing to determine the factor but the source is not yet apparent. There are a number of

Federal, State and County agencies working together. Ernie Barnett added that this is a strong indicator that something is seriously wrong in the system and there is great hope that the Restudy will be part of the solution. The Working Group formed an Issue Team headed by Melissa Meeker (DEP) and Paul Millar (SFWMD) to identify those activities that can be done within current budgets as well as identify future projects and priorities that can be taken to the Legislature and Congress to get additional needed funding.

Virginia Wetherell expressed hope that through this collaborative process an answer will be provided much quicker than if the litigation route were taken. Sonny Williamson presented a letter (Enclosure 3) received from Lt. Governor Buddy McKay specifically requesting participation citizen stakeholders and elected officials in fully participating roles in the teams that are established by the Working Group and Governor's Commission and the SFWMD and to present the inputs by October 1, 1998. This will enable specific budget requests from the State of Florida to be identified.

Legislative Update - Rick Smith (Governor's Office) - reviewed the environmental legislation passed by the 1998 Florida Legislature. The Governor's budget priorities includes \$10.5 million for reclamation and restoration of the St. John's River and a bill providing the Southwest Florida Water Management District and the West Coast Regional Water Supply Authority to create a partnership. The Legislature also tried to tackle the rewrite of Preservation 2000, which ends in 2000. It is hoped that something will take its place. The Task Force and agency leaders were encouraged to communicate with the Florida Legislature when they are down in their districts.

Sparrow Update - Dick Ring (Everglades National Park) - western population has held its own due to efforts by Corps of Engineers and the SFWMD. It is hoped that the population will increase this year.

Farm Bill, H.R. 2854, Section 390 - Update was deferred until the July Task Force meeting.

PUBLIC COMMENT

CPT Ed Davidson (Florida Audubon) - stated that the two National Parks has a documented visitation of 2.1 million people (prior to Hurricane Andrew) added to the Florida Keys economy makes the cost of restoration a wise investment. Suggested using some of these numbers to soften the impact. Florida Bay and the Florida Keys are the net recipient of mismanaged water of South Florida. He also raised the concern over the 700-mile canal elimination creating an underground levy impeding ground water flow ultimately resulting in a 700-mile curtain wall.

Patti Webster (Everglades Coalition) the Coalition is very supportive of this effort recognizing the challenges. Although the Coalition was not pleased with alternative D, it saw an incredible amount of time and modelling go into the development of alternative D 13. The Coalition is concerned about the status of Federal appropriations and offered to serve as the voice to take the message forward. The Everglades Coalition is considering becoming a partner in a Section 319 grant which would address improving water quality through best management practices by going into the community and teaching the people in the Western C-11 basin how to employ best management practices.

John Marshall (Arthur R. Marshall Foundation) - asked about the substance of the comments received in the AET process and how the comments influenced the outcome. John Ogden answered that all of the public comments were integrated into each of the sub teams. All public comments came in through the web site and other mechanisms. He suggested that peer review might provide for both an overview and another venue for public comment.

Shannon Estenoz (World Wildlife Fund) - commended the Restudy Team on the monumental effort to get through the alternative development process. World Wildlife is encouraged by the presentations seen with alternative D 13 and feels that the Everglades restoration is the primary goal of the Restudy. World Wildlife Fund is also very concerned over Everglades funding including Department of Interior land acquisition appropriations and proposed cuts to the Corps budget.

Stuart Strahl (National Audubon) - thanked the Restudy team for their work. National Audubon feels that the process has already been peer reviewed by the AET process. There is no justification for wasting water in sending a trillion gallons of water to tide. He presented a report (Enclosure 4) which addresses maximizing water storage for the Everglades and South Florida ecosystem restoration prepared by the Environmental Economics Council of National Audubon. National Audubon has concerns over appropriations on both the Federal and State levels. He urged everyone to support the Forever Florida program and other programs to acquire lands.

Mike Davis stated that it is a reality of what has to be dealt with, it is an issue of how to sell it to the people who have to give us the money.

Leon Abood (Rivers Coalition - Martin County) - stated that the massive freshwater releases from Lake Okeechobee have not only damaged the rivers, but has proven to be an environmental and economic disaster in Martin County which is a service based economy. "If you destroy the rivers, you will destroy the economy of Martin County".

Henry Caimotto (resident - Stuart Florida) - expressed disappointment over the lack of accountability. "The Restudy is not in your back yard and everyone just keeps studying." Keep hearing about more money and more studies yet never hear the word accountability. He questioned whether the SFWMD is really taking care of the water and why his money is used to clean someone else's mess. He agreed that the purchase of land is necessary and that polluters should pay for the clean up. He noted that clean water is the bottom line and urged everyone to get to work.

Donna Melzer (Martin County Commission) - noted that the community is very upset and urged that the environment not be under emphasized as it is the future for Florida, its residents and the economy. Martin County supports the Restudy and realizes that the cost to all of us will be high. Martin County will be putting its own money on the ballot in November for a \$30 million referendum to help start some of the short and long term solutions.

TASK FORCE / OTHER DISCUSSION

Billy Causey on behalf of the Task Force recognized the hard efforts of Major Ted Pruett (via telephone) who is leaving for Bosnia and wished him well. Ron Smola presented the draft Public Outreach Strategy (Enclosure 6). Task Force members were asked to give the draft to their Public Affairs people for review. Comments are due back to Mary Plumb by August 4, 1998. Ernie Barnett

presented Florida DEP's Pollution Prevention April Newsletter (Enclosure 5) which focuses on agriculture issues.

Rock Salt announced that the regular semi annual Task Force meeting is scheduled for July 27 - 28, 1998 at the Anne Kolb Nature Center in Ft. Lauderdale. Sea Turtle tour is scheduled for 7:00 p.m.

Mike Davis stated the Army would announce its new nationwide permits for improving wetlands protection next week. This will replace permit 26, which has resulted in wetland losses throughout the years.

Meeting Adjourned at 6:50 p.m.

Enclosures:

1. Briefing Booklets
2. Success In the Making
3. [Lt. Governor Buddy MacKay letter \(dated 6/24/98\)](#)
4. Maximizing Water Storage for Everglades (National Audubon 3/98)
5. Public Outreach Strategy
6. Florida DEP Newsletter (April 1998)