SUMMARY OF RESPONSES

PUBLIC OUTREACH SURVEY

conducted among

The Working Group

South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force

March, 2001

This report summarizes the responses of members of the Working Group of the South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force to a survey questionnaire on public involvement. The purpose of the survey is to gather views from Working Group members about its performance, priorities and directions in informing and involving the public. The survey consists of a rating scale of priority items and four narrative questions.

The questionnaire is concerned with two roles of the Working Group in regard to informing and involving the public. One of the roles is concerned with helping to coordinate public outreach about ecosystem restoration among relevant agencies. In regard to the coordination role, the questionnaire included a rating scale of 12 items to determine preference in how to promote coordination. The other role with which the survey is concerned involves the direct efforts by the Working Group to inform and involve the public about its activities. Four narrative questions are asked to assess member perceptions of effectiveness and to recommend improvements.

COORDINATION PRIORITIES: Twelve (12) potential activities that could be undertaken by the Working Group to help coordinate public outreach efforts among agencies were rated. Table 1 summarizes the ratings and their order of priority.

It is significant that on average that all but one item are rated as "important" or higher. This suggests that the matter of coordination in the opinion of the Working Group members is an important consideration going forward. The most highly rated potential activities include establishing shared goals and principles, sharing information, and combining activities to be more effective and to save money.

REVIEWING PERFORMANCE: The questionnaire asked for member comments regarding their views on the ways the Working Group has been most and least effective in informing and involving the public. Tables 2 and 3 summarize the comments of respondents.

The most effective ways in which the Working Group has informed and involved the public according to respondents are as follows: providing comment periods at Working Group meetings; providing workshops and forums; providing meetings dealing with specific topics tailored to target audiences; and reports and publications. Among the least effective features of public outreach mentioned most frequently were: an inadequate capacity to inform and involve the public effectively; lack of effectiveness in contacting the media and obtaining coverage; and insufficient outreach efforts to particular segments of the public.

TARGET AUDIENCES: Three types of groups were mentioned most frequently in suggesting that greater efforts be made to inform and involve them. The following groups were identified: Minority communities, local officials and the general public. It should be noted that Table 4 also included a variety of other groups mentioned one or two times.

RECOMMENDED PROJECTS AND ACTIVITIES: A wide range of thoughtful activities were identified by Working Group members to better inform and involve the public (see Table 5). The singular most mentioned matter concerned strengthening the basic public relations efforts of the Working Group.

TABLE 1

Working Group Priorities to Help Coordinate Public Outreach

Following in order of rated importance are the, "functions the Working Group could undertake among Task Force member agencies to help coordinate public outreach efforts in ecosystem restoration." The numbers to the right reflect "averages" based upon a rating scale in which 1 is "Not Important," 3 is "Important," and 5 is "Top Priority."

FUNCTIONS	RATING
Establishing Shared Goals and Principles	4.07
Combining Activities to be More Effective	4
Sharing Information	3.7
Combining Activities to Save Money	3.6
Anticipating and Resolving Conflicts	3.6
Avoiding Duplication of Effort	3.5
Encouraging Support for Particular Projects	3.5
Shared Efforts to Identify Lessons Learned	3.4
Identifying the Need for Additional Projects	3.3
Tracking and Monitoring Progress	3.2
Joint Professional Training	2.4

TABLE 2

Comments Regarding Effectiveness

Following is a summary of Working Group member comments in response to the following question: *In what ways has the Working Group been most effective in informing and involving the public?*

- Holding special meetings for targeted audiences with involvement of community leaders
- The meeting at the Agricultural Center in Homestead
- Completing high profile projects quickly that visibly benefit the public
- Reports, publications and web-site
- Public comment period at Working Group meetings
- The SF Restoration Science Forum and Everglades Restoration Science Conf.
- Public Attention achieved via Governors Commission
- Though association with the Governors Commission
- Some press releases, field trips and social event
- Through annual and biennial reports, Integrated Financial Plan, etc.
- Working Group meeting and special meetings to obtain input on specific issues
- Through reference to the Working Group in the activities of organizations
- Published reports
- Science conferences
- Public comments at Working Group meetings, esp. when topic is specified
- Allowing public to attend Working Group meetings
- Motivating agencies to deliver information to the public
- Having meetings open to the public
- Workshops and forums
- Special event meetings giving public a chance to interact with Working Group
- Public meetings and publications
- Having meetings open to the public
- Workshops and other fora
- Public meetings in the evening giving public opportunity for direct in

TABLE 3

Comments About Least Effective Ways of Informing and Involving the Public

Following is a summary of comments in response to the question: *In what ways has the Working Group been least effective in informing and involving the public?*

- Holding most meetings during the day
- Giving notice of meetings only as legally required (no outreach)
- When Working Group discussed internal process issues
- In general, agencies are under-funded for public outreach
- Little participation unless meetings in the evening
- No media coverage of meetings or decisions
- Need to get word out about the web-site
- No articles, op ed pieces, brochures or other products being provided. This should be a big deal.
- Little outreach to the general South Florida community
- Working group meetings are not conducive to interaction
- Public comments often not taken at scheduled times
- Little independent public input – same people come all the time
- No functional standing outreach focus and activities
- Not enough contact with local government
- Not enough pre-emptive media articles about restoration issues
- Not creating an adequately funded centralized office to develop and distribute information to the public
- Efforts by its own outreach staff
- No promotion of meetings in the media
- No organized effort to encourage public involvement
- No sense of purpose of the Working Group
- Outreach to minority and underserved communities
- Informing the public about Working Group meetings
- The Working Group has no public outreach capability
- Advertising of meetings
- Distributing publications to the right people

TABLE 4

Comments About Groups to Make a Greater Effort to Inform and Involve

The following comments were made in regard to the question: *What particular groups should the Working Group make a greater effort to inform and involve?*

- The general public, county commissioners, city councils, agricultural interests, leaders in minority communities
- More contact with local officials
- Low income and economically disadvantaged, Hispanic and black community leaders, local and state politicians
- General public, non-English speaking
- local planner, elected officials, minority and civic organizations
- Determine groups on a project by project basis
- Elementary, middle and high school
- K-12 students
- More minority outreach
- Minority and under-served
- General public
- Civic groups, government meetings, state and local trade associations, planning groups, utility associations, American Water Works Assn.
- All groups associated with restoration
- Environmental groups, stakeholders
- Smaller groups like garden clubs, Chambers of Commerce, etc.

TABLE 5

Recommended Projects and Activities

The comments below are in response to the question: *What specific projects or activities do you recommend the Working Group undertake to better inform and involve the public?*

- Information kiosks at public events
- Short, concise and objective video for use in schools and public forums
- Work with partners to reach more ethnic groups
- Have Working Group meetings coincide with environmental conferences
- A unified message and comprehensive outreach campaign
- Sharing is needed among Working Group members about outreach activities of each agency
- Working Group member agencies should share materials and info about programs and products
- Assure public comment period is held when scheduled
- Make Working Group member nameplates available to audience
- Need a functional work plan and plan to relate to CERP
- PR blitz needed
- More local workshops attached to Working Group meetings
- More media coverage
- Because Working Group has no resources for projects, it should provide leadership to assure agency commitments
- Establish partnership with entities that can inform the public
- Develop and distribute basic e mail list
- Develop common goals and promote them
- Prepare newspaper articles
- Provide notification of meetings in ways that reach the public
- Make better use of web site to inform public
- Figure out what Working Group does and communicate it via news releases and fact sheets
- The Working Group needs a PR firm and funds to support it
- More and smaller demonstrations of best management practices
- More public service announcements at better time