

Biscayne Bay Regional Restoration and Coordination Team (BBRRCT)
Report to the Working Group, September 2011

Biscayne Bay is a natural treasure of both state and national significance, encompassing Biscayne National Park, the Biscayne Bay Aquatic Preserve, and part of the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary. In addition to its natural features it embodies significant economic and cultural values. The Biscayne Bay Regional Restoration and Coordination Team's purpose is to provide active support to the Working Group in matters important to the Bay's preservation, protection, and restoration.

The Team's monthly meetings allow members to share the most current information available, hold in-depth discussions, and coordinate their actions on important issues. The Team's impact is revealed in the activities of our members, individually or collectively, in response to concerns about the future of Biscayne Bay. In addition, our meetings themselves have led directly to agencies altering their plans affecting the Bay. When the Team's concerns have warranted the full attention of Working Group members, we have sent formal letters of concern directly to the Working Group.

This report of our activities since October 2009 is not all-inclusive. The paragraphs below describe the issues of greatest importance to the Team.

1. **Essential surface and groundwater supplies (quantity, timing, and distribution)** – Since its inception in 2001 the Team has had serious concerns about an adequate supply of freshwater for ecosystem protection and restoration in Biscayne Bay. We have held discussions with the South Florida Water Management District on their efforts to establish rules to protect that water supply. We have discussed at length the freshwater needed for restoring essential salinity levels in the Bay. The Team has heard many presentations on all aspects of this issue, including historical salinity data and baseline monitoring of fauna in the Bay.
2. **Turkey Point Nuclear Power Plant impacts** – Many of our members, both non-government and government, have serious concerns about the impacts of the current cooling canals and the proposed radial wells for cooling the nuclear power expansion. There is concern about (a) saltwater intrusion now occurring below the cooling canals, (b) potential impacts of expanded use of those canals, and (c) impacts on salinity in the Bay and adjoining groundwater from the proposed use of radial wells to draw additional cooling water. Members are also disturbed by the apparent vulnerability of the entire Turkey Point facility to projected sea level rise. We have requested and received several presentations from Florida Power and Light (FPL) and government agencies on all these issues. State and Federal agencies are now in the process of regulatory reviews of the proposed nuclear and non-nuclear expansion of this plant. FPL representatives often attend our meetings and participate in discussion.
3. **Annual drawdown of water-levels in canals discharging into Biscayne Bay** – Canal water levels are a critical factor in providing freshwater to Biscayne Bay. The canals that deliver freshwater to the Bay are now lowered annually to support seasonal agriculture and Team members are concerned about impacts of this drawdown on water supply to the Bay. Analysis by the National Park Service has shown that the practice of releasing large pulses of freshwater at the end of the wet season contributes to a shortage of freshwater needed for by the Bay in the dry season. Lower canal levels also result in lower groundwater levels, further reducing the supply of freshwater. We have received presentations and held discussions on this issue, and many members of our Team continue to participate in public workshops aimed at balancing the needs of agriculture and the Biscayne Bay ecosystem.
4. **Biscayne Bay Coastal Wetlands (BBCW) and C-111 Spreader Canal CERP projects** – If completed, Phase II of each of these projects will provide the greatest actual ecosystem restoration benefits to Biscayne Bay, but the timelines for these Phase IIs have not been established. We have previously made known our concerns about the uncertainty of the BBCW project's completion in a letter directly to the Working Group. For several years we have been receiving frequent presentations on the status of this project and will continue to follow it closely.

5. **Sustained support for essential resource monitoring** – In June 2010 the Team sent the Working Group a letter urging continued support for restoration-related resource monitoring, especially for water quality and salinity patterns, habitat values, and fisheries resources. The substantial body of data that already exists provides a sound foundation for evaluating past and future impacts on the Bay. However, continued monitoring is necessary to support adaptive management of CERP projects, creation of numeric nutrient criteria, establishment of water reservation rules, regulatory review of permit applications, assessment of natural resource damage, and evaluation of climate-change impacts such as sea level rise and saltwater intrusion. Effective resource monitoring has proven to be a vitally important factor in nearly every issue this Team has addressed.
6. **Water quality** – The lack of adequate nutrient criteria for water quality could jeopardize efforts to protect and restore Biscayne Bay’s sensitive ecosystems. The State of Florida and EPA are currently working to develop these criteria. Some of our Team members have been actively involved, in an effort to provide increased protection of water quality without jeopardy to local businesses. We are monitoring the progress of this effort and have held several discussions on appropriate nutrient criteria for protecting and restoring the Bay.
7. **Resource Protection and Sustainable Uses of the Bay** – The Team has heard presentations about the challenges of balancing public use and resource protection at the local, state, and Federal levels, including Biscayne National Park’s proposed mooring buoy plan. We have been following the growing and serious impacts of invasive species, such as the lion fish. We have also followed the dredging of the Port of Miami channel, with concerns about the impacts of explosives on fish, sea turtles, and marine mammals. In addition the Team has established a standing Education Subcommittee that actively coordinates government agencies’ efforts toward public awareness, understanding, and appreciation of the values of Biscayne Bay and its restoration.
8. **Compatible Land Uses** – Surrounding land uses have great impacts on the Bay. We have taken particular interest in proposals for land use changes such as development plans, local master plans, and county planning amendments. We have heard presentations about Miami’s proposed Virginia Key Master Plan and Miami Beach’s Sustainability Plan. We have discussed proposed changes to the Urban Development Boundary including one adjacent to the Homestead Speedway which would potentially reduce groundwater recharge in an area near Biscayne National Park.
9. **Habitat Restoration** – The Team is greatly interested in the success of restoration projects and has made onsite visits around the Bay. We are fortunate that Gary Milano, with the Miami-Dade Department of Environmental Resource Management, has served on the Team and shared his knowledge of successful habitat restorations. Also, as a result of a presentation about the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s Living Shorelines Program, Team members are working with Miami-Dade County officials to open this program for use by private landowners on Biscayne Bay.
10. **Sea Level Rise and Climate Change** – In an effort to understand the potential impacts of sea level and climate changes on the Biscayne Bay watershed, we have heard presentations from academic, government, and public interest sources. One of our members, Dan Kipnis, is actively involved in public interest efforts to address these concerns. Counteracting sea level rise will be difficult but CERP projects that improve freshwater quantities and distribution to the Bay can help forestall some impacts, such as additional saltwater intrusion.

We hope this review has been helpful and welcome any further interest from the Working Group, either collectively or from individual members.

Dick Frost
Chair