Draft Meeting Summary
SOUTH FLORIDA ECOSYSTEM RESTORATION
JOINT WORKING GROUP (WG) AND SCIENCE COORDINATION GROUP (SCG) MEETING

Virtual ZOOM, January 28, 2021, 9:00 – 3:00 PM

1. Welcome and Introductions

James Erskine called the meeting to order at 9:02 AM and provided some administrative announcements, thanked everyone for attending, and reminded everyone the meeting is being recorded and webcast live at www.Evergladesrestoration.gov. James noted Lawrence Glenn from the Science Coordination Group (SCG) will help co-chair the meeting given the recent retirement of Bob Johnson. James Erskine recognized Sandy Soto, Office of Everglades Restoration Initiatives (OERI) for the administrative announcements related to the Zoom platform. Adam Gelber welcomed Shannon Estenoz, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary, Fish and Wildlife and Parks for the U.S. Department of the Interior.

Shannon Estenoz noted she spent the last several weeks on the Presidential transition team working on fish, wildlife and park issues from all over the country. Her work and tenure in the Everglades were great preparation for understanding what is going on around the country. While this program to restore an entire landscape is mature, there are many places around the country facing similar challenges that just beginning their journey. It has made her grateful and proud of this effort and the hundreds of folks that have been involved since the beginning. The WG and SCG is part of the governance structure put into place in 1996 and remains vital to the process. There are the high-level professionals who are doing the work and the first to recognize when there are bumps in the road. She is proud to be a part of what is going on down here and in her new role, to help in any way she is able. She wished the members a great and productive meeting.

James Erskine welcomed new WG member Wesley Brooks, additional member representing FDEP. Nick Aumen reminded everyone that the Greater Everglades Ecosystem Restoration (GEER) virtual conference https://conference.ifas.ufl.edu/geer/ will be spread out over two weeks in April 2021. Lawrence Glenn reminded everyone that Dave Rudnick, Special Advisor to the SCG also retired and he also welcomed new SCG member, Dr. Thomas Frazer, Chief Science Officer, Florida DEP.

2. Member Whip-Around

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

Working Group (WG) Members		**Alternate**
James Erskine – Chair – FL Fish and Wildlife Conservation Comm.	√	
Nick Aumen – Vice Chair – U.S. Geological Survey	√	
Karen Bohnsack – NOAA, Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary	√	
Stephania Bolden – NOAA, National Marine Fisheries Service	√	
Wes Brooks - Florida Department of Environmental Protection	√	

Amy Castaneda – Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida	√	
Kevin M. Cunniff – Seminole Tribe of Florida	√	Karli Eckel
Deb Drum – Palm Beach County	√	
Rebecca Elliott – FL Dept. of Agriculture and Consumer Services	√	Chris Pettit
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	-	Melodie Nadja
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	-	
Phil Everingham – Chair, BBRRCT, Special Advisory Group (non-voting)	-	
Adam Gelber – Office of Everglades Restoration Initiatives	√	
Science Coordination Group (SCG) Members		
SCG Chair – Vacant	-	
Lawrence Glenn – Vice Chair – South Florida Water Management District	√	
John Baldwin – Florida Atlantic University	√	
Joan Browder – NOAA, Southeast Fisheries Science Center	√	
Amy Castaneda – Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida	-	
Angela Dunn – U.S. Army Corps of Engineers	√	
Tom Fraser **-** Florida Department of Environmental Protection	√	
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	√	
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	√	
Vacant, 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 September 2020 joint WG/SCG meeting which was seconded by Kevin Cunniff. There was no discussion and the minutes were approved without objection.

4. Office of Everglades Restoration Initiatives (OERI) Update

Adam Gelber announced Bob Johnson will be coming to work at OERI. He provided a summary of the 2020 accomplishments that included approval of the Task Force's 2020 Biennial Report which was delivered to Congress. That report along with the 2020 Report to Congress, the Integrated Financial Plan (IFP) and the Cross-Cut Budget are available at: www.EvergladesRestoration.gov. The Task Force was invited by the Water Subcabinet to participate in a series of field trips throughout the south Florida landscape. The Water Subcabinet has completed its report where they highlight the funding challenges in meeting the timelines and sequencing of the IDS among other things. The full report is available at: https://www.doi.gov/sites/doi.gov/files/modernizing-americas-water-resource.pdf

In 2021, the Task Force will be undertaking a new effort as a result of WRDA 2020 - 'Suppressing Looming Invasive Threats Harming Everglades Restoration (SLITHER) Act' which amends WRDA 1996 and directs the Task Force to develop priority list for reducing, mitigating, and controlling invasive species within the South Florida ecosystem.

5. SFWMD Program and Project Update

Megan Jacoby noted Governor DeSantis is focused on Florida's environmental needs and signed Executive Order 19-12 directing the state to focus on water quality, quantity, and supply improvement. The Florida Legislature has been very supportive and appropriated $370 million in FY20 and $368 million in FY21. The SFWMD along with the FDEP have taken direction from the Governor and the Legislature and are focused on improving water quality, reducing discharges and sending water south. Megan provided an in-depth review of the following projects: Lake Okeechobee Watershed Restoration Project; C-43 Reservoir and C-44 Reservoir and Stormwater Treatment Area (STA); Everglades Agricultural Area (EAA) Reservoir and STA; and the Restoration Strategies Program. The SFWMD is always looking for ways to improve and expand operational flexibility and is pushing to expedite some of the features for Central Everglades Planning Project North and South. The S-333N structure is now complete and operational. The SFWMD has a continued interest in improving flows along the southern end of the system and is looking to expedite those components of Western Everglades Restoration Project that would help alleviate some of the high water conditions they are seeing in Water Conservation Area 3A and also help restore the hydrologic conditions in Big Cypress.

6. USACE Program and Project Update

Howie Gonzales reported the 4th 2020 Report to Congress was completed and transmitted on January 4th. The report documents the progress made between July 1, 2015 and June 30, 2020 and focuses on the momentum achieved since the last report by the partners. The Memorandum of Agreement for the National Academies of Sciences' Committee on Independent Scientific Review of Everglades Restoration Progress (CISRERP) was executed on November 17, 2020 and will run through November 2025. The Cooperative Agreement was

executed on December 17, 2020 and the scope includes the completion of the 2020, 2022 and 2024 reports. The CISRERP 2020 Report is being finalized and will be released sometime in March 2021. A periodic Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) update, defined in the Programmatic Regulations as an evaluation of the plan that is conducted periodically with new or updated modeling that includes the latest available scientific, technical, and planning information, will be kicked off in February 2021. Scoping for this effort will be initiated in February 2021. RECOVER will undertake the effort. This is not a Project Implementation Report that goes to Congress for authorization. In FY21 the USACE received $250 million in the President's Budget with $83 million FY20 carryover. For O&M they received $10.052 in the President's Budget with no carryover.

WRDA 2020 was enacted on December 27, 2020 and included:

- Canal 111(C-111) South Dade Post Authorization Change Report (PACR)
- C-43 West Basin Storage Reservoir PACR
- Loxahatchee River Watershed Restoration Project (LRWRP)
- Everglades Agricultural Area (EAA) Reservoir reauthorized as modification of Central Everglades Planning Project (CEPP)
- Seminole Big Cypress Critical Project deauthorized
- Urges expedited completion of Lake Okeechobee Watershed Restoration Project (LOWRP) and Western Everglades Restoration Project (WERP)
- Lake Okeechobee System Operating Manual (LOSOM) requirements for evaluation, coordination, and reporting

In-depth updates were provided on the LRWRP, Caloosahatchee River (C-43) West Basin Storage Reservoir, LOWRP, WERP, and the Biscayne Bay and Southeastern Everglades Ecosystem Restoration (BBSEER) study, Kissimmee River Restoration, C-111 South Dade, Picayune Strand Restoration project, Indian River Lagoon – South (IRL-S), Biscayne Bay Coastal Wetlands, CEPP, EAA Reservoir,

7. Lake Okeechobee System Operating Manual (LOSOM)

Eva Velez thanked all those who have participated in the LOSOM study process. The goal is to incorporate flexibility in Lake Okeechobee operations while balancing Congressionally authorized project purposes (flood control, water supply, navigation, recreation, and preservation of fish & wildlife). Eva reviewed the LOSOM alternative evaluation schedule noting they started in late 2018. The process started with the Lake Okeechobee Regulation Schedule adopted in 2008 and they listened to those things people wanted to either keep or change. A big milestone was reached this week, the selection of the initial array iteration 1, which was an effort to be intentional about what is possible when it comes to Lake Okeechobee. In iteration 2 the information of what is possible will be expanded to include information to balance the needs. She emphasized that they are beginning with the single objective of learning what is possible. In July 2021 the USACE will identify the recommended alternative. The draft report will be out for public review in January 2022, and the final report is planned for July 2022, with a record of decision in October 2022, which is when the Herbert Hoover Dike rehabilitation construction will be completed.

8. Aquifer Storage and Recovery (ASR) Science Plan

Jennifer Leeds provided some context for how they are implementing ASR and how the Science Plan fits. The ASR wells are a project component of the LOWRP under CERP. These are being done under CERP even though the SFWMD has received State appropriations to move forward with this project component to look at starting to implement storage north of the lake. They are looking to refurbish existing ASR wells that are associated with the Kissimmee River Restoration pilot project and a well up on the L-63 North canal. The new sites that have been identified are all consistent with those locations that have been identified in the Project Implementation Report for the LOWRP. All these sites are within the SFWMD's right-of-way along the canals and do not require any additional land acquisition. Because some of these locations are new, the SFWMD will have to look at the sites for constructability, accessibility, and more. They are currently in the design phase and the Science Plan will come into play when they move into construction.

Bob Verrastro reviewed the findings from the CERP ASR studies which included a finding of no fatal flaws in implementing ASR technology. They found that fewer wells could be constructed with just 80 around Lake Okeechobee. The National Academies of Sciences (NAS) reviewed the study and concurred that there were no fatal flaws and recommended an incremental approach with clusters of ASR wells to provide early benefits. The NAS' report identified six topics of remaining uncertainty and recommended they be addressed. The SFWMD has used the review by the NAS to structure the Science Plan. It describes potential studies to be conducted as ASR wells are implemented in a phased manner. The Science Plan was developed with review and input from an independent peer-review panel of scientists. The plan presents the first version of an overarching program of scientific studies that supports a phased ASR implementation schedule for the Lake Okeechobee Watershed Restoration Project (LOWRP). The 2021 Draft ASR Science Plan will be out in early February for public comment and the final plan will be out in April/ May. Additional information can be found at https://www.sfwmd.gov/our-work/alternative-water-supply/asr

Stacy Myers reiterated the Seminole Tribe's ongoing position that they support the SFWMD putting in the ASR test wells at the C-38 Canal site with the condition that it is done in strict adherence to the NAS' recommendation for biological and chemical testing and adherence to the ASR Science Plan.

Public Comment

Daniel Watson (resident) said it was encouraging to see the Cape Sable Seaside Sparrow on the agenda and pushed for further review. They all know this sparrow has been a weakness in their plan to move water south and one of the causes of the high-water disaster they have been dealing with in the central Everglades. He heard the S-12A was closed this week to slow the rate of recession so that the WCAs don't dry out. In closing the S-12A, three temporary pumps were turned on to pump that water over to the L-28. If the plan is to close the S-12B, then he asked why the water was being pumped into Big Cypress rather than being sent south.

Don Carlson (resident) asked how they planned to move the water south with the S-12A and B being closed. He also said he hoped they continued moving forward with their plans with the new Administration.

Irela Bague (Miami Dade County's first Chief Bay Officer) this new role stems from the governance structure created by the Biscayne Bay Task Force. Her position serves as an advisor to the Mayor and the Board of County Commissioners. She will also serve as an advocate and coordinator with local and state governments as well as all stakeholders engaged in improving the health of Biscayne Bay. The bay not only provides water for the close to 3 million residents but is a lynchpin to the quality of life and a cornerstone of their economy. She thanked everyone for recognizing the importance of moving the BBCW project and BBSEER forward. She looked forward to working with everyone in her new capacity and offered her support as well as the support of Miami Dade County as they move forward.

Josh Greer (resident) on the ASR wells project, he said that it seemed to him that they are spending a lot of time and money figuring out how bad these ASR wells are going to be. He would love to see them concentrate on getting that water south to Florida Bay instead of putting it into the aquifer.

Kyle Archacki (resident) said he was also pleased to see the CSSS on the agenda. They must be able to open the S-12s sooner to avoid such high water in the future. He is pleased the high water is gone for now and believes the recession rate was a little extreme. He also questioned why they were still pumping water into Big Cypress if they were going to close the structures. This past weekend they caught a 4-foot python that was eating a purple swamp hen.

John Rosier (resident) also questioned why they were pumping water into Big Cypress.

Tom Van Note (resident) said he encouraged the continuation of the CSSS study. Single species management to the detriment of all other species is well beyond its time and it needs to cease. He is encouraged to see that effort moving forward. If as they were told that the locks were closed to slow the rate of recession from WCA 3, then why are they pumping water into the Big Cypress.

Newton Cook said the deviation for the S-12s, for the protection of the CCCS ran out. The extra water that they have north of Tamiami Trail is being dumped into Big Cypress. He congratulated Shannon Estenoz, who always does a wonderful job wherever she goes. He's looking forward to her helping them in the Everglades. Because of the CCCS, habitats and estuaries all the way up to the Kissimmee have been destroyed. He thanked the WG/SCG for having this topic on the agenda.

John Cason said the Newton's comments were very poignant and thanked everyone on the call for their efforts. His focus is on the CCCS and the S-12s. The water evacuation from WCA 3 was horribly delayed during this last event. It was to the detriment of what little wildlife remains out there. Forcing the game species to the tree islands and levees is not the answer to high water and results in grouping them for easy predation. They need to get this water moving south and he looked forward to working with them in the future.

Jennifer Reynolds said they are blessed to have so many stakeholders and members of the public engaged and putting a spotlight on things that are happening in terms of operations and its effects on the environment. The temporary pumps that are pumping into Big Cypress work off the fuel tanks out there. The S-12A structure was closed to reduce the recession rate. They anticipated the fuel would run out on those temporary pumps but they were off by a couple of days. They will continue to run those until Saturday when it will be much safer for them to

remove those fuel tanks when they are empty. James Erskine added that the deviation concludes on the 31st and the USACE and SFWMD will transition over to standard water management practices.

9. Restoration Coordination and Verification (RECOVER) Update

Phyllis Klarmann reminded everyone that RECOVER is intended to be an interagency and interdisciplinary effort that ensures CERP implementation is guided by the best available science. She reviewed RECOVER's three major components, current organizational structure, and objectives. She highlighted the notable deliverables and accomplishments for FY20 and reviewed upcoming FY21 workplan tasks.

Gina Ralph clarified that this presentation is intended to initiate dialogue with the SCG to find better ways to communicate and promote science in the Everglades. She reviewed the opportunities for RECOVER to coordinate with the SCG, on all the great science occurring in the Everglades, to include:

- Input on draft Conceptual Ecological Models and Hypothesis Clusters
- Support other RECOVER FY21 Work Plan Tasks
- Identify and discuss topics of scientific significance (climate change and sea level rise projections)
- Synthesis and streamlining reporting (Plan for Coordinating Science, Systemwide Ecological Indicators and System Status Report)

Wes Brooks noted there has been concern with regards to planning and monitoring because of increased construction. RECOVER will need to evolve with that growing demand. In the Corps' workplan there is $1.5 million budgeted for FY21. He asked if that would meet the program needs or if there are outstanding budgetary needs that need to be fulfilled.

Gina Ralph noted the Monitoring and Assessment Plan, which is the system-wide monitoring, is cost shared with the SFWMD. They have the science in place that will help them address whether they are achieving success in Everglades restoration. They will be formulating a five-year Strategic Plan to ensure they have the appropriate indicators. Phyllis noted that during the planning they would look into the resource needs. Lawrence Glenn said he is happy that RECOVER will be a recurring agenda item because the science that RECOVER conducts is integral and foundational for what is being constructed and where and how the physical features are being operated. Important to bring that information to this group that makes very large decisions. James Erskine agreed it was important to have this overlap and to ensure RECOVER has the resources needed including scientists. Phyllis encouraged members wanting to get involved to contact her or Gina.

10. Curtain Wall Update

Jennifer Reynolds provided an update on the SFWMD's initiative to implement a curtain wall project in south Dade. As additional flows are sent across the Tamiami Trail, water levels will rise in ENP. Adjacent to the park is Las Palmas aka 8 ½ square mile area and they may have increased water levels as well. A flood mitigation plan was necessary and built as part of the Modified Water Delivery project implementation and the Combined Operation Plan (COP) describes how the Modified Water Delivery features will work with other projects in the area. That plan allows more water than ever before into Northeast Shark River Slough. It includes an

operational component that limits water releases from WCA3A in certain high-water conditions. This limits the SFWMD ability to provide flood control in the central Everglades. There are impact such as flooding in tree islands, flooding in BICY and the flooding along the eastern boundary. To address this, we took it to our Governing Board and there are two options; develop acquisition to purchase property in 8.5 sq mile area or build a limited curtain wall option for future to control seepage. They are still working on the data and this item will be presented to the Governing Board meeting in February.

11. Recreational Fisheries in the Everglades

Jennifer Rehage noted she is part of a research group based out of Florida International University that have studied fish and fisheries for the past 15 years. She highlighted the value and status of recreational fisheries in the Everglades as well as fisheries-flows relationships that shows the benefits of restoration for the coastal fisheries. Florida leads the nation in the economic impact from recreational fishing for both the number of anglers involved and the quality of fishing. Yearly sales total $11 billion which means that 1 in every 6 dollars spent on fishing in the U.S. is spent in Florida. A third of recreational fishing trips are taking place in Florida. In Florida 1 in 5 anglers' fish in the Greater Everglades region with a $1.2 billion economic impact. Fishing accounts for $800 million a year in the Florida Keys and $400 million a year in Florida Bay. Aside from the economic value, the Everglades provides critical habitat for long-lived, migratory species such as the Tarpon and Goliath grouper. As habitat is lost in other areas, the Everglades habitat becomes even more important. Because there is limited monitoring, they rely on other data sets like angler records and local angler knowledge that can be used to assess the health of the fisheries. An example of angler records are the 40 years of dockside interviews done at Flamingo/Everglades City. The data from angler records is fishery dependent. FWC has standardized, statewide monitoring efforts to monitor the health of fisheries. These efforts provide comparative data.

According to Angler interviews over last 40 years the catches on snook are highest on record for this year. Highest fish populations for Red Drum, Gray Snapper and Snook seen post Hurricane Irma. Fish are known to spawn during hurricanes. The hurricane was followed by good wet conditions and low salinities in Florida bay supporting the juvenile fishery. Seatrout was the lowest on record after the drought in 2015 and the associated hypersalinity and seagrass die off. Guides noted that there is high fishing quality but tough fishing conditions in Florida Bay. The guides must move more to find clean water. Expressed concerns over COVID related fishing pressure. Guides expressed an interest in catch and release management in the park. Angler knowledge is being turned into quantitative information by scoring and assigning values to fishing assessments, providing near real-time data.

RECOVER supports monitoring efforts conducted by NOAA in Florida Bay and FIU in Shark River Slough provides the only data for the effects of freshwater flows on fisheries. Learned that high flows produce more prey in marshes that come to the estuaries, make fisheries healthier (fatter) and get them to spawn. Specifically, Snook get fatter on sunfish and migrate to spawn. Moderate draw-downs concentrate prey and draw snook up the SRS and the drawdown dictate how many snook will return to spawn. Droughts have negative effect on fisheries. Recorded low bass abundance from droughts in the form of true mortality. In 2011 estimate 80% of the Bass population died due to 100-day drought. During droughts salinity in in dry years, Biscayne Bay reach 40 PPT and can even reach lethal levels of 50 PPT for seatrout. As you might imagine, more seagrass has a positive effect on seatrout.

In conclusion, fisheries are economically important. Hurricane Irma provided important information on additional flows to fisheries and provided positive responses, while droughts caused mortality and lower angler catches. Need to account dependency of the fisheries on freshwater.

Member Discussion
James Erskine asked if Jennifer sees seasonality in data or just quantity of water. Jennifer said that flows at different season can have different effects.

Melodie Naja thanked Dr. Rehage and noted that NPS has been collaborating for many years with very successful results. She added that the research always including citizen science and public outreach.

Adam Gelber noted that this is near and dear to him, great work by you and the team at NOAA. This contributes to the economic aspect and driver. Fish are an important indicator.

12. Cape Sable Seaside Sparrow (CSSS) Conservation

Larry Williams provided an update on the effort being developed by a group of partners that includes the SFWMD, USACE, FWC, ENP, Miccosukee Tribe and FWS. It is a two-part course of action that will allow the S-12A and B, S-343A and B, and S-344 structures to remain open year-round. 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 the Cape Sable Seaside Sparrow's subpopulation A. The question is whether the subpopulation is too low to even recover. The other populations are showing a mixed bag of trends. The graphic shows the muhly grass habitat needed for CSSS species and the water needs to support it. If it is too dry, then trees come in and if it is too wet it shifts to cattails and saw grass and the sparrows cannot use it. It is no different than looking at tree islands to ensure the plant communities needed for that habitat. The recommendations have been developed and are straightforward such as, when 3A gets too high, open the gate. The draft document will be circulated. They are also looking to modify the Biological Opinion and maybe the COP.

Public Comment
Ansley Samson (Everglades Law Center) regarding the CCCS presentation, asked whether there has been modeling done on the impacts of the proposed water management changes. She is interested in knowing the extent of the modeling and analysis done on these proposed changes.

Daniel Watson (resident) noted the picture showed by Larry Williams shows that it cannot be too wet or too dry for the sparrow to nest. They have all this water being held in the central Everglades to keep the hydrology right for subpopulation A. They have over 300 deer on levees and tree islands to protect this subpopulation. There are a lot of concerns with the deer being packed together and spreading Chronic Wasting disease. He recently went out to the 8 ½ square mile area and it is dry.

Newton Cook thanked Larry Williams for doing a very difficult job. Even after all Everglades restoration projects are done the water will be restricted to flow south nine months out of the year if it bothers the CSSS nesting. That also applies to the 8½ square mile area. For over 20 years the sparrow has been the number one restriction destroying the Caloosahatchee, St. Lucie, and Lake Okeechobee. They need the system to flow south and not worry about the CSSS. He asked that they open the gates and let the water flow naturally.

John Rosier (Everglades Coordinating Council) said the council feels the same as Newton Cook. They are destroying way more to save one bird. If the habitat is not suitable, the birds will more to better habitat. If they don't address water quality and the CSSS then it won't matter how many projects are done. Single species management does not work. He also thanked Jennifer Leeds for explaining why they are pumping water into Big Cypress.

Don Carlson (resident) said he would like to see the CSSS review continue as planned. He agreed with Newton Cook, single species management is not working. It will be a colossal waste of resources if they can't move the water south.

Josh Greer said he is a fourth generation Gladesman and private landowner in the Big Cypress. The 8 ½ sq mile area has been a thorn on the side of Everglades restoration. This year, with the high-water event that they had, those S-12 gates don't move enough water even when they are wide open. They just spent a lot of money, time, and effort on building the bridges on Tamiami Trail. He would like to see time and energy spent on getting the water south where it belongs. He looked forward to removing the thorn from the side of Everglades so that he could get back to enjoying the Everglades and Big Cypress.

Kyle Archacki reiterated everything Newton Cook and John Rosier said adding that they can't help the Everglades unless they move water south of US 41.

Cara Capp (NPCA) said it has been years of studying and planning to get to the point where they are ready to build and operate a lot of the CERP projects. NPCA and many of the NGO partners have asked President Biden's Administration to invest $2.9 billion into the Everglades over the next four years. The way to prevent the extinction of the CSSS is to implement CERP as quickly as possible. They need to resolve the 8½ square mile area and she urged that they look at federal resources to help in possibly purchasing some of those lands.

Capt. Chris Wittman said LOSOM should address getting the water right with the goal of shared adversity. If they are just doing LORSS 2008 then the process is a waste. The system is teetering on the brink and they need to focus on making the change now. He referenced A.S. Shannon Estenoz's testimony to Congress, "moving the water from Lake Okeechobee to Everglades particularly in dry season should be thought of as a water management tool, not just a restoration goal." Flooding in the 8 ½ sq mile area this year was from rainfall. Jennifer Rehage's presentation is a good example of how sportsman support restoration.

Mr. Mike Elfenbein (resident) 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.

Next Steps and Closing Comments

Ed Smith reported that Governor DeSantis just announced his proposed FY 2021 - 2022 'Florida Leads' budget. It highlights the governor's commitment to expediting Everglades restoration, improving water quality and better management of state lands. It also adds a new category of funding 'Resiliency Florida' that will provide $1 billion over the next four years to improve Florida's resilience. The budget also provides a little more than $469 million for Everglades restoration which is extremely helpful in getting key projects done. It also commits $145 million for targeted water quality improvements throughout the State of Florida either through grants or through the TMDL program.

James Erskine noted that OERI will work to schedule the next WG/SCG meeting. A possible May Task Force meeting is also planned. Lawrence Glenn thanked the public for staying engaged and being part of this process. Adam Gelber reminded everyone of the BBSEER PDT call the following day.

James Erskine thanked everyone and adjourned the meeting at 2:44pm.

Handouts:

1. Agenda
2. Membership Roster
3. Meeting Minutes, September 2020
4. OERI
5. SFWMD Program and Project Update presentation
6. USACE Program and Project Update presentation
7. LOSOM
8. SFWMD ASR Science Plan
9. RECOVER
10. Curtain Wall Update (no handout)
11. Recreational Fisheries
12. Cape Sable Seaside Sparrow Conservation
13. National Research Council Update
14. WG and SCG Discussion Topics (no handout)
15. Preparation for Task Force meeting (no handout)