

DRAFT Minutes
 Working Group (WG) and Science Coordination Group (SCG)
 ZOOM Meeting
 September 17, 2020

1. Welcome and Introductions

James Erskine called the meeting to order at 1:00PM and provided some administrative announcements. He welcomed new WG member Jason Watts, representing FDOT, who is replacing Marjorie Kirby, who recently retired. Bob Johnson welcomed new SCG member, Holly Milbrandt representing the City of Sanibel who is replacing James Evans, who recently left his position. Adam Gelber recognized Gene Duncan, Task Force member, who joined the meeting. The next Task Force meeting is scheduled for October 2020. Nick Aumen reminded everyone that the Greater Everglades Ecosystem Restoration (GEER) virtual conference <https://conference.ifas.ufl.edu/geer/> is scheduled for April 19 -22, 2021. The video for the joint WG/SCG meeting is available at: <https://www.evergladesrestoration.gov/wgm/>

2. Member Whip-Around

Members who joined via the ZOOM platform or called in via phone were asked to introduce themselves and provide brief introductory remarks.

Working Group (WG) Members

- James Erskine – Chair – FL Fish and Wildlife Conservation Comm.
- Nick Aumen – Vice Chair – U.S. Geological Survey
- Karen Bohnsack – NOAA, Florida Keys Nat’l Marine Sanctuary
- Stephania Bolden – NOAA, National Marine Fisheries Service
- Amy Castaneda – Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida
- Kevin M. Cunniff – Seminole Tribe of Florida
- Deb Drum – Palm Beach County
- 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
- John Maehl – Martin County Board of County Commissioners
- Roland Ottolini – Lee County Division of Natural Resources
- Pedro Ramos – NPS, ENP & Dry Tortugas National Parks
- Leonard Rawlings – Bureau of Indian Affairs
- Jennifer Reynolds – South Florida Water Management District
- Edward Smith – Florida Department of Environmental Protection
- Joe Sullivan – U.S. Department of Transportation, FHWA
- Jason Watts – FL Dept. of Transportation
- Larry Williams – U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- Vacant – U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, NRCS

Joined via ZOOM unless noted otherwise

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Phil Everingham – Chair, BBRRCT, Special Advisory Group	-	
Adam Gelber – Office of Everglades Restoration Initiatives	√	
Science Coordination Group (SCG) Members		
Bob Johnson – Vice Chair - Everglades National Park	√	
Lawrence Glenn – South Florida Water Management District	√	
John Baldwin – Florida Atlantic University	-	
Joan Browder – NOAA, National Marine Fisheries Service	√	Joined via phone
Amy Castaneda – Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida	√	
Angela Dunn – U.S. Army Corps of Engineers	√	
Jennifer Hecker – Coastal & Heartland National Estuary Partnership	-	
Chris Kelble – NOAA, AOML	√	Joined via phone
Chad Kennedy – FL Dept. of Environmental Protection	√	
Gil McRae – FL Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission	-	Penny Hall (alternate)
Holly Milbrandt – City of Sanibel Natural Resources Department	√	
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	-	

3. Approval of Meeting Minutes

Deb Drum made a motion to approve the minutes from the June 2020 joint WG/SCG meeting which was seconded by Nick Aumen. There was no discussion and the minutes were approved without objection.

4. Office of Everglades Restoration Initiatives (OERI) Update

Adam Gelber announced OERI is working on improvements to the www.Evergladesrestoration.gov website and hopes to unveil it at a future meeting. OERI has also been working on the Task Force’s Biennial Report and the Integrated Financial Plan.

Invasive Exotic Species – Strategic Action Framework (SAF) Update - Allyn Childress reminded everyone that this effort was focused on updating the SAF to reflect all the progress made since 2015. OERI kicked off the SAF update process after receiving concurrence from the Task Force in April 2019. The Task Force has a long history of working on invasive exotic species and this SAF brings in a lot of the history while providing a path forward. She reviewed the five components of the SAF which include the core document, case studies, priority strategies, progress report and an IES Snapshot Budget for FY19. Priorities for the next five years build on the progress made to date and include expanding many programs and tools that were implemented in 2015. Carrie Beeler reviewed the progress and accomplishments made since 2015 which included rulemaking and policy changes that have made a big impact on how they prevent and manage invasive exotic species. Additional early detection and rapid response (EDRR) tools, programs and creative capacity building have increased the number of

individuals looking for newly introduced species. Working in a coordinated effort rather than an ad-hoc basis has been a central component to their success. Spending on research, outreach, prevention and EDRR for both plants and animals has also increased. The final draft of the SAF will be presented to the Task Force at their October 2020 meeting. The SAF and associated materials will be available on the web at: www.Evergladesrestoration.gov

Larry Williams noted the great advances in control of invasive exotics. He reminded everyone of the Lacey Act, the law used by the USFWS to limit the spread of invasive animals. Breeding populations of Tegus lizards were discovered in two counties in Georgia last year. A female Tegus lizard was also found and removed near Lexington, South Carolina this past August. As a result, Alabama amended its state regulations and added Tegus lizards as a prohibited species. As predicted, these invasive exotic species are moving from Florida to other areas in the southeast. This is putting a lot of eyes on Florida, which is good. FWC and the other partners are putting comprehensive EDRR programs into place. In 2017, there was the federal court decision regarding the Lacey Act (on the books since 1903) that governs the movement of illegal wildlife across state lines. The USFWS establishes a list of injurious species that cannot be moved across state lines and they listed 8 or 9 constrictor snakes as injurious and the pet industry sued them over that. At the appeals court level, the court decision said that the Lacey Act, as written, does not prohibit the movement of these injurious animals across state lines in the 48 states. This was a blow to the USFWS and the people working on IES and an unfortunate outcome. There is some effort to revise it and make it explicit. Senator Rubio has been trying to get the law revised. Another example is the invasive exotic snakehead fish, which spreads through rivers, and current concerns if they get into the Chattahoochee drainage as there is no federal law now with teeth in it. Some interest in Congress to fix this and he asked those that could, to weigh in on this issue.

James Erskine added that FWC is looking at rule making for non-native reptiles and information is available on the web.

Integrated Financial Plan (IFP) – Adam Gelber reminded the group that the IFP is required by WRDA 96 and provides detailed information in the form of project sheets for over 250 federal, state, tribal and local restoration projects that contribute to the accomplishment of the Task Force’s Strategy. The IFP is updated annually and will be posted on the web www.Evergladesrestoration.gov .

Biennial Report – Adam Gelber noted the report fulfills the requirement in WRDA 96 to report biennially on Task Force activities and progress made toward restoration. The reporting period is from July 1, 2018 to June 30, 2020 and the draft report is being presented to the WG for acceptance. Once accepted, the report will be presented to the Task Force for approval at their October 22nd meeting. The principal audience for this report is the U.S. Congress, Florida Legislature and the two tribes. Rebecca Elliott said she has some hot off the press data updates for some of FDACS’ water quality projects and asked to be able to include them for this reporting period. Lawrence Glenn said that from the SFWMD’s perspective, they appreciate the hard work that goes into putting this report together. They did notice some factual inconsistencies in the report and thanked staff at OERI for incorporating all their comments. Ed Smith made a motion for the WG to accept the report with accommodation for some last-minute edits to be made following this meeting and for the report to be forwarded to the Task Force for approval. Jennifer Reynolds seconded the motion and the WG voted unanimously.

5. SFWMD Program and Project Update

Megan Jacoby noted the progress and the amount of work happening in the Everglades is unbelievable. She reviewed those items the SFWMD is working on with the USACE to include: the C-44 Reservoir and STA; C-43 Reservoir construction; Central Everglades Planning Project (CEPP) South; Everglades Agricultural Area (EAA) Stormwater Treatment Area (STA); and the Biscayne Bay Coastal Wetlands (BBCW). The Project Management Plan for the Biscayne Bay Southeastern Everglades Restoration (BBSEER) is complete and the study was initiated in July 2020. The state programs reviewed included performance of the STAs and construction that is either completed or underway for Restoration Strategies.

6. USACE Program and Project Update

Howie Gonzales reviewed the program items to include the 2020 Report to Congress and the contract renewal for the Committee on Independent Scientific Review of Everglades Restoration Progress (CISRERP). The Report to Congress is required by WRDA 2000 and is submitted jointly by the Secretaries of the Army and Interior. This will be the fourth report and will focus on the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) progress made between July 1, 2015 through June 30, 2020. The draft is being finalized and will be sent up their vertical chain. They will continue to coordinate and consult with the tribes and the Task Force. The final report will be released to Congress in December 2020. The CISRERP MOA is being updated to cover the time period 2020 – 2024. The scope of the Cooperative Agreement will include the completion of the 2020, 2022 and 2024 report cycles. He reviewed the FY20 and FY21 budgets for construction and operations and maintenance. Updates were provided on those projects with planning elements: Loxahatchee River Watershed Restoration Project (LRWRP), C-43 West Basin Storage Reservoir, Lake Okeechobee Watershed Restoration Project (LOWRP), and the Biscayne Bay and Southeastern Everglades Ecosystem Restoration (BBSEER) project. He asked the Working Group to support the Corps by hosting a stakeholder engagement workshop for BBSEER to engage the public.

Updates were also provided on those projects with design/construction underway, to include: Kissimmee River Restoration; Canal 111 (C-111) South Dade; Picayune Strand Restoration; Indian River Lagoon – South (IRL-S); Biscayne Bay Coastal Wetlands; Central Everglades Planning Project; and the Everglades Agricultural Area (EAA) Reservoir. He also reviewed operations for Modified Water Deliveries to ENP reporting that the Combined Operational Plan (COP) is now complete, the record of decision was signed in August 2020 and they are now operating the system down south under COP. He reviewed the goals and objectives they are working through for the Lake Okeechobee System Operating Manual (LOSOM) as well as where they are in the plan formulation process. The final PIR for the LOWRP is undergoing review and the Chief's Report is expected in Nov/Dec.

James Erskine asked the WG for consensus on the Corps' request for the Task Force to sponsor the BBSEER stakeholder workshop which would be hosted by the WG. There was unanimous support for the workshop and the request will be taken to the Task Force.

7. Integrated Delivery Schedule (IDS)

James Erskine noted there were over 186 people in attendance at the IDS public and stakeholder workshop held that morning and encouraged those that were unable to participate to watch the video available on the www.Evergladesrestoration.gov website.

Eva Velez provided an in-depth review of the IDS placemat, one of the tools used to help people understand how projects fit within the program. The working draft of the IDS reflects updated FY20 and FY21 federal and non-federal budgets as well as annual updates to the project level scope, schedule and budget. The strategic initiatives that inform the program include ongoing work-in-kind credit adjustments, CERP cost share, execution of PPAs, and anticipated authorization of projects in WRDA 2020. Investments in the SFER program through FY19 are approximately \$6 billion, Restoration Strategies and Everglades Construction Project are about \$3.6 billion and the Herbert Hoover Dike is about \$1.6 billion. The investment estimate for total SFER construction is approximately \$7.4 billion from 2020 – 2030. The final IDS will be released at the October 22nd Task Force meeting.

8. Cape Sable Seaside Sparrow Conservation

Larry Williams reported on an effort by a group of partners to include the SFWMD, USACE, FWC, ENP, Miccosukee Tribe and FWS that are developing a course of action that will hopefully allow the S-12A and B, S-343A and B, and S-344 structures to remain open year-round. The course of action will include two parts. The first part will be water management actions that direct water away from the S-12A and B and/or encourage sheetflow across the Everglades landscape. The second part will be land management actions and ecological treatments that promote high quality habitat for Cape Sable seaside sparrows in the area of subpopulation A.

9. National Research Council Report Update

Bob Johnson provided an update on the Congressionally mandated study of the CERP by the Committee on Independent Scientific Review of Everglades Restoration Progress (CISRERP) through the National Academy of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine. The study is jointly funded by the USACE, SFWMD and DOI and the eighth biennial review began in May 2019. The report is focusing on major ongoing restoration projects underway in 2019-2020 and their associated monitoring and ecological indicators. Sponsors received a draft of Chapter 3 (restoration implementation progress) for fact checking. Once the contractual issues are resolved the committee will finish the report within a few weeks.

10. WG and SCG Discussion Topics

Bob Johnson noted they have had discussions about how to improve coordination between the WG/SCG and RECOVER and are proposing a new standing update to WG/SCG by RECOVER on Everglades ecosystem conditions and restoration progress. Possible reporting scope would include: monitoring and assessment status; system-wide and sub-regional hydrological and ecological status and trends; ecosystem response to project-level restoration; system-wide response to South Florida Ecosystem Restoration programs; and monitoring and assessment findings, applications, emerging issues and priorities.

Public Comment

Ms. Nyla Pipes (One Florida Foundation) said they should not lose sight of the fact that they are making progress. The efforts to address the concerns with Subpopulation A of the CSSS are a great example of that momentum and they would like to see similar momentum with the IRL South. The public wants to see progress being made and roadblocks to sending water south removed.

Mr. Newton Cook thanked Larry Williams for his presentation adding that it is exciting to see the attention and movement that is happening with the CSSS issue. This is a first step and when MWD is done they will have to move 15,000 csf under the trail toward Florida Bay during a rain event.

Mr. John Rozier said Larry's presentation provides a glimmer of hope. He echoed Newton's comments adding that any water getting to Florida Bay is good. Even though the park wants all the water they can get, they are still operating under a lawsuit that limits the ppb going into the park. They will always have a problem in trying to get large amounts of water going to that part of the glades.

Mr. Drew Martin (Loxahatchee Group of the Sierra Club) thanked the WG/SCG for continuing to hold these meetings via ZOOM. As far as the Tegu, other lizards and animals, he does not believe they should open the Lacey Act and change legislation that has been very effective. States should make it illegal to have those animals as pets and those who have these animals as pets should be required to have their pets micro-chipped. He believes there has been a lot of misunderstanding with the CSSS and appreciated Larry's presentation.

Mr. Tom Van Note (South Florida Chapter Safari Club International) said the fact that they are talking about one sub-population out of several and given that they are birds and can move, he joined the chorus in hoping this would be resolved. He thanked Larry and the group for bringing this issue up in this forum.

Ms. Betty Osceola (Miccosukee Tribal Member) said her Tribe lives in the Everglades and is directly impacted by the S-12 closures. They fail to consider the tribal lands and animals that reside on those lands. The sparrow is an issue and for years the Tribe has tried to bring up those concerns. She applauded the Tribe for sending the letter to CEQ which resulted in this issue being looked at.

Mr. Mike Melton (Miami-Dade resident) as a hunter and fisherman, glad the issue of the CSSS and holding water north of the trail are being addressed.

Mr. Mike Elfenbein (resident) regarding the progress on invasive species, noticed that no one wants to highlight the negative, he asked how many invasive species were identified in Florida in 2015 and in 2020. Similarly, he asked how many acres of non-native vegetation they had in 2015 and in 2020. This would give them a better metric when measuring progress. He thanked Larry for his comments on the sparrow and said he hoped that as they move forward on these issues that it doesn't take the threat of a letter to CEQ to get the agencies to sit down and resolve these issues that have persisted for decades.

11. Preparation for Task Force Meeting

Adam Gelber reminded everyone that the next Task Force meeting is scheduled for Oct. 22, 2020. It may be a combination of in-person/ZOOM meeting and hope to have the details finalized quickly.

Next Steps and Closing Comments

Nick Aumen announced that session proposals for the GEER Conference <https://conference.ifas.ufl.edu/geer/> close on Oct. 2nd. Bob Johnson said he appreciated the continuing progress and the level of public engagement. Lawrence Glenn said they appreciate this forum and the public participation which helps them reach their restoration goals. Adam Gelber reminded everyone that OERI will follow up with the Task Force via e-mail on the sponsored BBSEER workshop request.

Kevin Cunniff regarding the LOWRP, reiterated the Seminole Tribe being opposed to aspects of the wetland attenuation feature which poses a direct danger to the Tribal community by having a large reservoir adjacent to the Brighton reservation. There hasn't been an USACE ability to guarantee that any levee structure will be fail safe. The Tribe feels that having this clear and present danger to the Tribal community renders parts of the Brighton reservation unusable and akin to a take. Secondly, the wetland attenuation feature poses a threat to known cultural resources and burial resources that are of extreme importance to the Seminole Tribe. Despite working with the USACE on this issue the Tribe is concerned that there is no clear path forward. Thirdly, the Tribe is trying to be supportive of other aspects of this project and is tentatively supportive of the ASR technology that has been proposed. Despite the volumes of correspondence and meetings, they are disappointed that the Tribe's concerns have yet to be addressed. On a positive note, the Seminole Tribe is very supportive of Everglades restoration and remains committed to standing shoulder to shoulder with those that have a vested interest in seeing a restored ecosystem. He urged that alternatives for the LOWRP be put forward.

COL Kelly said the USACE and the Seminole Tribewill continue to work through the LOWRP. The USACE is planning a CEPP South celebration around the time of the October Task Force meeting. It will be COVID-19 compliant and they will not be able to invite everyone.

James Erskine thanked everyone and adjourned the meeting.

Handouts:

1. Agenda
2. Membership Roster
3. Meeting Minutes, June 2020
4. OERI
 - a. Invasive Exotic Species
 - i. Power Point presentation
 - ii. Draft Strategic Action Framework
 - iii. Case Studies
 - iv. Priorities
 - v. Progress and accomplishments since 2015
 - vi. 2019 Snapshot Budget
 - b. Integrated Financial Plan (IFP) and Biennial Report
5. SFWMD Program and Project Update presentation
6. USACE Program and Project Update presentation
7. Integrated Delivery Schedule
 - a. Presentation
 - b. IDS placemat
8. Cape Sable Seaside Sparrow presentation
9. National Research Council Update
10. WG and SCG Discussion Topics (no handout)
11. Preparation for Task Force meeting (no handout)