

*DRAFT Meeting Minutes
 Joint Working Group and Science Coordination Group
 West Palm Beach, FL
 September 29, 2016*

1. Welcome and Introductions

COL Jason Kirk called the meeting to order at 10:03 AM noting it was his first meeting as Chair of the Working Group (WG) as well as James Erskine’s first meeting as Vice Chair. New WG members, Rebecca Elliott representing FDACS and Gene Duncan representing the Miccosukee Tribe were welcomed. The agenda and the draft meeting minutes from the March meeting (Encl. 1) were provided to the members. Chad Kennedy made a motion to approve the minutes which was seconded by Larry Williams. March meeting minutes were approved without objection. Susan Gray reminded everyone of the 2017 GEER Conference and reported the 2017 South Florida Environmental Report has been posted on the SFWMD’s website (www.sfwmd.gov). Shannon Estenoz introduced Caroline McLoughlin, Vice Chair of the Biscayne Bay Regional Restoration Coordination Team (BBRRCT). She along with Phil Everingham who serves as the Chair have been asked to join the meetings whenever they are able. The BBRRCT is an advisory group to the WG and has been very active and they would like to integrate them a little more. Members were reminded of the next Task Force meeting scheduled for December 2nd at the South Interior Building in Washington, DC. They will be celebrating the 20th anniversary of the South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force and the passage of WRDA96.

Members were asked to introduce themselves and provide brief introductory remarks. Eric Hughes announced that was retiring and introduced Cecelia Harper who would be taking over for him as the EPA/CERP liaison. He thanked the COL and his staff for their assistance in helping transition Cecelia into this position. Bob DeGross, Acting Superintendent for Biscayne National Park announced that Margaret Goodro has been selected as the permanent Superintendent and will be on the ground in early November.

In Attendance:

Working Group (WG) Members

Sep 29

Alternates

COL Jason Kirk – Chair - Corps of Engineers	√
James Erskine - Vice Chair - FL Fish and Wildlife Conservation Comm.	√
Billy Causey - NOAA, Florida Keys Nat’l Marine Sanctuary	-
Bob DeGross - Biscayne National Park	√
Deb Drum - Martin County	√
Gene Duncan - Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida	√
Rebecca Elliott - FL Dept. of Agriculture and Consumer Services	√
Veronica Harrell-James - U.S. Attorney’s Office	√
Lee Hefty - Miami Dade County	√
Eric Hughes - U.S. Environmental Protection Agency	√
Marjorie Kirby - FL Dept. of Transportation	√
Cherise Maples - Seminole Tribe of Florida	-
Ernie Marks - South Florida Water Management District	√
Russell Morgan - U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, NRCS	√
Roland Ottolini - Lee County Division of Natural Resources	√
Bonnie Ponwith - NOAA, National Marine Fisheries Service	-

Pedro Ramos - NPS, ENP & Dry Tortugas National Parks	-	Bob Johnson
Leonard Rawlings - Bureau of Indian Affairs	-	
Robert Robbins - Palm Beach County	√	
Barry Rosen - United States Geological Survey	√	
Edward Smith - Florida Department of Environmental Protection	√	
Larry Williams - U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	√	
Vacant - Office of the Governor	-	
Phil Everingham - Chair, BBRRCT, Special Advisory Group	-	Caroline McLoughlin
Shannon Estenoz - U.S. Department of the Interior	√	

Science Coordination Group (SCG) Members

Nick Aumen – Chair - United States Geological Survey	-	
Susan Gray - Vice Chair - South Florida Water Management District	√	
John Baldwin - Florida Atlantic University	-	
Joan Browder - NOAA, National Marine Fisheries Service	-	
Amy Castaneda - Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida	-	
James Evans - City of Sanibel Natural Resources Department	√	
Chris Kelble - NOAA, AOML	-	
Chad Kennedy - FL Dept. of Environmental Protection	√	
Cherise Maples - Seminole Tribe of Florida	-	
Gil McRae - FL Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission	-	Amber Whittle
Bob Progulske - U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	√	
Gina Ralph - U.S. Army Corps of Engineers	√	
Dave Rudnick - Everglades National Park, NPS	-	
Dan Scheidt - U.S. Environmental Protection Agency	-	
Bob Johnson - U.S. Department of the Interior, Special Advisor	-	
Vacant - FL Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services	-	
Vacant - U.S. Department of Agriculture - NRCS	-	
Vacant - U.S. Department of Agriculture - ARS	-	

2. SFWMD Program and Project Update

Jennifer Leeds provided a presentation (Encl. 2) updating the members on the Restoration Strategies Program, noting the A-1 Flow Equalization Basin (FEB) is performing better than anticipated. L-8 FEB construction completion is expected in November 2016 and is 87% complete. STA-1W Expansion is broken into two parts, completion of expansion 1 is expected in December 2018 and design for expansion 2 is expected to start by 2018. The various conveyance improvement projects that were necessary to help facilitate water into their expanded facilities were also reviewed. The Western Basins Water Resource Evaluation Study (different from the Western Everglades Restoration Project) effort was started a year and a half ago. They are focused on areas where the District has authority to improve the hydrology and water quality. They are currently screening potential improvements and have been engaging FDACS and USDA-NRCS. They are also working with local landowners. The information that is gathered from this evaluation will feed into the federal planning project. A status update was also provided for the C-44 Reservoir/STA, C-43 Reservoir (Cell 1), Picayune Strand Restoration Project, Biscayne Bay Coastal Wetlands: L31E Flow-way Interim Operations and the Lakeside Ranch STA Phase 2 (South).

Question and answer session followed, to view the recording in its entirety, please visit:
<https://www.evergladesrestoration.gov/content/wg/archives/092916/>

3. Corps Program and Project Update

Howie Gonzales provided a presentation (Encl. 3) highlighting the accomplishments in the South Florida Ecosystem Restoration (SFER) Program that includes the Foundation Projects, CERP 1st generation projects authorized under WRDA 2007 and CERP 2nd generation projects authorized under WRRDA 2014. They were able to execute Project Partnership Agreements (PPAs) for the Caloosahatchee River (C-43) West Basin Storage Reservoir, Biscayne Bay Coastal Wetlands (BBCW) and Broward County Water Preserve Areas (BCWPA) allowing for nearly \$350 million in credits to the SFWMD. The Central Everglades Planning Project (CEPP) is in the proposed WRDA and they initiated a Pre-Partnership Credit Agreement allowing the SFWMD to initiate work within the scope on the south component. They initiated Project Implementation Reports (PIRs) for the Loxahatchee River Watershed Restoration Project (LOX), Lake Okeechobee Watershed Restoration Project (LOWRP) and the Western Everglades Restoration Project (WERP). All three studies are being conducted under the Corps of Engineers new SMART planning paradigm. The Fiscal Year 2017 goals and President's Budget were reviewed. COL Kirk added the dollars are critical to getting this done and OMB has a new examiner that has been assigned to the Everglades program.

Question and answer session followed, to view the recording in its entirety, please visit:
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4. Report on Working Group Sponsored Public Workshops

James Erskine noted he had the opportunity to chair the workshops and both provided a great way to promote the interaction between the public, the scientists and the managers from the agencies. Workshop participants all worked in small groups to help formulate some of the plans.

Allyn Childress provided a presentation (Encl. 4) and reminded everyone that although there are a lot of meetings that take place they are able to provide more interactive workshops under the Task Force where the public and interested parties are able to interact. The WERP workshop was held in August in Clewiston, FL and they had about 80 folks participate. People were allowed to work in small groups on a participatory mapping exercise on historic conditions, existing conditions as well as suggested future actions. A total of 18 maps were produced. The Lake Okeechobee Watershed (LOW) workshop was held in August in Jensen Beach with approximately 100 participants. Folks worked in small groups and worked on a configuration exercise where they were asked to draw features on a map as well as provide written information explaining why they want the features. The results of the workshop were formally transmitted to the Corps and the SFWMD to be used in the PDT planning process. All of the materials and videos from both workshops are posted at www.evergladesrestoration.gov. Anyone interested in participating in future workshops was encouraged to sign up for the blog at www.evergladesrestoration.gov.

5. 2016 Task Force Strategy and Biennial Report

COL Kirk noted the members are being asked to review and accept the 2016 report which will be forwarded to the Task Force. Substantive comments have been received and members were provided with hard copies (Encl. 5a) of the strikethrough, underline draft for their review over the lunch break.

Allyn Childress provided a presentation (Encl. 5b) reminding the members that the Strategy outlines how the restoration effort will occur and identifies resources needed. The Biennial Report reports on Task Force activities and the progress made during the two-year reporting period (July 1, 2014 through June 30, 2016). The Executive Summary would highlight those things that happened after the reporting

period. The principal audiences are the Congress, Florida Legislature and the two tribes. The Integrated Financial Plan contains the individual, detailed project sheets which can be found on the web. A summary of the System-wide Ecological Indicators which provides the means to track ecosystem response to restoration is also included in the report. She provided an in depth review of the report as well as how it can be viewed on the web at: www.evergladesrestoration.gov. Shannon Estenoz noted this is the third time the WG has seen this document. This report has been streamlined over the years and they are moving towards a web based experience. However, the transmittal process still requires a PDF version.

After the lunch break, Gene Duncan, Deb Drum and other members provided substantive comments on the report which were reviewed, edited and agreed to by the group. Kim Taplin and Megan Jacoby would work with Allyn Childress to make sure the IDS is reflected accurately in the report. COL Kirk asked the members to provide any additional edits to Allyn Childress by noon on Tuesday. A revised draft will be sent back out for formal agency concurrence by COB Wednesday. Report will then be transmitted to the TF principals for its concurrence prior to the December Task Force meeting.

To view the discussion in its entirety, please visit:

<https://www.evergladesrestoration.gov/content/wg/archives/092916/>

6. Integrated Delivery Schedule (IDS)

Kim Taplin provided a draft of the IDS (Encl. 6a) dated September 2016 which has been updated to reflect FY16 budgets and the FY17 President's Budget. She also provided a presentation (Encl. 6b) to review the changes made to the IDS since the last update in 2015. In terms of good news, the planning studies for both the Lake Okeechobee Watershed and Western Everglades were kicked off in 2016 and will be completed 1 year earlier. The Herbert Hoover Dike (HHD) Rehabilitation construction completion has been extended out 3 years and the Kissimmee River construction completion has been extended out 1 year. She reviewed the six other projects that have had their schedules either extended or shifted. There has been a great deal of interest and requests to move up storage planning south of the lake, the EAA component. While the Secretary of the Army has indicated a willingness to move sooner than the 2021 initiation of the EAA study, they have not yet found a feasible, willing, non-federal sponsor for that effort. There have also been requests to move forward the Lake Okeechobee Regulation Schedule revision and the BBCW Phase II but their experts and resources are currently tied up. She reminded the members that the IDS is a living document and can be reconsidered as resources and expertise get freed up.

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COL Kirk suggested they include Contract 8A for the C-111 South Dade in addition to the Contract 8 and Contract 9 and also to add the word "pending" before authorization 2016 so as not to get ahead of Congress. Shannon Estenoz noted the IDS is part of the consultation process with the Task Force. They are not going to vote but barring any objections, this would be the version that is elevated to the Task Force in December. James Evans noted the City of Sanibel has concerns, they would like to see the EAA project accelerated. They would not like to see the C-43 Reservoir timeframe extended but the agencies' budgets are going to be the limiting factor. Roland Ottolini added that Lee County would also not like to see slippage of the C-43 Reservoir schedule. Lee Hefty noted there have been a lot of discussions in Miami Dade County to advance the BBCW Phase II and to the extent that they can look at opportunities in the future, Miami Dade County is interested in helping these projects along. Deb Drum noted the C-23/24 Reservoir North planning starts a year earlier than the south reservoir. She wanted to go on record stating that if there were complications with the north planning, that could be an opportunity to switch

and accelerate the C-23/24 STA portion. COL Kirk noted an updated version of the IDS will be prepared for the December Task Force meeting.

Public Comment

Ed Fielding (Martin County Commission) said the vision they have for the Lake Okeechobee basin is much too modest. His objective is that they not have releases from the lake into the estuaries and this vision won't accomplish that. In his view, they will need a million acre feet of storage, STA or ASR capabilities to meet those expectations. They also have concerns with water quantity and quality.

Newton Cook (United Waterfowlers of Florida) said they currently have 8,000 cfs coming in at the top of the lake and in January they had 18,000 cfs. Until they get a plan that will move the water from the north end of the lake into Florida Bay and until there is the same ability to move water under Tamiami Trail through the park into the bay, the estuaries will be bombed.

Cara Capp (National Parks Conservation Assoc.) said she wanted to celebrate WRDA adding it was a great achievement for many folks around this table. NPCA will continue to advocate to make sure they get the needed funding. NPCA remains concerned about the SFWMD's recently introduced plan for Florida Bay, specifically creating a new inflow point to Taylor Slough and associated water quality impacts it may have for the park. This is an important piece that will have an impact to Florida Bay and she urged that anytime a new plan proposes to change water flow to ENP that it be fully vetted. NPCA supports the goal of sending clean water to Florida Bay and believes the best way to do that is to complete and operate the long term restoration plans that many entities around this table have been working on for years. They are excited to see the next phases of MWDs move forward and they want to see C-111 finished. They need to see storage treatment and flow in the EAA and they are disappointed to see the IDS has EAA planning to begin 5 years out. They hope the state would follow Senator Negron's leadership and join the Corps of Engineers to begin this planning effort sooner than 2021.

Diana Umpierre (Sierra Club) thanked the Corps of Engineers for its readiness to begin the planning for storage, treatment and conveyance in the EAA in concert with the planning for CERP projects west and north of the lake. The EAA storage project is an existing CERP project with a planning phase that keeps being pushed further and further into the future. The Everglades, the estuaries and the 8 million south Floridians like herself can't wait any longer for EAA planning to begin. They urge the SFWMD and Gov. Scott to begin the planning phase now. In addition, Sierra Club strongly objects to the use of ASR and deep injection wells that will not help to restore clean and natural flows into the Everglades.

Julie Hill Gabriel (Audubon) noted it was impressive to see how many things are going on. She thanked everyone at the table noting it was very much appreciated. This year they have seen extreme circumstances in Florida's environment and in their waterways that have required extreme responses. While acknowledging how much work is going on, she urged them to find a way to move up the EAA storage project.

Dawn Shirreffs (Everglades Foundation) stated that a couple of years ago when there was a clear message from many sectors of the community to press for the EAA Reservoir, they were told they could not have three concurrent planning processes. It is discouraging to see the two other planning efforts moved up. They have been in a state of emergency for more than 6 months and this IDS reflects the status quo and does not deliver any new water to Florida Bay and does not significantly relieve Lake Okeechobee discharges to the estuaries. They need to be able to stay flexible and respond to a crisis. She thanked the Corps for their flexibility in looking at possible budget re-allocations and she encouraged the SFWMD to do the same.

Drew Martin (Loxahatchee Group/Sierra Club) said he supported the comments made by others, particularly in agreement on ASR. They do not think ASR should be considered as providing much help in storing water and it is in a sense a waste of resources when they could be using those resources for EAA planning. He is personally concerned with what is going on with the Loxahatchee NWR and the SFWMD saying they would like to take it over adding he thinks it will distract and impede Everglades restoration. The staff has done everything they can to get funding and he thinks this may be an issue for this group. What is going on in the estuaries is hurting the economy and they need to start EAA planning right away. They need to start focusing on the loss of wetlands and urban development that continues to encroach upon the system and he suggested they have urban planners on this group. He is concerned about drilling wells in the water conservation areas (WCAs). Fracking takes a huge amount of water and he thinks that everyone in this group should be opposed to any fracking or well drilling, even experimental, inside the WCAs. He hopes they will go on record as something they are opposing.

Shannon Estenoz, from Interior's perspective said they are incrementally achieving progress and she doesn't think they are indemnifying the ecosystem from the worst Mother Nature has to dish out in the future. The idea is to make it resilient so that when they get hurricanes and extreme events, the ecosystem can respond in the way Mother Nature intended. She echoed the encouraging words about getting MWDs and C-111 done and appreciates the efforts to accelerate those projects that are critical for Florida Bay. Interior would like to begin a dialogue as they look ahead within the CERP context, to look at exploring seepage wall technology down along Everglades National Park (ENP) as a longer term, more sustainable approach to provide additional water into ENP while protecting private property to the east. They can do it in a way that does not deprive their resources to the east like Biscayne National Park (BNP). Finally, disagree with the notion that the position of Loxahatchee NWR is an issue for the WG since it is unfolding at a level above their pay grades.

7. REStoration COordination & VERification (RECOVER) Update

Susan Gray introduced the agenda item noting this is a multi-agency effort to look at system-wide monitoring for the ecosystem. April Patterson, Patti Gorman and the RECOVER Leadership have been looking at the steps needed to move forward as projects come online. They have been struggling with resource limitations in terms of covering everything they want to cover and get the information to the managers as they go forward with project and program development.

Patti Gorman recognized other team members. She provided a presentation (Encl. 7a) reviewing the purpose, intended audience, components, deliverables, timeline as well as a request for potential SCG assistance. She also provided a map (Encl. 7b) detailing what is being monitored and where. The five year planning effort is a comprehensive and forward thinking effort which takes into consideration the IDS while reviewing the current state of the science in order to formulate a path forward for prioritizing RECOVER efforts for FY17-21. CERP is transitioning from a planning mode and integration of science is at the heart of what needs to be done over the next five years. RECOVER has been in existence since 2000, they have had a lot of great work and they want to make sure they are focused on where CERP is now. RECOVER's work over the next five years will focus on meeting the terms of the CERP Programmatic Regulations (Pro Regs) with regards to tracking the interim goals and targets.

RECOVER will also be working with others to identify and implement priority Adaptive Management strategies. Seeing the great work the WG has been able to do with the workshops for the Western Everglades, Lake Okeechobee and CEPP, RECOVER would like the SCG to sponsor a workshop. RECOVER will use the workshop format at its annual science meeting in the Jan/Feb timeframe to help with the science integration and vulnerability analysis tasks. They will include the University of Maryland's Center for Environmental Science who will be under contract with RECOVER in addition to

the principal investigators. Susan Gray added that as great an outreach effort as RECOVER did, there were people who felt they were left out of the process and by having the SCG as part of the review, comment and discussion they would have greater outreach success. She said that conceptually that is something the SCG would be happy to help with and sponsor. Shannon said that if the SCG decided to do that, the OERI would staff it.

8. National Research Council 6th Biennial Report Update

Bob Johnson provided a presentation (Encl. 8) reviewing the National Research Council's role. Section 601 of WRDA 2000 requires the establishment of an independent scientific review panel to review the Plan's progress toward achieving the natural system restoration goals. Prior to the Committee on the Independent Scientific Review of Everglades Restoration Progress (CISRERP) there was the Committee on the Restoration of the Greater Everglades Ecosystem (CROGEE) that produced topical reports rather than biennial reports. CISRERP has done five biennial reviews with the sixth one being the next one. He reviewed the set of fixed topics that are in every report adding that they always include 2 to 3 topics that are specialty science type of topics that relate to something they are working on at the time. He reviewed the topics that were covered at each of the CISRERP meetings. The Committee is currently finishing up the report writing. They do a report out process to the sponsor agencies as the report is being released and that is scheduled to coincide with the Task Force meeting in December. The Committee will provide the sponsoring agencies with a draft report for fact checking purposes and then the report will be available on the National Academies' website at <http://nas-sites.org/cisrerp/prior-cisrerp-reports/>. Shannon Estenoz noted this is an independent science review and they won't know exactly what is in the report until they see it.

Public Comment

Drew Martin (Loxahatchee Group/Sierra Club) noted the reefs are experiencing bacterial degradation and although it is not the same as bleaching, it is very serious and he believes it may be tied to the releases out of the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee. The freshwater could be pushing a lot of those nutrients out into the system. He said he hoped the SCG is looking at the implications of the damage from these releases.

Next Steps and Closing Comments

James Erskine reminded everyone of the 2017 GEER Conference that requires advanced registration. Shannon reminded everyone that her office will send an e-mail next week asking for agency concurrence on the Strategy and Biennial Report. Also, those planning to attend the next Task Force meeting should plan on arriving the day before since they are hoping to put together something the night before in celebration of the Task Force's 20th anniversary. The State of Florida, Corps and Interior as the sponsoring agencies will designate the folks who will receive the CISRERP briefing which may happen that same week.

COL Kirk thanked everyone for their participation and recognized Eric Hughes from EPA who is retiring after 38 years of federal government service.

Adjourn at 2:08PM.

Presentations and handouts for this meeting are available at:
<https://www.evergladesrestoration.gov/content/wg/archives/092916/>

Handouts:

1. Administrative Items
 - a. Agenda
 - b. Draft minutes, March 2016 meeting

2. SFWMD Program and Project Update presentation
3. Corps Program and Project Update presentation
4. Working Group Sponsored Public Workshops presentation
5. 2016 Task Force Strategy and Biennial Report
 - a. Presentation
 - b. Draft Report
6. Integrated Delivery Schedule (IDS)
 - a. Draft IDS Placemat
 - b. Presentation
7. REstoration COordination & VERification (RECOVER) Update
 - a. Presentation
 - b. RECOVER Map
8. National Research Council Update