

Florida's Coral Reef Coordination Team (FCRCT)  
Virtual Kick-off Meeting  
February 14, 2023

**1. Welcome and Introductions**

Wes Brooks, FCRCT Chair, called the meeting to order at 9:33am. He reminded everyone that the meeting was being recorded and webcast. An opportunity for public comment will be provided at the end of the meeting. Adam Gelber, OERI Director, welcomed everyone and thanked the agencies for appointing members and the public for remaining engaged in this important mission. The Working Group (WG) approved the Team Charter in September and the Chair in January. Allyn Childress, OERI, reviewed the administrative announcements related to the ZOOM platform.

Wes Brooks recognized the following individuals that were in attendance:

- Secretary Shawn Hamilton, Task Force Member, FDEP
- Lauren Talbert for Nicole LeBoeuf, Task Force member, Commerce
- Adam Brame – WG member
- Ed Smith – WG member
- Veronica Harrell-James – WG member
- William “Chad” Kennedy – SCG member
- Roland Ottolini – WG member
- Joan Browder – SCG member
- Karen Bohnsack – WG member
- Rebecca Elliott – WG member
- Doug Smith – Martin County Commissioner

**2. Member Self Introductions**

Members were asked to provide brief introductory remarks and describe their agency's role regarding Florida's coral reef.

*Voting Members*

- Chris Eggleston – FWS
- Sarah Fangman – FKNMS – NOAA
- Wade Lehman – EPA
- Gil McRae – FWC
- Joanna Walczak – FDEP (shared a joint FDEP powerpoint)
- Nikki Morgan – FDEP
- Erik Stabenau – NPS
- CJ Sweetman – FWC
- Dana Wusinich-Mendez (Coral Reef Conservation Program – NOAA)

*Non-Voting Members*

- Cassandra Armstrong – SFWMD announced EAA Groundbreaking on Feb 22<sup>nd</sup>

- Angela Delaney – Broward County
- Deb Drum – Palm Beach County
- Laura Eldredge – Miami Dade County
- Ian Enochs – NOAA
- Chris Kellogg – USGS
- Gina Ralph – USACE
- Elizabeth Kelly – Martin County
- Still working with Monroe County to get the appropriate person appointed

Wes Brooks, Chief Resilience Officer for the State of Florida, heads the statewide Office of Resilience inside the Executive Office of the Governor. The statewide office of Resilience is about 8 months old and their role in coral reef conservation restoration is a bit less direct than many of their agency partners. The major purpose of the office is to review all flood resilience and mitigation activities across the state and coordinate those efforts with federal, state, and local governmental entities and stakeholders, including by providing strategic direction for interagency and cross disciplinary initiatives to minimize the flood vulnerability of critical assets as well as working to align flood resilience and mitigation and priorities across governmental and non-governmental partners. Ecosystem restoration is a big part of what the State of Florida does especially in enhancing natural infrastructure to combat or mitigate flood risk. Everglades restoration is a major priority for the State of Florida and the Statewide Office of Resilience. In the case of coral reefs in southeast Florida, research out of USGS suggests that our existing reef system in its current state, which is severely degraded, provides flood protection benefits to thousands of residents and averts ~\$675 million a year in property damage and lost economic activity. Additional research has demonstrated that losses in reef height during a 100-year storm increases the number of threatened residents from flooding and the economic damage figure rises to ~ \$2.9 billion. In addition to losses in reef height, they are dealing with sea-level rise. Combatting the degradation of the reef system is critical to maintaining the value it provides from flood protection services. The population in southeast Florida, the sheer economic value in the region and its importance to the state demonstrated the critical value of Florida's coral reef to flood risk reduction and the promise of coral reef restoration to counteract those physical and chemical losses as well as to allow the reef structure to keep pace with sea-level rise – this represents a major opportunity for Florida and our state's resilience efforts. To that end Governor DeSantis recognized these facts and has provided the state members with real ammunition to make progress. In January, he signed Executive Order 23-06 that directed his office and DEP in collaboration with FWC to develop the Florida's Coral Reef (FCR) Restoration and Recovery Initiative with the goal of restoring 25% of the reef by 2050. The Governor also released his FY23/24 budget recommendations with more than \$10 million in new funding for a total of more than \$21 million for coral protection and restoration initiatives to launch the FCR 3 initiative. Most of that initial seed money is to be used for a competitive grant program to fund the expansion of the propagation infrastructure and enhance our ability to house, breed, and reintroduce strong populations of native coral in ecologically significant quantities and in hazard/risk reducing locations. Wes concluded by stating that he is looking forward to getting this team off the ground.

### **3. Overview of the South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force (Task Force)**

Allyn Childress provided an overview of the Task Force's structure, role, and three strategic restoration goals. The Task Force organization is exempt from Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) and the constraints associated with FACA. The OERI provides staff support to the Task Force and its subgroups.

Adam Gelber encouraged everyone to view the video that explains how we got to where we are found at [www.Evergladesrestoration.gov](http://www.Evergladesrestoration.gov).

### **4. Overview of the FCRCT Charter and Purpose**

Wes Brooks reviewed the team's mission, responsibilities, membership, administration, and deliverables which include:

- A collaborative framework for water quality monitoring along Florida's coral reef;
- Recommendations for ecological indicators and RECOVER performance measures specific to Florida's Coral Reef and associated resources to be considered by the Science Coordination Group (SCG); and
- Any other items as requested by the WG or SCG or as deemed necessary or beneficial by the Team.

### **5. Draft FCRCT 2023 Timeline**

Wes Brooks noted that for the first year they are looking to align the team's 3-hour meetings with WG/SCG meetings. Proposed meeting dates:

- March 14 or 15 Hybrid (SFWMD & ZOOM)
- June 28 or 30 Hybrid (USGS in Davie & ZOOM)
- Sep 6 or 7 Hybrid (SFWMD & ZOOM)
- Nov 29 or Dec 1 Hybrid (USGS & ZOOM)

A Doodle poll will be sent out after this meeting. The March meeting will be focused around Everglades restoration; the overall status of the reef system condition; and also assessing current water quality monitoring programs in place across the system. The focus of the June meeting will be on identifying gaps and future needs to support the development of the Regional Water Quality Monitoring Framework, their first deliverable. For the September meeting, they will continue their work to develop the Monitoring Framework and also explore the history of intergovernmental coordination and introduce members to RECOVER and ecological indicators in Everglades restoration. In the November/December timeframe, the goal will be to have a Regional Monitoring Framework finalized for review and approval. They will also begin exploring a standardized process for the team to initiate and develop nominations for ecological indicators for the SCG to consider. They will also determine how to provide feedback to the WG on CERP project development; design components; and the potential impacts of upstream projects on the reef resources.

## 6. Vice Chair Nomination

Allyn Childress explained that the voting members of the team shall nominate and recommend one of its federal members with voting responsibilities to serve as Vice chairperson of this team subject to WG approval. Gil McRae nominated Eric Stabenau. Joanna Walczak seconded the motion. Wade Lehmann, because he is new to the group, suggested the members be provided with a short write-up, so that they can make a more informed decision. Wes Brooks said they could conduct the vote electronically via e-mail. Wes noted Eric Stabenau has been nominated and we are open to add other nominations or self-nominations to the list. The desire is to move quickly on this, within the next 2 weeks, so that they can recommend the Vice Chair to the WG at its March meeting. Gil McRae offered to withdraw the nomination. Wade Lehman said he saw no problem with leaving the nomination standing without a final decision but time limiting it.

Wes said they would collect the nominations along with the brief statements within the next week with the goal of having the vote taking place no later than a week after that. The vote would be by the 10 voting members via e-mail.

Wes asked for a second to table. Wade seconded the motion to table. No one was opposed to tabling the motion. There were no comments by the members.

## 7. Public Comment

Kellie Ralston (Bonefish and Tarpon Trust), her organization is a science-based organization and recognizes that habitats and water quality are key to abundant and sustainable fisheries and hence their intense interest in this group and the coordination of coral issues with Everglades restoration. She commended the creation of this team and appreciate the federal, state, and local efforts and participation on coral issues. The timing couldn't be any better given the Governor's recent commitment to additional coral funding and restoration efforts. They are supportive of the team's timeline and the deliverables.

## 8. Next Steps

Wes Brooks thanked everyone for participating and reviewed the next steps:

- Solicit nominations for the federal Vice Chair
- Set the calendar for the rest of the year via doodle poll
- The March meeting will be held in West Palm Beach with ZOOM option for those who can't make it in person and the team will focus on current water quality monitoring efforts
- He will ask the DEP to share the results from their monitoring efforts across the region
- He asked each agency to produce a written synopsis of their current monitoring programs or efforts that they conduct or support along the reef tract. A template will be sent out for everyone to use. Team members were asked to return them to Allyn by March 1<sup>st</sup>.

Meeting adjourned at 11:16AM.