

**Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan  
Central Everglades Planning Process  
DRAFT Enhanced Public and Stakeholder Engagement Protocol  
November 15, 2011**

Initiation of the Central Everglades Planning Process (CEPP) was announced by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) and the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) at the October 27<sup>th</sup> South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force (Task Force) meeting. The CEPP focuses on developing the next phase, or third generation, of CERP projects for the central Everglades region as a national pilot project in the Corps' streamlined planning process. This document describes the enhanced public engagement process that will be undertaken for the CEPP by the Corps and SFWMD with facilitation and logistical support provided by the Task Force office.

## **BACKGROUND**

There is a strong history of efforts to restore portions of the Everglades. Some of these are referred to as "foundation projects" and include Modified Water Deliveries to Everglades National Park (Mod Waters) and Kissimmee River Restoration. However, the complexity and sheer size of the ecosystem called for a more comprehensive approach. In 2000, the U.S. Congress authorized the federal government, in partnership with the State of Florida, to embark upon the multi-decade, multi-billion dollar Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP).

The CERP builds on the restoration progress of the foundation projects while meeting the growing demands for water supply. The CERP involves modification of the existing network of drainage canals and levees that make up the Central and Southern Florida Flood Control (C&SF) Project. The initial implementation of the CERP included a conceptual framework of 68 interrelated components, requiring a sophisticated scientific understanding of the watershed to drive the planning, design, and operation of the C&SF Project modifications, and to ensure that the goals for ecosystem restoration are achieved.

### **Status of Ongoing Restoration Projects**

Much progress has been made since 2000 with construction completed on most of the foundation projects, and construction underway on the 'first generation' CERP projects including the Picayune Strand, the Indian River Lagoon South, and Site 1 Impoundment projects. Project Implementation Reports (PIRs) have been completed, or are nearing completion, for the 'second generation' CERP projects, which include the Biscayne Bay Coastal Wetlands Phase 1, the Broward County Water Preserve Area, the Caloosahatchee River (C-43) West Basin Storage Reservoir, and the C-111 Spreader Canal Western Project. These projects are intended to provide benefits in areas such as the Kissimmee Basin and along the east and west coast ecosystems, and will contribute significant ecological benefits to the South Florida Ecosystem and the specific regional habitats in which they are located.

### **The Next Increment of CERP Projects**

The next increment, or ‘third generation’ CERP projects, will focus on capturing harmful regulatory discharges that currently pass from Lake Okeechobee to the Caloosahatchee and St. Lucie estuaries, and redirecting this water southward into the Everglades. This redirection will help to reestablish a connection between Lake Okeechobee and the Everglades, and also lessen extreme high/low water fluctuations in Lake Okeechobee. Treating and redirecting this excess water to the south will restore the volume, distribution, and timing of flows to the remaining Everglades and will improve water depths and flooding durations to benefit plant communities and wildlife habitat in the Water Conservation Areas (WCAs), Everglades National Park (ENP), Florida Bay, and southern estuaries. This third generation of CERP projects will include components needed to increase water storage and water quality treatment in the upstream watershed [Everglades Agricultural Area (EAA) Storage and expanded Stormwater Treatment Areas] to allow the removal of man-made impediments that obstruct natural sheetflow within the heart of the Everglades. Seepage management features also will be included to retain water in the Everglades and protect adjacent urban and agricultural areas from flooding. These central Everglades components make up the heart of the overall restoration plan and are aimed at restoring hydrological and ecological connectivity in the remaining portions of the historic River of Grass.

### **THE CENTRAL EVERGLADES PLANNING PROCESS**

A new central Everglades planning process will set the direction for the next decade of CERP implementation, with a focus on the third generation CERP projects and the goal of developing an integrated, comprehensive technical plan for delivering the right quantity, quality, timing, and distribution of water to the remnant Everglades.

Much has been learned over the last ten years that has significance to formulation of this suite of central Everglades projects. Extensive scientific investigations were conducted and are summarized as part of RECOVER’s Scientific Knowledge Gained effort, as well as the advances and learning in the adaptive management and monitoring and assessment processes. Additionally, the SFWMD conducted an extensive planning effort in 2008-2010 to assess the benefits of utilizing additional lands within the EAA for expanded water storage and water quality treatment. New planning and evaluation tools also were developed within this SFWMD planning effort to examine the benefits of a series of alternative conceptual configurations.

These important advances in our scientific understanding of the defining characteristics of the Everglades, and newly developed evaluation tools will contribute greatly towards technically and scientifically-sound planning recommendations that will, in turn, ensure restoration success.

### **A Streamlined Approach to Project Planning**

Another important lesson learned over the past decade is that the Corps’ current planning approach required for CERP PIRs is long, costly, and cumbersome. As noted by the Committee on Independent Scientific Review of Everglades Restoration Progress

(CISRERP), “while the cumbersome planning process of CERP implementation slowly moves forward, the South Florida Ecosystem continues to decline.” This federal implementation process is not unique to south Florida and is similar to Corps programs across the nation that have evolved into a time-consuming and complex suite of extensive quantitative analyses that are used to optimize costs and benefits. In response, the Corps’ senior leadership in the Office of the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works [ASA(CW)] have initiated a national pilot program for candidate planning studies designed to assess the effectiveness of transforming the Civil Works Planning Program to better meet the needs of the nation’s water resources challenges.

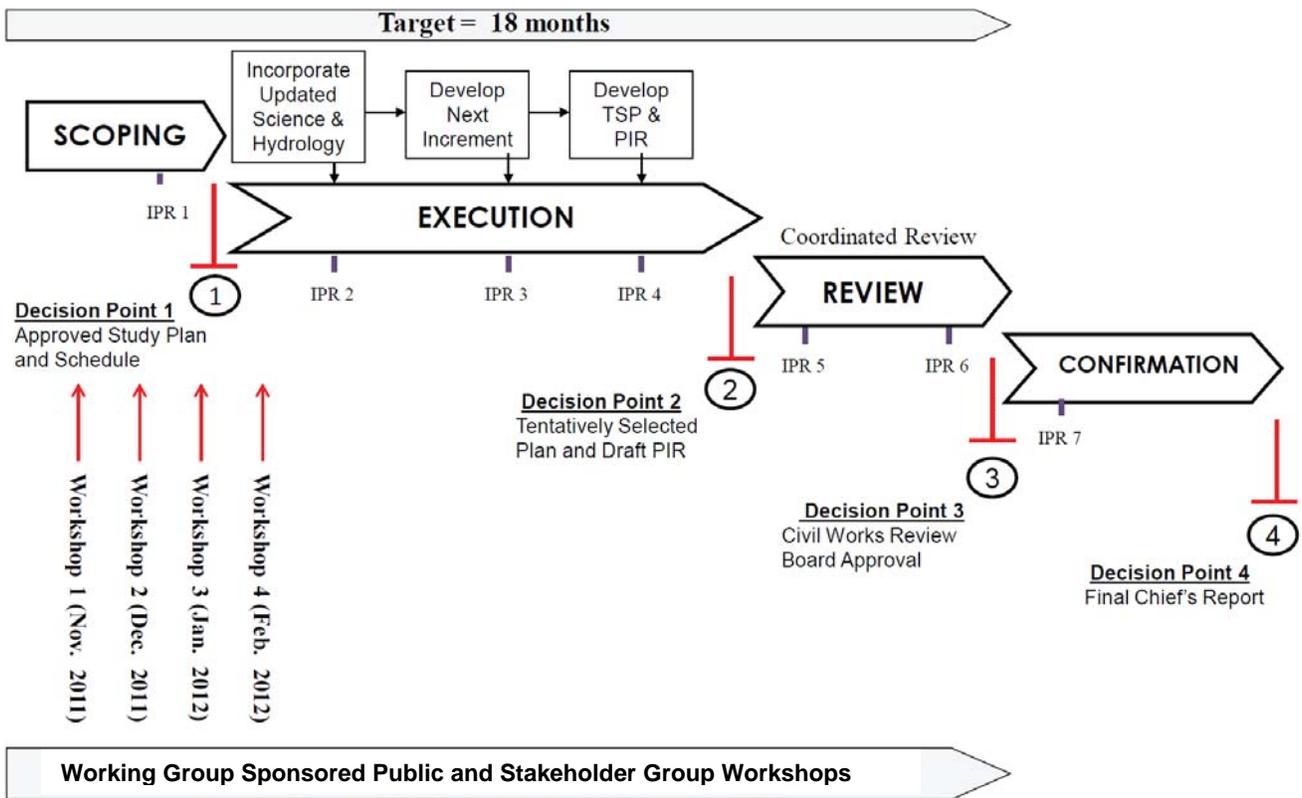
To achieve these goals, the pilot process is designed to cut years off the current Corps planning process by focusing on: (1) early decision making; (2) robust and clear analyses and decision making criteria; (3) reducing unnecessary detail; and (4) earlier and more frequent coordination using a vertical team comprised of decision makers throughout the Corps’ chain of command, including representatives from the District, Division, Headquarters, and the ASA(CW) Office.

### **Enhancing Public and Stakeholder Participation in the Central Everglades Planning Process**

The initiation of the CEPP was announced by the Corps and SFWMD at the October 27<sup>th</sup> Task Force meeting as one of the national pilot projects in the Corps’ streamlined planning process. The Task Force unanimously supported moving forward with the proposed planning process and directed the Working Group to establish a protocol for enhanced public and stakeholder participation that maximizes and builds on existing partnerships and capacities, and minimizes administrative costs.

This enhanced public participation will serve to augment the regular suite of public meetings required for Corps planning efforts. The new streamlined Corps planning process does not waive any existing legal or CERP requirements. Rather, all public involvement and scoping activities required under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Water Resources Development Act of 2000, and the Programmatic Regulations will be integrated into the overall calendar of CEPP meetings. While all of the required technical agency reviews and independent external peer review requirements still apply, the timeframes will be reduced to complete the overall planning process, which is targeted to be completed within 18 months. (See Figure 1.) The outcome of the CEPP planning process will be a PIR that can then go forward for consideration by the Congress for authorization and appropriation.

# Central Everglades Planning Process



**Figure 1.** The proposed Central Everglades Planning Process, including the first phase of Working Group sponsored public and stakeholder group workshops.

## PUBLIC AND STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION PROTOCOL

Five components have been developed for the CEPP public participation protocol. These components build upon the guidance from the Task Force and will guide development of the CEPP integrated meeting calendar.

### Component 1: Maximizing Existing Public and Stakeholder Participation Capacity

This component reflects the existing network of meetings currently conducted by the Task Force, Working Group, Science Coordination Group, and Water Resources Advisory Commission (WRAC). These regular public meetings provide opportunities for the stakeholders, interest groups, and the public to engage in a host of restoration activities. Over the next 18 months, these meetings will include sessions devoted to the CEPP. Tools such as web-casting, video and audio recording, web-based records, and social media will be used to enhance access to these meetings and to broaden the availability of information produced by these meetings.

### **Component 2: Public and Stakeholder Group Workshops**

Pursuant to Section 528 (f)(3)(B) of the Water Resources Development Act of 1996, the Working Group is authorized to "...seek advice and input from any interested, knowledgeable, or affected party as the...working group [sic],..., determines necessary" to perform its duties. To accomplish this, the Working Group will sponsor a series of workshops specifically designed to enhance stakeholder input to the CEPP. These meetings will provide local governments, interested stakeholders, Tribes, and the public with opportunities to engage in two-way dialogue at a more technical and detailed level at key phases of the planning process such as the scope of the study, development of goals and targets, development and evaluation of alternatives, and plan selection (see Figure 2 – Public and Stakeholder Group Workshops).

### **Component 3: Enhanced Local Government Engagement by the Working Group**

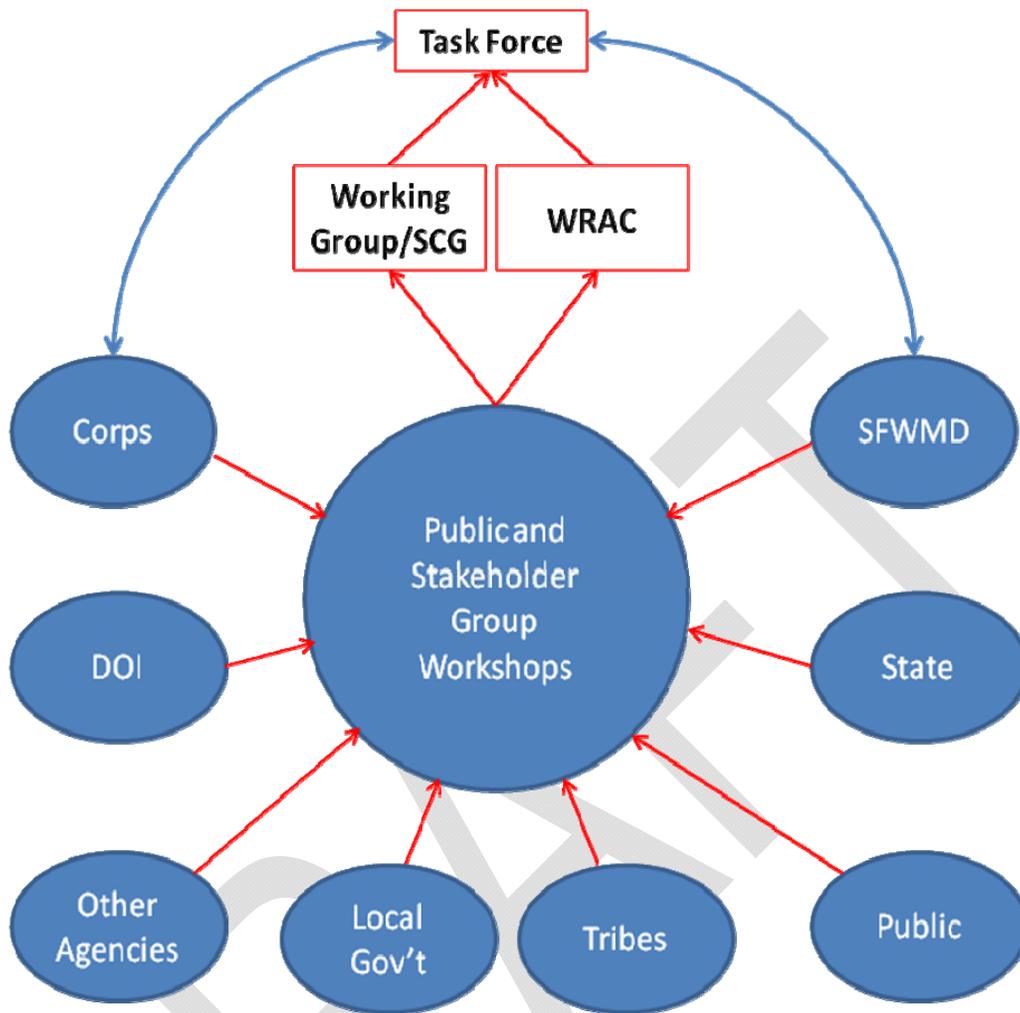
During its deliberations on October 27, 2011, the Task Force noted that representatives from local governments may benefit from participating in the enhanced public process beyond representation on the Task Force itself. For the purposes of this protocol, the Task Force staff will ensure that known interested parties who represent local governments are notified and invited to participate in the CEPP planning process. In addition, the Task Force staff will actively seek to expand local government participation and may make recommendations to the Chair of the Working Group regarding opportunities to enhance engagement with local governments throughout the planning process.

### **Component 4: Minimizing Administrative Costs**

Throughout the accelerated planning process, the Task Force will seek to maximize partnerships with its member agencies to minimize the administration and logistical costs associated with an enhanced public process. These efforts will include partnering on staffing, facilitation, and meeting facilities. To reduce administrative costs, the SFWMD has offered to host the public and stakeholder group workshops at its headquarters facility. Together with targeted regional workshops, this will serve to minimize overhead expenses while maximizing transparency, information sharing, and public involvement.

### **Component 5: Feedback Loops**

As described above, the 18 month scoping, execution, and review phases of the CEPP planning process will include multiple forums and expanded opportunities to participate. Key agency and public workshops will be sequenced to coincide with the major tasks in the CEPP plan and at each of the major decision points (see Figure 1). The Working Group/Science Coordination Group meetings, WRAC meetings, and public and stakeholder group workshops will be scheduled and designed to provide a tight feedback loop to the Task Force, so that the Task Force may provide informed recommendations and input to the Corps and SFWMD planning team (see Figure 2).



**Figure 2:** Public and Stakeholder Group Workshops; CEPP feedback loop.