

*Approved Minutes
South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Working Group
Westin Beach Resort, Key Largo, FL
March 29, 2004*

Welcome and Administrative Announcements

Jay Slack called the meeting to order at 1:05 PM and reminded everyone that the meeting was being transmitted over the web. Meeting agenda (Encl 1) and draft minutes (Encl. 2 and 3) from the January and February meetings were provided.

Working Group Members	March 29	March 30	Alternates
Ernie Barnett – FL Dept of Environmental Protection	-	-	
Frank Bernardino – South Florida Water Management District	-	-	Joni Warner
Billy Causey – NOAA, FL Keys Nat'l Marine Sanctuary	√	√	
Alex Chester – NOAA, National Marine Fisheries Service	√	-	Essie Duffie
Carol Clark – National Park Service	√	√	
Wayne Daltry – Southwest FL Regional Planning Council	√	√	
Dennis Duke - U.S. Army Corps of Engineers	-	-	Erik Stor
Gene Duncan – Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of FL	√	√	
Christopher M. Flack – Office of the Governor of Florida	-	-	
Roman Gastesi, Jr. – Miami Dade County	√	√	
T. Niles Glasgow – U.S. Department of Agriculture	√	√	Bill Reck
George Hadley – U.S. Dept of Transportation	-	-	
Richard Harvey – Environmental Protection Agency	√	√	
Norman O. Hemming, III - U.S. Attorney's Office	-	-	
Kenneth B. Metcalf - Department of Community Affairs	-	-	Roger Wilburn
Donna Pope - FL Dept. of Transportation	-	-	Marjorie Bixby
Fred Rapach – Palm Beach County Water Utilities Dept	-	-	
W. Ray Scott - FL Dept of Agriculture and Consumer Services	√	√	
Jay Slack – U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	√	√	
Craig Tepper - Seminole Tribe of Florida	√	√	
Kenneth S. Todd – Palm Beach County Water Resources Manager	-	-	
Anna Townsend – Bureau of Indian Affairs	-	-	Mary Umholtz
Vacant - Broward County Department of Natural Resource Protection	-	-	
Joe Walsh - Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission	-	-	
Jess D. Weaver – U.S.G.S.	-	-	Aaron Higher
Greg May, Special Advisor	√	√	
Rock Salt, Science Coordination Group Liaison	√	√	

Whiparound

Carol Clark announced the south Florida parks, National Preserve and Caribbean parks are putting together an Exotic Plant Management Plan. Scoping meetings have been held and are currently in the draft alternative stage.

Wayne Daltry announced the Lee County's Draft Mitigation Plan is out for public review. Lee County is concerned with the South West Florida Feasibility Study component of CERP and the two-year slippage. The back pumping proposal for Lake Okeechobee has been resolved. Lee County has been active in challenging the assumptions of what constitutes a beneficial supply for their estuary and is currently trying to find out if their repeated requests to include nutrients and algal blooms as indicators for their estuary are being considered.

Mary Umholtz attending for Anna Townsend, BIA noted they too are concerned with the issues affecting the South Florida ecosystem.

Aaron Higher sitting in for Jess Weaver said he was on the first committee that drafted the Multi-Species Plan and said he found the present plan encouraging and noted he was concerned with certain aspects not being resolved.

Niles Glasgow reported his agency is involved in implementation of the 2002 Farm Bill and will be doing a lot of work in the Okeechobee basin trying to put conservation practices on the ground which will impact phosphorus concentrations.

Richard Harvey informed the group that he is forwarding e-mails regarding ASR to Atlanta for guidance. He said he was anxious to hear what the Task Force's charge was to the Working Group in dealing with multi species issues. Craig Tepper said they are also trying to figure out the single versus multi-species issues as well. Roger Wilburn was present for Ken Metcalf and had no comment.

Alex Chester reported on NOAA's Coral Reef Research Plan which has been ongoing for the past three years amounting to \$2 million per year.

Billy Causey reported the groundbreaking was held in February for the Dr. Nancy Foster Florida Keys Environmental Complex/Florida Keys Eco Discovery Center. The third meeting of the Marine Protected Area Advisory Committee will be held on April 6 – 8, 2004 in Key Largo and is open to the public. He announced the Coral Reef Task Force will be meeting in September 2004. NOAA is working closely with the Biscayne National Park Fishery Management Plan and is using the Sanctuary Advisory Council Working Group process. Councils, which are exempt from FACA, are able to form groups easily and provide a venue for public comment. He noted the recent articles in the press alleging restoration activities are going to kill the coral reefs and said that he would address that issue the following day. A summit is planned in August to look at the status of resources and additional information will be provided at a later date.

Marjorie Bixby said FDOT met with the Army Corps of Engineers on March 18 regarding the Tamiami Trail GRR and SEIS for Modified Water Deliveries. She noted it was a positive exchange and comments were provided in writing.

Roman Gastesi reported modeling of the Miami River will start in April and dredging should start in the fall.

Task Force Update

Greg May confirmed Ms. Ann Klee moved from Interior to EPA. He said he appreciated her leadership and added it was conceivable that she could return to the Task Force representing EPA. Ms. Marti Albright has been named as the Department of Interior Task Force representative. She is currently the Executive Director of the Take Pride in America campaign. He reviewed upcoming meetings to including the CSOP meetings on April 5-6th and April 26-27th, SCG meeting on April 19th and the Task Force meeting on May 4-5th.

Multi-Species Management Workshop

Jay Slack reminded the group they were given specific direction from the Task Force to provide them with three major questions and obstacles with respect to multi-species management. They also asked for help in formulating recommendations. Jay noted he worked with Greg and Bob Jones on putting together the workshop. He noted that FWS would make a presentation that will serve as a primer on the statutes and how they work together as well as the various activities and initiatives. Other perspectives will be presented to help frame the dynamics. He noted they would be looking to Bob Jones to help the group work their way through this challenge to productively answer the questions teed up by the Task Force.

Bob Jones reviewed a detailed timed agenda (Encl. 4) for the workshop. He added that after the presentations and discussion, the group would be asked to identify key issues or issue areas that the members believe are most critical for the Task Force. A brief prioritization exercise will be conducted at the end of the day. The following day's exercise would start with feedback and then focus on the key issues. He urged everyone to listen to each other and not interrupt. Greg May reviewed the Task Force's non-discretionary priorities, such as updating the Strategic Plan and Biennial Report, and discretionary priorities. The discretionary priorities fall into three categories: CERP implementation; Modified Water Deliveries and CSOP implementation; and Multi-Species Management. He noted that agendas and resources are being aligned with these Task Force priorities.

Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) Presentation

Dr. Todd Hopkins referenced two handouts that were provided: a Power Point presentation (Encl. 5) and draft Roadmap to Recovery (Encl. 6). He reviewed the history of the Endangered Species Act and provided examples of how it is being implemented. He explained that it is a complex law with flexibility to change through time. The bald eagle is an example of a single species whose habitat has been restored all over the country resulting in recovery of the bald eagle. The FWS and NOAA Fisheries are involved in the day to day administration and the South Florida Field Office which is headed by Jay Slack. Its mission is to work with others to conserve, protect enhance fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats. He emphasized that the key phrase was “working with others” if they are to be successful.

The draft Roadmap to Recovery is an attempt by the FWS to pull together all of the authorities, plans and strategies into one document for the general public. It covers all of south Florida and includes the 69 federally listed species and 23 unique ecological communities. The Roadmap has two goals: to preserve and restore and to recover. He reviewed the diagram of the process which involves adaptive management, feedback loops, monitoring and management among many other things. There are standards and principles that apply to all recovery actions, that if used would result in recovery being efficiently and effectively coordinated. He reviewed all of the authorities in addition to the Endangered Species Act which must be blended into a process to successfully restore the ecosystem. He explained how the siting tool was used for the Indian River Lagoon South project area which is comprised of 92,130 acres of habitat. This tool was developed to site the CERP elements used to protect and minimize impacts to threatened and endangered species, rare habitats and habitats with high levels of biodiversity as well as to identify and prioritize lands for required for restoration. The tool was first used in the Lake Okeechobee Watershed Project resulting in significantly less impact to the habitats in the area. He reviewed the Everglades Ridge and Slough model noting they are thought models to help them make decisions and are conceptual. The Multi-Species Recovery Plan has twenty-three ecological communities and covers a lot of the same ground that CERP covers.

Wayne Daltry asked what role the FWS has in developing the question, noting they were presented the answer before they had a chance to get the question brought out. Wayne noted that although they were originally told that rehydration was the first option, he cannot find that it was ever considered. The reservoir concept was presented as the answer to the question of where to put a lot of water above ground. There is still an option on the table for the Lake Flirt, lock 78-A, but he was told there was a single-species issue which prevents this from being viable. He said he would be more impressed with an approach of getting the questions before evaluating the answers. They are still awaiting the SW Florida Feasibility Study which has been delayed a few more years and emphasized the importance of the information being complete before the strategy is written. He said that every time he sees a map of his area he wants a footnote inserted that the information is incomplete. There are some regional solutions being presented that they think won't meet the needs of the area very well. Meanwhile his area has not had its complete CERP assessment done as of yet. Bob Jones said that is the type of issue identification the group will be asked to engage in after the presentations. Greg May said it sounded like Wayne was talking about an alternative development process where there could be a range of alternatives. He thought Wayne was referring to the Project Delivery Team (PDT). Wayne said that they were told that a non structural answer couldn't be considered because they were discussing structural answers. Billy Causey said he was concerned with storage capacity and water quality issues. He asked whether they were close enough to the CERP projects to benefit from anything that flows through there and whether these are consistent with CERP. Dr. Hopkins said that one of the elements that go into the selection process is how far the lands are from various infrastructure needs.

Gene Duncan gave an updated version of a presentation he had previously provided since there were many new faces around the table. He noted his briefing had not been peer reviewed. He said that single-species management of the Cape Sable Seaside Sparrow (CSSS) is leading to the destruction of other threatened and endangered species for the benefit of this one animal and is leading to habitat destruction. It floods Water Conservation Areas (WCAs) and state and tribal areas for the benefit of Everglades National Park (ENP) where the bird is located. The CSSS lives almost entirely within ENP. He said the unofficial population estimates of 128 sparrows in sub-population A, if true, means there are only 8 singing males. He said that Dr. Pimm, whose population figures are unpublished, has predicted extinction of the species.

He said that other ornithologists who have published in peer reviewed scientific journals disagree with Dr. Pimm's conclusions. However, the FWS and ENP are basing their actions on Dr. Pimm's work. The scientific review panel has met twice and concluded it is premature to use the model used by Dr. Pimm to predict probabilities of extinctions and that the model is better for examining population behavior. Dr. Will Post and John Greenlaw are the researchers who worked on the Dusky Seaside Sparrow, closest relative to the CSSS, and disagree with Dr. Pimm. Gene added that they have no idea whether the bird lives in other parts of the system because they are not looking for it. It was named Cape Sable because it lived in Cape Sable and the habitat was different from the one it is now occupying. Hurricane Andrew had a large influence on where the bird is now found. In protecting it, ENP is being held abnormally dry to protect the habitat of the bird.

Gene reviewed graphs showing that under the sparrow protection plan, they are moving in the opposite direction of restoration water levels. ENP is dryer under the sparrow protection plan, so long as it continues to live there we cannot move towards restoration. North of Tamiami Trail things are too wet, with ponding occurring. The stage duration curve in WCA 3A reflects ponding which needs to be reduced. Both ISOP and IOP are both going in the wrong direction. An estimated 8.4 tree islands are being lost per year. Tree islands are down 60% from 1940 to 1980. When a tropical storm moves through there is less flood protection for south Dade homes and farms. The Snail kite is in its designated critical habitat which is being destroyed for the sparrow which is not in its designated habitat. FWS issued an incidental take statement for these animals in order for IOP to move forward.

Richard Harvey asked for the FWS' position with regards to Gene's comments. Bob Jones said it would be appropriate to ask clarifying questions at this time and there will be additional time available for discussion after all the presentations were made. Jay Slack said the FWS uses peer reviewed science and considers all the science in making decisions. He noted that in addition to using peer reviewed science, they have held two Avian Ecology Workshops and a Sparrow Summit. Imminent scientists were brought in to review information and provide their insights. The science is very strong as far as the species go. The habitat is marl soil and marl prairie and there is no reason to believe that has not been sparrow habitat. The marl prairies and soils have formed under a specific hydrology over hundreds of thousands of years. FWS is not a proponent of changing the habitat type. The Corps did a post analysis of what happened last year and they found that the activities to route water around resulted in less water in the WCAs than if the S-12s had been open the entire time. Clearly there are tradeoffs, where over time one species will do better than others. Richard Harvey said the issue is that the sparrow is on the brink of extinction. Jay reminded the group of the findings from the Avian Ecology Workshop which showed that the team of experts felt strongly that the trades, what would happen to those other species, would not be as severe. Snail kites and wood storks are opportunistic and can accommodate a changing landscape while the Cape Sable Seaside Sparrow is limited in how far it will move over time.

Richard Harvey asked whether there was another area in south Florida with a similar set of circumstances. Jay said the Grasshopper Sparrow, whose numbers are even lower than the sparrow, will require similar tradeoffs. Jay Slack said it was their hope that with CSOP and the work of RECOVER, the problem would be solved. Jay Slack said that exotics are a huge problem. If "we" end up with a monoculture of Lygodium and Brazilian pepper for example. He said he saw exotics as the biggest nemesis for all species whether endangered or not.

Aaron Higher said he could foresee a number of problems coming before the Task Force as big as the sparrow. The Loxahatchee changing from a soft water to a hard water system for example. John Ogden said he spent most of his professional career dealing with exotics and although he didn't poll 1,700 members of the SFWMD, he wanted to present his perspective on this issue. He listed his credentials and noted he did some of the early research on the American Crocodile in Florida Bay. He was the person who first discovered the population of the sparrow population east of Shark River Slough. Both presentations illustrate two different ways at looking at this issue. The presentation by Todd explained exciting ways of identifying community types or ecosystems and focusing on coordinated approaches for identifying, preserving and protecting those communities. It is assumed to be based on good science, and predicts that the individual species will benefit across the board because of these actions. Gene's presentation illustrates there are real emergencies and that by doing something directly for a species, it may be difficult for that

approach to be compatible with ecosystem restoration. Most of the natural system left in south Florida is fragmented and substantially reduced spatially and altered hydrologically. Almost any emergency action will create conflict with the “get-ahead-of-the-curve, long-term programs.” He said he did not have an answer, but acknowledged a lot of work ahead. He was concerned because they still do not have a seamless relationship among the agencies and participants in CERP. They still seem to be tackling issues and questions on a species by species basis. He proposed that some representatives from RECOVER and Vero Beach sit down and work through the list of species and reach agreement on which ones they need to be working on. His agency sees a lot of opportunities with this ecosystem community approach and using CERP as a mechanism for achieving a lot of their goals. He said he did not have an answer for the Cape Sable Seaside Sparrow, however, he hoped something has been learned from the past ten years that could be converted into a strategy for the future. There potentially could be another sparrow out there since there are a number of animals that have moved around in response to how the ecosystem has been altered. He also noted that storks aren’t nesting, feeding or acting as they used to. Some may be forced to move around again as restoration alters habitat. He asked to see the Avian Ecology Report. **Follow-up: Jay Slack noted the Avian Ecology Report would be provided to the Working Group members.**

Bob Jones suggested they begin the discussion with lessons learned and identify broad issues. Greg May said he wanted to build on the presentations. He noted that everyone recognized the benefits of a more natural flow through northeast Shark River Slough once Modified Water Deliveries has been implemented.. The question of how to operate the system in the meantime remains. The potential loss of flood protection because of higher water levels is an issue. To address this concern, the current operation scheme has flexibility built in through pre-storm drawdowns. Wayne Daltry asked for the inclusion of estuarine species such as seagrasses to be considered for recovery. Richard Harvey suggested focusing some attention to habitat impacts from development and exotic species and the alteration of habitats that are no longer able to sustain desirable populations of a species. The increase to freshwater flows can cause an estuarine system to go from brackish to fresh in a couple of days. Alex Chester supported the comments made regarding estuarine species. His agency is concerned with a number of endangered species such as sawfish, sturgeon and sea turtles all of which are found in the estuarine areas of Florida Bay. There is ample evidence that the downstream impacts can be profound. Gene said that the most valuable thing that can be accomplished is to have the Task Force come together with some guiding principles. For example, if they agree that they are going to restore the system will take priority over protecting the habitat for a single species. A species in its legally designated habitat should have priority over a species that moved into an area and is not in its native habitat. Jay Slack said it sounds like FWS is against restoration when in actuality congress has made them responsible for administering an Act. Gene said he recognized FWS was trying to do their job and added that it may take changing the law to achieve restoration in south Florida. The Working Group needs to tee this up for the Task Force. Wayne added on behalf of Lee County that they do not believe that the West Indies is the legal habitat for the manatee. Billy said the Multi-Species Recovery Plan is past due and this workshop is critical. It seems like they often forget about the water once it is delivered to the coast. He informed the group of the petition to add *Croppa Palmata* to the endangered species list. He believed that there was a good chance of making the list and this will add another dimension to deal with endangered species. He suggested looking at those species on their way to extinction as a result of direct human activities. John Ogden suggested categorizing all the issues and asked how well CERP is designed to address these problems and how well the Multi-Species Recovery Plan is designed to address certain issues. Are some of these issues such that a short-term immediate action is needed.

Public Comment

CPT. Ed Davidson (FL Keys Citizen Coalition) said the most efficient way to store water is near the surface. The chief consumption of water is drainage yet this water is not measured or metered. If they continue to facilitate further increased drainage to subsidize development, then they will use up a great deal of the new water this project was supposed to produce. He noted that many feathered species have adapted to the negative changes and did not understand why they lacked faith that these same species will re-adapt to more natural conditions.

April Gromnicki (Audubon of Florida) acknowledged hard decisions are going to have to be made and if it is done right there will be a restored and healthy ecosystem. She agreed with Gene that they have to agree

to some principles and be committed to making tough choices and the first choice should not be whether to let a bird go extinct on “your watch” while trying to restore the Everglades.

Dan Clark (Cry of the Water) showed a video depicting the effects of eutrophication to the reefs as a result of cyanobacteria. He said these reefs are located next to sites for the proposed dredge and fill project and are already stressed and impacted. They sent a letter to the Corps asking them to consider the current condition of the reef when determining how much additional stress they can take from silt, sediment and turbidity. He indicated that COL Carpenter responded and stated that it would not have any effect. They have filed a grievance with the Coral Reef Task Force over this issue and are suggesting the Corps go out and look at the current condition of the reef.

Continuation of Working Group Discussion

Bob Jones asked the members to provide the top three issues regarding multi-species management from their perspectives. Bob Jones consolidated the issues into categories. The strategic issues that were identified would be reviewed in further detail on the following day.

Land Acquisition Team Update

Mark Musaus provided a status update on the Land Acquisition Strategy. At the December Task Force meeting the members provided four directives: include a more robust discussion on less than fee acquisition; explain why estimates are in 1999 dollars; clear up internal inconsistencies; and explain why the amount of land needed for restoration appears to be increasing. The team is working on the four areas. Some of the issues will be addressed right away. Other issues like less than fee acquisition will take longer. The team plans to update the strategy using data as of June 2004. By using the June 2004 data we can synchronize the schedule to develop the Land Acquisition Strategy with that of the Strategic Plan and Biennial Report. Wayne Daltry reported the coastal corridor assessment is taking into account the less than fee easements. The assessment will include an inventory and a book of techniques. He asked whether the concern over the increase in land was just for CERP or for the entire restoration. Rock Salt agreed they had not done a good job in explaining why the numbers were going up.

Public Comment

Stephanie Clark (Cry of the Water) commented that the up-front mitigation for segment III was drastically different from what was described in the mitigation plan. She noted reporting many violations as they were happening last summer. She requested an inspection to determine which portion of the artificial reef was properly built to qualify for up-front mitigation, but has not yet received anything from the Corps. She suggested a new wave impact analysis be conducted to ensure there is no impact to adjacent beaches and provided her written comments (Encl. 7) for the record.

April Gromnicki (Audubon of Florida) said that everyone could be proud that the State of Florida and the WMD have successfully acquired over half the lands or more than 200,000 acres for CERP. The estimated remaining lands are under 200,000 acres with an estimated cost of \$1.3 billion. She noted the current estimate of ten to fifteen years to finish the acquisition. She believes that this is too long and noted that development pressures are increasing. She provided a fact sheet (Encl. 8) on the proposed annexation by Florida City as well as a development of regional impact which is in the pre-application stages. The proposal is within two CERP footprints, Biscayne Bay Coastal Wetlands (BBCW) C-111 North Spreader Canal projects and within the Save Our Rivers Model Lands Basin. It is also outside the urban development boundary and urban expansion area. She asked the Working Group to raise these issues with the Task Force.

Meeting adjourned at 5:30 PM.

*Approved Minutes
South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Working Group
Westin Beach Resort, Key Largo, FL
March 30, 2004*

Administrative Announcements

Jay Slack called the meeting to order at 8:30 AM. January and February minutes were approved as presented.

CSOP Advisory Team

Carol Rist reported the team has been developing performance expectations. She noted that it has been difficult to come to agreement on these broad expectations considering the diverse nature of the stakeholders. She reviewed critical areas that the team has identified such as Taylor Slough, 8.5 Square Mile Area and p WCA 3A and 3B. In the future the team will meet to further refine their performance expectations. Once the performance expectations are finalized, the team will use that framework to evaluate the performance of the Corps' proposals. Jay Slack asked how the performance expectations for CSOP relate to other CERP components. Carol explained that one of their goals is for the expectations to be consistent with CERP. The team, for example, would question the wisdom of spending a lot of money to elevate Tamiami Trail only to tear it down later. Greg May explained that CSOP is the operating plan for two projects: MWD and C-111. The team is providing advice to the Task Force for their consideration when giving advice to the Army. Richard Harvey asked what type of recommendations or advice the team would be giving to the Task Force. He also asked whether there is real value added to the process and whether the team's product will be well received. Carol said that the Task Force and the Corps were very interested in what the stakeholders had to say. She acknowledged that there were fireworks at the last meeting but that they would meet again and report progress to the Task Force. Greg noted the Corps said the feedback from the team has already been helpful. Marjorie Bixby noted that when they talk about elevating Tamiami Trail, DOT feels it is critical to have some type of overlay on the trail to preserve it in the interim while Modified Water Deliveries is implemented. DOT is concerned with the integrity of the roadway. Rock Salt noted that if the Corps can deal with the unnatural delivery of water, then it could be a big help in dealing with flooding issues in south Dade. Billy Causey noted people in the Keys are already starting to posture in opposition to elevating the Trail because of water quality concerns and suggested outreach folks are needed. Greg noted Commissioner Rice would be the Monroe County point of contact for this issue.

Corps Update

Erik Stor introduced Dan Hayes and noted the Corps just awarded a contract to gather the history of the events from 1948 to 2000 leading to the CERP. He asked the members to contact Dan Hayes if they had information or historical perspective to contribute. He announced that General Castro would sign the Project Implementation Report for the Indian River Lagoon - South the following day. Rock noted that once the Division Commander signed the PIR the final circulation of the EIS would start and this would complete the NEPA process leading to the Chief's Report and transmittal to Congress. Erik noted the draft report for SGGE will be released in April for review. He noted that the updated model runs for the Initial CERP Update will be posted. Significant changes include the incorporation of the additional five years of data as well as physical changes to the structures. Stu Appelbaum clarified the two model runs (one showing effects of model change and the other showing the effects of all the changes in assumptions) will be posted and the results will be used by RECOVER to do their evaluation. Stu added the purpose of posting both runs is to isolate the changes that are due to the additional data set and changes that have an impact on where water shows up in the system. He noted that corresponding changes to the NSM model are being made. The bottom line of the initial CERP Update is to show how the plan performs. If there are adverse results then they will launch efforts to make improvements to the plan. It is also important to compare the performance of the new model with the new natural system model (NSM) and to determine how it performs relative to the target. Erik Stor reported that they are still on track for the June 2006 completion of Modified Water Deliveries and are in the process of acquiring tracts in 8.5 square mile area. They are offering homeowners a comparable property within the 8.5 SMA per Congressional mandate.

Wayne Daltry noted he has raised the issue of sequencing the feasibility study and the back pumping. Stu Appelbaum said they should employ a process similar to the Indian River Lagoon (IRL). The Project Delivery Team (PDT) began with the IRL plan in the yellow book and then, did more detailed planning. That resulted in an additional 90,000 acres of natural storage. He saw the potential for something similar with the Caloosahatchee since they had determined the need for storage to take care of local water resource issues as well as environmental deliveries. While the plan in the Restudy called for a reservoir, if the C-43 PDT comes up with options that can do the same thing or do it better then it would be considered as part of the alternative development process. Wayne said they concur with the yellow book which says that the Caloosahatchee River would be divorced from Lake Okeechobee as a supplier of water except for extreme flood events. He noted that restoration for them is developing a restored Caloosahatchee River Basin Estuary connection. Lee County is trying to get an assessment from the SW Florida Feasibility Study of how much water they need for the summer estuary as well as during the dry season. Then they will know what is surplus and suitable for allocation for the regional system. The regional system concern they continually express is with the back pumping proposal out of the basin into the lake. He believed that issue should disappear from the equation since they will be divorced from Lake Okeechobee. He stressed the importance of sequencing the feasibility study to assess the environmental issues before serious though is given to back pumping which will reduce their basin's supply by 40% of their basin generated run-off. Stu agreed they have discussed this since the Restudy days and that component is sequenced fairly late in the process. He understood that the new modeling would show different results in the Caloosahatchee. He said he was not sure what it would mean in terms of the back pumping. Wayne Daltry said the sequencing of the back pumping still has an unaltered start date which is before the completion of the feasibility study. Stu said they are now looking at the MISP and promised to look at that issue.

Richard Harvey requested that Corps address how they intend to deal with the Scripps permit request at the next Working Group meeting. Jay Slack noted Scripps is an example of a larger issue and asked the group whether they wanted to spend time on the next agenda. The group agreed they wanted time in the next agenda to discuss this issue. Rock Salt said he had heard complaints that land owners in 8.5 square mile area had not been treated fairly, but he found out that the Corps had made numerous efforts to make them all appropriate offers. He had also heard that the project was falling behind schedule. Eric reiterated that the contract is scheduled for advertisement in May and award in August 2004 with completion scheduled for August 2005.

Water Quality in Florida Bay

Billy Causey said his intent was to clarify some of the recent information in the press with regards to what was happening to the coral reefs. He introduced Bill Kruczynski and provided a Power Point presentation (Encl. 9). He presented a number of factors contributing to the decline of coral reefs in the Florida Keys.

Strategic Plan

Linda Friar told the group that she is working on the update to the Strategic Plan and the Biennial Report for 2004. Both the Task Force and Working Group will receive the draft next week and updated project sheets are due her by March 31st. The updated data will be incorporated into the next version. She is working with the Corps to improve the graphics and packaging. Rock Salt added that the SCG is working on the plan to coordinate science which would be a complimentary companion plan to this document. He hopes to have a draft for the May Task Force meeting.

Multi-Species Management Workshop

Bob Jones provided a handout (Encl. 10) that listed the previously identified critical multi-species management issues organized under broad headings. The handout also listed examples of possible short term strategic issues and opportunities and possible longer term strategies. Chris Pederson asked the members to rank the examples as high, medium or low. Gene Duncan asked for discussion prior to ranking and noted that MWD would do nothing for the Cape Sable Seaside Sparrow since it would not change the habitat requirements of sub population A. Bob clarified they were trying to distinguish between what was needed in the short term versus the long run. He said Gene could rank it low and then they would discuss it.

Ranking and Discussion of Possible Short Term Strategic Issues/Opportunities

Eight members ranked the short term strategies as medium and two ranked them low.

John Ogden said he was not comfortable with the PDTs having some sort of lead role in addressing multi-species issues. He believed that RECOVER would be more appropriate. Gene Duncan also said that MWD would alleviate the stacking of water but the sparrow habitat requirements at the three stations would remain the same. Meanwhile the Park will have to be maintained in a dry state until a decision is made to either translocate subpopulation A (eight singing males along with the females) or flood the birds. Jay Slack commented he feels confident his agency has a role at the PDT level and recognized there could be a communication issue. Erik Stor said he saw it as an assessment of how the PDTs are able to move forward with information after decisions have been made. Jay Slack noted he was hearing a concern from this group that his agency may not be doing its job. He assured the group his staff is going to PDT meetings and they do have a plan. John Ogden noted that part of the confusion is the use of the term multi-species management and single-species management which is a wide range of issues that are broader than the scope of the Multi-Species Recovery Plan. Jay Slack said maybe they have not defined it well enough and need to work through what it means to everyone on the Working Group. Greg said Multi-Species Management is the broad global term that incorporates all the issues they need to take into account as they implement CERP and other restoration efforts. It is not limited to any one agency but encompasses their collective responsibility as restoration moves forward. The recovery plan is a subset of the multi-species management issue. Single-species management appears to be a difference of opinion where some people believe that actions have been taken for the sparrow at the expense of other species.

Gene Duncan said the agencies are doing their job too well and are destroying the center third of the Everglades. They need to weigh everything and not give preference to one habitat over another or one species over another. The Indians own the center third and are not happy that deer have been drowned, ground mammals are dead and the tree islands are disappearing. It was wrong when CEQ decided to take these actions without NEPA compliance. Jay said that given what they were dealt with they did everything in their power to make sure the impacts were not greater than they already were. He added that there were a lot of other factors involved. They need to focus on the complete suite of issues because the FWS does not turn a blind eye to impacts to tree islands and the Everglades and they too are a part of his charge. Rock Salt said he did not disagree that the central Everglades has suffered great damage and that needs to be their focus. He reported that the data he has seen on the loss of tree islands and deer shows it was as a result of previous decisions not related to the sparrow. With regards to CEQ, it is the statutory role of CEQ to take up emergency actions as they relate to NEPA. He did not think it was appropriate to say it was an illegal call. Gene Duncan said he understood that the idea behind NEPA is to evaluate all the options and look at the impacts and then make an informed decision. The problem with giving preference to the Endangered Species Act is that you are giving a priority to one set of options without looking at the entire suite of decisions. It is forcing agencies like the Corps into actions that are damaging the environment. Rock said that everyone present would agree the central Everglades is in bad shape and there is substantial opportunity to make improvements. Gene Duncan asked whether they would ever be able to restore flows into the western side of ENP and if they did it would be in direct conflict with the habitat requirements of that bird. He thought those would be tough choices. Rock reminded the group that Stuart Pimm has said that when they put Tamiami Trail across in 1928, they drowned the birds.

Rock asked about who would conduct the assessments. Jay said he thought they were to communicate this to the Task Force and they could assign it to a subcommittee. Greg agreed the Task Force is interested in making that decision but did not think the group was far along in its discussions. John Ogden asked what types of actions are already being implemented under the Multi Species Management Plan. Who is doing it? Is it entirely a FWS responsibility? Are the opportunities for participation and cooperation from other agencies such as the SFWMD? Are there points of entry where the SFWMD could link up to help implement pieces of it? Jay said there may be a link of how they could work together better and not what is or isn't done. Bob Jones reminded everyone that this should not be viewed as final and although it was under the communication strategy it could very well be a part of the broader assessment of how the plan is going.

Rankings and Discussion of Possible Longer Term Strategies

The members ranked the long term strategies A through E individually. John Ogden noted that he did not give a single value to all the items under each section, some he strongly agreed with and some he thought were unimportant. Chris Pederson noted that everyone probably felt the same way and they would make note of the individual comments. Bob Jones asked if anything was missing. Jay Slack identified water quality as needing to be included. John Ogden said the biggest challenge as they proceed with restoration is that they will constantly be faced with one species versus another, one species versus a cluster of species or one species versus an ecosystem approach. The biggest message they need to take to the Task Force is that they need policy guidelines on how to deal with those issues. Jay Slack said that a decision about one species and some extreme action that is needed in spite of impacts to a list of other species does not mean that action is not the one to pursue. For example the Everglades mink has specific needs and CERP is its only possibility of hope. That single-species action is the best multi-species action because you would include all the species that are in the assemblage of the habitat that the mink is an indicator for. Rock asked the group if multi-species means all species, not just endangered species and multi-species management refers to a subset of the species identified as either threatened or endangered. Bob Jones added that in the short term strategy, the Task Force should take the lead in articulating a vision and a set of principles. Gene said the Task Force should be coming up with guiding principles and restoring the habitat should be first. The number one problem is that they are currently managing for a particular habitat at the expense of multiple habitats.

A. Craig Tepper said he is uncomfortable with the NSM predictive tool and that animals are moving around, adjusting and changing. Gene said there is a panther problem in the Big Cypress and sooner or later someone may get hurt. John Ogden said the word “ensure” is too strong. Rock said the SCG is working on number three and number two is something RECOVER should be doing. They should go to the FWS or the Department’s Science Plan with regards to number five since they are agency responsibilities. Some things need to be coordinated and other things need to be handed off and sourced to the responsible agency.

B. Invasive exotics and water quality are impacts to habitat need to be paid attention to.

C. Gene said he ranked the estuarine habitat low because although it is part of the system, if the terrestrial system is fixed, then the marine system will follow.

D. John Ogden said he ranked number five low because he was not comfortable with the idea of building in at the policy level plans for translocation or captive breeding. Those should not be preferred options and relocation should be looked at only in an emergency. Jay Slack agreed. Rock said that number one conveys a sense that multi-species management is something they would start and then complete. It becomes a communications matter to coordinate the various actions being done by all the agencies and not just everyone understanding what everyone else is doing. It is not a timetable issue but an awareness issue.

E. Jay said that with regards to number three, having an open and transparent process was not an issue since they are under strict federal mandates to do so. Rock said that as he hears the word restoration he is hearing all species, multi species, inherent in it is the notion of integrated multi species and habitat types. When he hears the word recovery he thinks of an endangered species that relates to a specific responsibility that those agencies have to develop recovery plans as a subset of restoration.

Jay Slack suggested water quality be added as a major category similar to exotics. John Ogden added that a wide array of contaminants adversely affect the health of species or populations and could reduce the diversity of species in an area. They are weak in understanding the linkages between the levels in the system and its effects on species. Two statements were added under water quality. 1. Ensure water quality is dealt with in a manner so that the restored Everglades hydrology and habitat are healthy. 2. Analysis and efforts will be undertaken to ensure high water quality is maintained to promote restoration goals. John Ogden said he was not sure how to translate these statements to the Task Force for action and suggested adding number 3. Identify issues that would strengthen the technical understanding of the linkages between the contaminants and responses. Rock, referring to the prior day’s discussion on politics, regulation and policy, said that the only political impediment to true multi-species approach are on the environmental side

where people get attached to a particular species and they want to hold on to their species. He said there is fear out there about being able to do some of these things. Jay Slack said that Richard Harvey's issue related to that because people in the state or legislature or congress have no understanding of the issue. Rock said that his experience has been that both Secretary Babbitt and Norton have tried to advance a more multi-species approach on the ESA and the green side comes after them. Bob Jones said Richard used the term "political indifference". He said he was not sure what they could do about it other than try to get all of the interests have more confidence in what is being done. Jay Slack suggested removing this category since it has been counted everywhere else and they did not have any bullets below it. Rock said that interests that are attached to a particular single species become an obstacle.

Jay Slack said he would take the information and report to the Task Force at their next meeting. He said he got a sense that everyone was comfortable at a strategic level with the short term concept and long term concepts. He said he thought they had made a lot of progress and he would rather present this to the Task Force at a strategic level and seek some guidance on categories. He asked for additional guidance from the members. Greg agreed with Jay's suggestion for a strategic presentation and distillation of some of the critical issues. John Ogden said the major message is that they are working on this and have identified key headings. They could provide a schedule as to how they will proceed through the rest of the year. Bob Jones would prepare a full workshop report which could be shared with the group or used to prepare a higher level strategic presentation.

Billy Causey suggested they look into having a joint meeting with the Coral Reef Task Force in September. He also noted members were missing from the table and asked whether they group needed to discuss attendance. Greg May noted that with the legislature is in session many of the state representatives were tied up.

Public Comment

Nancy Klingener (The Ocean Conservancy formerly known as the Center for Marine Conservation) noted her organization is the nation's oldest and largest environmental group based solely for marine conservation with over ten thousand members in the State of Florida. She is also a member of the Sanctuary Advisory Council and works closely with Billy Causey and his staff and was glad to see his presentation. She pleaded with the group to keep the Keys in mind even when they are not meeting in the area. She asked for the group to look out for the Keys, with three national parks, four national wildlife refuges, the nation's most visited National Marine Sanctuary, the State of Florida's most visited state Park. She noted that these resources are the foundation for the \$2.1 billion tourism economy. They also have one of the nation's most valuable commercial fisheries, in the top ten nationally. She said that the population is bifurcated between wealthy vacation homeowners who are not engaged in local/regional issue and the working classes who do not have time to attend these meetings. She seconded Ms. Gromnicki's comments regarding the development proposed for Florida City which will affect her county tremendously.

Brenda Lee Chalifour (Save Our Shoreline, Inc.) asked what specifically are they going to do to stop the "carnage of their offshore resources" and improve the health of the reefs and their water quality. She noted Billy Causey's presentation indicated that there are many factors causing the negative impacts to the coral reefs. She acknowledged there are many causes contributing to the demise of the reefs in Broward County. Some of the causes are known and some are unknown because they do not have the monitoring program that they have in the Keys. They have clear and convincing evidence that their offshore resources in Broward County are being destroyed by direct action by the Army Corps of Engineers and DEP. They are issuing permits to kill their resources. There is also neglect by agencies charged with enforcing the Endangered Species Act and the Clean Water Act. By approving the beach dredge and fill project, these agencies are signing a death warrant on these resources. The cost of the Broward dredge and fill is very high, it is killing turtles, burying over 13 acres of near-shore hard bottom, jeopardizing reefs given increased turbidity, destroying over 24,000 corals and wasting tax payer dollars. The benefits are questionable and short term. She showed photos of a dredge and fill in Boca where sand has already been lost. She said resources were being destroyed "at the hands of people in this room" even though there are viable alternatives. She said they should have a bypass to keep the natural flow of sand for the channel at the southern portion of Broward County south of Port Everglades. Beach stabilizing dunes and vegetation help hold sand and yet they are not included in this project. The USDA has offered to provide the funding

and do the planting and that is also not in the project. Stormwater runoff is increasing erosion and contributes to water quality problems. She said they are either “in it” for the ecosystem or not and if they are “in it” then they need to be more consistent. She asked that these coastal resource issues and water quality issues be on the May Task Force agenda.

Meeting adjourned at 12:15 PM

Enclosures:

1. Agenda
2. Draft meeting minutes, January
3. Draft meeting summary, February
4. Detailed Workshop Agenda
5. FWS Power Point Presentation
6. Draft Roadmap to Recovery
7. Stephanie Clark’s comments
8. Audubon of Florida concerns re: proposed Florida City annexation
9. Billy Causey’s Power Point presentation
10. Workshop Agenda and Strategic Issues for 3/30
11. Working Group Roster (Updated February 4, 2004)