

Draft Meeting Minutes
Joint Working Group (WG) and Science Coordination Group (SCG)
South Florida Water Management District
West Palm Beach, FL
September 19, 2019

1. Welcome and Introductions

James Erskine called the meeting to order at 9:15AM noting it was a condensed agenda given the Task Force Sponsored Integrated Delivery Schedule (IDS) workshop scheduled for that afternoon. Members were reminded the meeting was being webcast. Those having public comments on the IDS were asked to hold their comments until the IDS workshop. James welcomed new WG members Jennifer Leeds (SFWMD), Kevin Cuniff (Seminole Tribe of Florida) and Sunny Snider (NOAA). Susan Gray welcomed new SCG members Stacy Myers (Seminole Tribe), Stephanie Romañach (USGS) and Angela Dunn (Corps of Engineers). Russell Morgan announced that Under Secretary Bill Northey is the new USDA representative on the Task Force and Jason Strenth will represent the department on the SCG. LTC Jennifer Reynolds introduced LTC Todd Polk who is succeeding her. James recognized Patty Power Task Force alternate to Jim Shore representing the Seminole Tribe. Members were asked to introduce themselves and provide brief opening remarks.

The video, handouts and presentations from this meeting are available via the link below:
<https://www.evergladesrestoration.gov/wgm/>

In Attendance:

Working Group (WG) Members

James Erskine - Chair - FL Fish and Wildlife Conservation Comm.	√	
Nick Aumen – Vice Chair – U.S. Geological Survey	√	
Stephania Bolden- NOAA, Florida Keys Nat’l Marine Sanctuary	-	
Amy Castaneda – Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida	-	
Kevin M. Cuniff – Seminole Tribe of Florida	√	
Deb Drum – Palm Beach County	-	Jeremy McBryan
Rebecca Elliott - FL Dept. of Agriculture and Consumer Services	√	
Cecelia Harper - U.S. Environmental Protection Agency	√	
Veronica Harrell-James - U.S. Attorney’s Office	√	
Lee Hefty - Miami Dade County	√	
COL Andrew Kelly – U.S. Army Corps of Engineers	-	LTC Jennifer Reynolds
Marjorie Kirby - FL Dept. of Transportation	-	
Jennifer Leeds – South Florida Water Management District	√	
John Maehl – Martin County Board of County Commissioners	√	
Russell Morgan – U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, NRCS	√	
Roland Ottolini – Lee County Division of Natural Resources	√	
Pedro Ramos – NPS, ENP & Dry Tortugas National Parks	√	
Leonard Rawlings – Bureau of Indian Affairs	-	
Edward Smith - Florida Department of Environmental Protection	√	
Sunny Snider- NOAA, Southeast Fisheries Science Center	-	

Joe Sullivan – U.S. Department of Transportation, FHWA	-	
Larry Williams – U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	√	
Phil Everingham – Chair, BBRRCT, Special Advisory Group	-	
Adam Gelber – Office of Everglades Restoration Initiatives	√	
Science Coordination Group (SCG) Members		
Susan Gray – Chair - South Florida Water Management District	√	
Bob Johnson – Vice Chair - Everglades National Park	√	
John Baldwin - Florida Atlantic University	-	Brian Benscoter
Joan Browder – NOAA, National Marine Fisheries Service	-	
Amy Castaneda – Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida	-	
Angela Dunn – U.S. Army Corps of Engineers	√	
James Evans – City of Sanibel Natural Resources Department	√	
Jennifer Hecker – Coastal & Heartland National Estuary Partnership	√	
Chris Kelble – NOAA, AOML	-	
Chad Kennedy – FL Dept. of Environmental Protection	√	
Gil McRae – FL Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission	-	Penny Hall
Stacy Myers – Seminole Tribe of Florida	√	
Bob Progulske – U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	√	
Stephanie Romañach – United States Geological Survey	√	
Dan Scheidt – U.S. Environmental Protection Agency	-	
Jason Strenth – U.S. Department of Agriculture – NRCS	-	
David Rudnick, Special Advisor – National Park Service	√	
Vacant – FL Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services	-	
Vacant - U.S. Department of Agriculture – ARS	-	

2. SCG Leadership Discussion

Susan Gray announced her plans to retire at the beginning of 2020 and proposed stepping back from the Chair position. Bob Johnson has agreed to serve as Chair and Susan would serve as Vice Chair until her retirement. Adam Gelber thanked Susan for her service and encouraged any SCG member who would like to be considered as Vice Chair in 2020 to let his office know. Chad Kennedy made a motion which was seconded by Nick Aumen to bring the SCG leadership change to the Task Force at its October meeting. All voted in favor with none opposed. Susan Gray also announced that Lawrence Glenn will be the new SFWMD representative on the SCG after her retirement.

3. Priorities Update

Adam Gelber reminded everyone the OERI team will be working with the WG and SCG on the deliverables for these priorities. Allyn Childress noted there were six priorities established at the June meeting and the focus has been on two of the efforts: System-wide Ecological Indicators and Invasive Exotic Species.

System-wide Ecological Indicators

The suite of indicators was established by the Task Force to provide a picture of overall ecosystem health. An update on the 11 indicators is provided in a stand-alone System-wide Ecological Indicators report as well as a portion of the Biennial Report that is provided to the Congress and the Florida

Legislature. There is an interest in assessing the current suite of indicators to determine whether they are still appropriate, have enough data, cover the right geographic area, can detect trends, etc. Before they tackle the technical information, they want to have input from the policy makers and understand how the decision makers are using this information and how it can be improved. They will begin conducting one-on-one interviews to obtain feedback regarding the purpose and utility of the document. That information will be used to help structure the next phase of activities. This will be a long-term process that will feed into the 2022 Biennial Report. The points of contacts for this effort are Allyn Childress and Laura Brandt.

Invasive Exotic Species Strategic Action Framework

The core framework document was developed in 2013 based on the four phases of the invasion curve and includes both plants and animals. There are case studies for each phase, a preliminary action assessment that prioritized specific strategies and actions as well as a single year Cross Cut Budget. They will be working to update the documents to reflect the work that has happened since it was originally developed. OERI reached out to the members to develop a list of experts and participants and the first call was held to kick-off the effort. Next steps are to assess existing elements in order to develop an updated Framework, starting with the base document and case studies. The goal is to finalize this effort by the summer of 2020. The points of contacts for this effort are Allyn Childress and Carrie Beeler. An update will be provided on both efforts at the October TF meeting.

Pedro Ramos said FWC, with funding from the Park Service and others, is in the process of developing a state-wide Strategic Action Plan on Invasive Species. He suggested they don't duplicate that effort. He commended the Governor and others who have ramped up the removal efforts. He also thanked Nick Aumen and USGS for the research and studies currently underway in Everglades National Park. James Erskine said that FWC has members involved on both efforts.

4. Tamiami Trail Next Steps (TTNS) and Central Everglades Planning Project (CEPP)

Bob Johnson reminded everyone the goal is to send more water south to reduce harmful discharges to the northern estuaries and restore flows to the central/southern Everglades which requires increased outflow capacity from WCA-3A. The CEPP will redirect much of the new water eastward into Northeast Shark River Slough, the historic flow path. This requires reconstructing the eastern Tamiami Trail roadway, to accommodate the CEPP flows and design high water of 9.7 feet in the L-29 canal. Tamiami Trail has been an obstruction to flows since the 1920s. The Tamiami Trail Next Steps project was authorized by Congress in 2009. The Phase 1 project constructed 2.3 miles of bridging in early 2019. These bridges are aligned with the new CEPP flow path. Phase 2 will reconstruct/raise the remaining 6.5 miles of roadway to protect the roadway from adverse high-water impacts. As they are raising the road, they will look at how they can increase the distribution of flows to restore some of the historic slough environment. The presentation included a review of flows into Northeast Shark River Slough (NESRS) from 2003-2019. They have seen the highest flows on record in NESRS, so they are seeing the benefits of the roadway improvements. Seepage management is a big problem that they will continue to work through. Construction is scheduled to be substantially complete by November 2022 which is when the next set of conveyance features for the CEPP starts bringing more water south.

5. SFER Program FY20 Budget: Federal and Non-Federal

Howie Gonzales reviewed the FY20 federal budget. There will be a big push in detailed design so that they will have projects ready for construction. He reviewed how the \$200 million identified in the President's Budget will be used. For Non-CERP, \$1.2 million will be used for the C-111 South Dade and Kissimmee River Restoration projects. For CERP, \$198.8 million will be used for the C-43 West Basin Storage Reservoir, Indian River Lagoon South, Picayune Strand Restoration Project, Biscayne Bay Coastal Wetlands (BBCW), Broward County Water Preserve Areas, CEPP, CERP Design: BBWC Phase 2 and CERP Program Management. Their funds don't expire so whatever is not used this year will be rolled over into the next fiscal year.

Matt Morrison reviewed the state's South Florida Ecosystem Restoration funding which is \$423.8 million of which \$415.5 million is for CERP. In addition, there is \$43 million from DOT for Tamiami Trail, \$32 million a year for Restoration Strategies and money that is coming in through appropriations and ad valorem funding for the Northern Everglades and Estuary Protection Program.

6. Consultation on the Integrated Delivery Schedule (IDS)

Eva Velez provided three placemats: 2018 IDS; SFER program; and the working version of the 2019 IDS. She reviewed the history of the IDS which has its roots in the Yellow Book and reminded everyone that the IDS is intended to be a forward-looking document as they identify their priorities. The working version of the 2019 IDS will continue building on the historic momentum. Everglades science holds the key to achieving the CERP goals and additional information is available at www.evergladesecohealth.org. Advancing construction and receiving ecosystem benefits from CEPP is possible because several key non-CERP and foundation projects have reached important milestones. As a result of the June 2019 WG/SCG meeting, the SCG members participated in a webinar to discuss how Everglades science informs the IDS process. The Task Force voted to sponsor a single IDS public engagement workshop, as requested by the Corps, which is scheduled for that afternoon. The final IDS update will be presented at the October 29th Task Force meeting.

Roland Ottolini noted the value of using the IDS as a roadmap. He suggested adding the water quality piece of the C-43 reservoir to the IDS as a non-CERP project since it may be funded down the road. James Evans noted Secretary Valenstein and Mayor Ruane, at the last Task Force meeting, asked whether there was a way to show in the IDS the consequence of the lack of federal or state funding. He stated that it is important to be transparent and know the consequences so they can advocate for the needed funding. Jennifer Hecker noted the 2018 IDS had the C-43 completed in 2022 and the new IDS has it being completed in 2023. It is good to have an explanation as to why so they can communicate that to their constituents. She also agreed that now that the C-43 water quality feasibility study is kicking-off that they have a placeholder in the updated IDS. Dave Rudnick said the IDS is based on their engineering and fiscal projections, but progress will depend on their ability to identify and overcome constraints such as water quality, harmful algal blooms, effectiveness of Restoration Strategies and seepage management.

7. Consultation on PIRs

Lake Okeechobee Watershed Restoration Project (LOWRP)

Howie Gonzales noted the LOWRP project is located just north of Lake Okeechobee. The C&SF project

eliminated much of the natural floodplain storage and changed the conveyance from slow overland flow to rapid canal flow. The inflows into Lake Okeechobee are 6 times greater than can be released. The LOWRP is the only CERP project that influences the timing and distribution of water entering Lake Okeechobee, which is key to Everglades restoration, estuary protection, and water supply. The project area is approximately 920,000 acres, the size of Rhode Island. The planning study kick-off in the Summer of 2016. The tentatively selected plan, alternative 1BWR, was identified in May 2018 and includes 46,000 acre-feet of shallow storage, 80 Aquifer Storage and Recovery (ASR) wells, 25 of which are co-located with the wetland attenuation feature, and approximately 5,000 acres of wetland restoration. Cost is approaching \$2 billion. They just completed a second public review period. The Chief's Report is planned for May 2020 for consideration in WRDA 2020.

Kevin Cunniff stated that the Seminole Tribe does not object to the project in terms of what its ultimate scope and objective can do. The Tribe does not object to having the ability to store water or restore wetlands. The Seminole Tribe is objecting to the location of some of the features such as the big reservoir on the outside of the Brighton Reservation and is objecting to some of the other scoping associated with this. The Seminole Tribe believes there is still some work to do on how this project ultimately gets designed and executed.

LTC Reynolds said she appreciated the Tribe's comments. She wanted to provide some perspective of where they are in the process and how they could collectively overcome some of the hurdles. They agree in general on the scope and ultimate goals but there are specific components that are not agreed upon. Because of the federal process, if they don't turn in something for a Chief's Report in the Spring of 2020, they won't make WRDA 2020 and will have to wait another 2 years. They don't have a mechanism to make an adjustment to the plan to look at the additional information the Seminole Tribe would like them to consider. From her perspective they have a couple of options. They could look for a non-concurrence from their Senior Leaders' panel on the project which would mean they would shelve the project or seek another authorization to re-look at the project. However, there could be delays. Another option is to look for a way to reformulate the project; they currently don't have authorization or funding to do that. The third option would be for Congress to include additional language in the WRDA. Stakeholders like the Seminole Tribe that have specific components that are concerning could potentially advocate for language that would help Congress clarify their intent of authorizing a project with considerations for other aspects.

Stacy Myers added there are aspects of the project, such as ASR with certain constraints, the Seminole Tribe would accept, but they question the feasibility of the reservoir portion due to potential direct flooding impacts to the reservation and cultural resources.

Loxahatchee River Watershed Restoration Project (LRWRP)

Howie Gonzales noted the LRWRP seeks to restore and sustain the overall quality, quantity, timing and distribution of freshwater to the federally designated National Wild and Scenic Northwest Fork of the Loxahatchee River while maintaining levels of flood protection and water supply. The project also seeks to restore, sustain, and reconnect the area's wetlands and watersheds that form the historic headwaters for the river. The tentatively selected plan, Alternative 5R, includes impoundments for water storage and improved timing of releases. There are areas that would experience restored hydrology and wetland habitats that would be restored. The project area is approximately 480,000 acres or about 750 square miles. The Chief's Report is planned for March 2020 for consideration in WRDA 2020.

Jeremy McBryan noted that the Palm Beach County Commission voted to approve a motion to continue efforts to support LRWRP and communicate some key concerns. They are working with a technical consultant to do some additional work that they should have by the end of October. They will hopefully continue to collaborate with the Corps and the SFWMD on a forward path.

Approval of Meeting Minutes

Nick Aumen made a motion to approve the June 2019 meeting minutes which was seconded by Chad Kennedy. There were no objections and the minutes were approved as presented.

Public Comment

Irela Bague (Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce) said she was a Governing Board member when they voted to accelerate the restoration of a group of projects, one of which was the BBCW project. Since then, she along with many stakeholders, have continued advocating and urging for the completion of Phase 1 and the commencement of Phase 2 planning. She thanked the Corps and the SFWMD for agreeing to engage in the development of the PMP and Scope of Study for Phase 2. Biscayne Bay is an essential part of Miami Dade's economy all of which depend on a healthy bay ecosystem. Biscayne Bay is in critical ecological decline and its health may be irreversible if action is not taken quickly. Sustaining the momentum of the BBCW project without adding elements that create delays is essential to achieving the restoration goals of Biscayne Bay and Biscayne National Park.

Joan Lawrence (Miami Dade County resident) said this has been a great year for BBCW and she also thanked the Corps and the SFWMD. Utilizing the Biscayne Bay Regional Restoration Coordination Team (BBRRCT), one of the WG's teams, as a forum has been successful and much appreciated by the stakeholders. The 2019 Energy and Water Senate Appropriations bill includes BBCW Phase 2 study language. The President's FY20 budget includes \$2.5 million for initiating and fully funding the Phase 2 PIR. They are finally on the right track.

Cara Capp (NPCA) said she was thrilled with progress on Tamiami Trail. The success of that project is a testament to the partnerships. NPCA knows that relief for the northern estuaries is not going to come until they can send that water south and under Tamiami Trail. They share everyone's excitement about the funding levels for this year. NPCA and many of their partner organizations have long advocated for full CERP funding at the state and federal level. Their message now is, thank you and keep going. They can't have one good year of funding for the Everglades. They see how much progress is made with one inflow of \$200 million, imagine what they could do every year. Their priority is to finish projects, show progress and show what this level of investment buys so that the decision makers continue to invest in our Everglades. With this inflow of money, projects such as the KRR, BBCW Phase 1, C-111 South Dade and C-44 would be complete in terms of federal construction. This would free up those dollars to accelerate other projects like CEPP South. She concluded by reminding everyone that NPCA continues to be on the team.

Doug Gaston (Audubon Florida) welcomed LTC Polk and thanked LTC Reynolds for her service. Everglades restoration has been a long and winding road, but they are at a moment in time where they will be able to push several projects over the finish line and begin to see the ecological benefits these projects were designed to deliver. Every project that gets completed frees up funding for projects that are being planned. Audubon of Florida is excited with the federal and state funding commitments and hopes this will continue. Now is the time to double-down, keep pushing forward and capitalize on the progress and momentum being made.

Lisa Interlandi (Everglades Law Center) said she appreciated the comments by LTC Reynolds on the processes to get through the LOWRP and LRWRP concerns. The Everglades Law Center does have concerns about the reservoir portion of the LRWRP. They do support the project scope and goals and they absolutely want to see that project move forward but they need to find a way to build flexibility into the approval so that they can retain the ability to come to some agreement on the portions of the project where there are still outstanding concerns. They continue to look forward to working with everyone so the projects are not delayed.

Next Steps and Closing Comments

Adam Gelber thanked everyone noting there is a lot of work to be done and the OERI staff is dedicated to helping the WG and SCG accomplish its work. The next Task Force meeting is scheduled for Oct 29th in Washington, DC. Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks, Rob Wallace, just started and is ready to become engaged in the issues. The next joint WG/SCG meeting is scheduled in December at the SFWMD.

Handouts:

1. Agenda
2. Draft minutes, June 20, 2019 meeting
3. WG/SCG Priorities Update
4. Tamiami Trail Next Steps and CEPP
5. SFER Program FY20 Budget
 - a. Corps (federal) Budget
 - b. SFWMD (non-federal) Budget
6. Consultation on the IDS
 - a. Presentation
 - b. 2018 IDS Placemat
 - c. SFER Placemat
 - d. 2019 working draft IDS Placemat
7. Consultation on PIRs
 - a. LOWRP presentation
 - b. LRWRP presentation