

**Approved Meeting Summary
SOUTH FLORIDA ECOSYSTEM RESTORATION
WORKING GROUP (WG) AND SCIENCE COORDINATION GROUP (SCG)
PLANNING SESSION**

HYBRID IN PERSON and ZOOM, March 14, 2023

Full video recording of the meeting is available at: [March 14, 2023 - Working Group/ Science Coordination Group Meeting — Everglades Restoration Initiatives](#)

1. Welcome and Introductions

James Erskine called the hybrid meeting to order at 10:05AM. Sandy Soto provided some administrative announcements regarding the ZOOM platform. James asked the members to review the planning session notes from the last meeting for the follow-up discussion later that afternoon. Lawrence Glenn said they heard a lot of information during the planning session and there is a lot to digest. He hoped they could set some goals for the year that will help them decide when to have two-day meetings. Nick Aumen reminded everyone of the GEER Conference scheduled from April 17-20, 2023. Martin County Commissioner Sarah Heard was recognized. Members were asked to provide brief introductory remarks.

2. Member Whip-Around

Working Group (WG) Members

	person	ZOOM	Alternate
James Erskine – Chair – FL Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission	√	-	
Nick Aumen – Vice Chair – U.S. Geological Survey	√	-	
Becky Allenbach – U.S. Environmental Protection Agency	-	√	
Karen Bohnsack – NOAA, Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary	-	√	
COL James Booth – U.S. Army Corps of Engineers	-	-	LTC Todd Polk
Adam Brame – NOAA, National Marine Fisheries Service			
Wes Brooks – Florida Department of Environmental Protection	√		
Amy Castaneda – Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida		√	
Deb Drum – Palm Beach County	√		
Rebecca Elliott – FL Dept. of Agriculture and Consumer Services	√		
Veronica Harrell-James – U.S. Attorney’s Office	√		
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 Naja via ZOOM
Leonard Rawlings – Bureau of Indian Affairs	-	-	
Jennifer Reynolds – South Florida Water Management District	√		
Whitney Sapienza – Seminole Tribe of Florida		√	
Edward Smith – Florida Department of Environmental Protection	-		
Joe Sullivan – U.S. Department of Transportation, FHWA			
Larry Williams – U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service		√	
Vacant – FL Dept. of Transportation	-		
Vacant – Miami-Dade County	-		

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	
Lawrence Glenn – SCG Chair – South Florida Water Management District	√
Angela Dunn – SCG Vice Chair - U.S. Army Corps of Engineers	√
John Baldwin – Florida Atlantic University	
Joan Browder – NOAA, Southeast Fisheries Science Center	√
Amy Castaneda – Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida	√
Jennifer Hecker – Coastal & Heartland National Estuary Partnership	
Bonnie Irving – U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	√
Chris Kelble – NOAA, Atlantic Oceanographic Meteorological Laboratory	√
Chad Kennedy – FL Dept. of Environmental Protection	√
Gil McRae – FL Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission	√
Holly Milbrandt – City of Sanibel Natural Resources Department	√
Mark Rains – Florida Department of Environmental Protection	
Jed Redwine – Seminole Tribe of Florida	√
Stephanie Romañach – United States Geological Survey	
Dan Scheidt – U.S. Environmental Protection Agency	
Erik Stabenau – National Park Service, South Florida Natural Resources	√
Jason Strenth – U.S. Department of Agriculture – NRCS	√
Craig van der Heiden – Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida	√
Vacant – FL Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services	-
Vacant – U.S. Department of Agriculture – ARS	-

3. Approval of Meeting Summaries

James noted the September 2022 and January 2023 meeting summaries were provided via e-mail. Chad Kennedy made a motion to approve which was seconded by Jennifer Reynolds. No one was opposed and the summaries were approved.

4. OERI Update on WRDA 2020 Invasive Species

Adam Gelber and Carrie Beeler reminded everyone of the direction in WRDA 2020, part 1, to develop a priority list of species. WRDA 2020, part 2, directs them to focus on cooperation and collaboration to guide applied research, develop innovative strategies and tools, and implement specific management, control, and eradication activities including prevention. A group of experts were convened and came up with a list of 19 species that were split into 5 taxa for the prevention list. The group will be working to develop summary documentation on each species that will include means of arrival/pathways, current/historic establishment in Florida, and potential impacts. Recommendations will be developed for WG and SCG approval at a future meeting. The following subject matter experts were in attendance in person and online and answered member questions: John Galvez (USFWS), LeRoy Rodgers (SFWMD), Wes Daniel (USGS), Sarah Funck (FWC), and Deah Lieurance (University of Florida).

Wes Daniel reported that there has been a call to create an Aquatic Invasive Species Rapid Response Fund which would be funded like FEMA to provide resources to jurisdictions to go out and try to control

or eradicate new introductions of invasive species. Local governments, states, and Tribes can apply. The funding is in the FY 2023 President's Budget, it will come through the FWS and will be used to start the pilot project that will be coordinated with the Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force. Additional information can be found at: [Early Detection Rapid Response | U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service \(fws.gov\)](#)

Wes Brooks suggested OERI staff inventory agency authorities and capabilities to manage this. Identify what tools are in the toolbox and where the gaps are.

5. Florida's Coral Reef Coordination Team (FCRCT) Update and Approval of Vice Chair

Wes Brooks provided an update on the FCRCT that held its kick-off meeting on Feb 14th. Brief overviews of member agencies were provided, the TF/OERI structure was reviewed, and members were given an assignment to provide a water quality monitoring synopsis by agency. The team will discuss the water quality monitoring information received at the next meeting on March 15th via ZOOM. The voting members of the team are recommending that Erik Stabenau serve as the team's Vice Chair, and they are asking the WG for its blessing. Nick Aumen made a motion which was seconded by Melodie Naja. There were no objections, and it was unanimous for Erik Stabenau to serve as the Vice Chair on the FCRCT.

Public Comment

Mike Elfenbein (via ZOOM) shared his excitement at the opportunities to protect more of the wildlife corridor through the Southwest Florida study area announced by U.S. FWS. It is a great opportunity to advance a lot of the goals and objectives that the Task Force is working towards. With regards to algae blooms and nutrient loads, he thanked the SFWMD for having the forethought to investigate some of the new technologies to improve the water quality in the Northern Everglades. It is great to see other government agencies working simultaneously in engineering with nature. If they are to effectively combat nonnative species throughout the Everglades they need to explain to the policymakers that wilderness designations make it extremely difficult for them to achieve their goals. Many do not realize that 20% of what they call the Florida Wildlife Corridor has been historically funded by sportsmen. House Bill 1157 and Senate Bill 1234 will ensure that residents of Florida can continue to have the right to fish and hunt.

6. USACE Program and Project Update

Kim Vitek noted the FY 2023 appropriations for construction was increased to \$447.3 million. They received an additional \$40 million for the CEPP South contract and \$350,000 for Adaptive Assessment and Monitoring. The FY 2024 Pressbook was released, and they are hoping to receive \$415 million for the SFER program. They are seeing unprecedented levels of funding since more and more of this program is moving into construction. They will kick-off the update to the Integrated Delivery Schedule in June 2023. An in-depth review was provided on those projects in planning, design/construction, and operations. It was noted that the team continues to move forward on WERP and is currently working on the modelling without the Wingate Mill STA. The Chief's Report is planned for late 2024 and inclusion in WRDA 2024. On the Combined Operational Plan, it is working and they are getting water where they need it. The Biennial Report was released in Feb 2023.

Jed Redwine (online) said the Seminole Tribe is aligned with the Miccosukee Tribe in support of WERP. Erik Stabenau also said the NPS is very supportive of WERP and is pleased to see the additional modeling

that is ongoing. Wes Brooks pointed out that the 2022 IDS shows \$1.386 billion worth of capability for FY 2024 and assuming they get all the funds, there will still be a gap of approximately \$357 million.

7. SFWMD Program and Project Update

Mindy Parrott reviewed the ecosystem restoration program that included projects done jointly with the USACE such as the CERP & Foundation Projects and the C&SF Section 216 Infrastructure Resiliency Plan as well as those projects they are doing as a state entity or in partnership with local entities or private landowners such as Restoration Strategies, Northern Everglades and Estuaries Program, and dispersed water management. She reported on recent milestones to include contracts that were awarded and upcoming groundbreaking. The Governor's Executive Order 23-06 provides \$3.5 billion for Everglades restoration, water quality, and water supply. It directs the SFWMD to expedite restoration projects that minimize the risk of harmful discharges and send water south. It ensures meaningful progress on storage projects (EAA Reservoir, Lake Okeechobee Watershed, and Indian River Lagoon – South Reservoirs). The SFWMD will now be assuming responsibility for construction of the EAA A-2 Reservoir Pump Station and the IRL-South C-23/C24 South Reservoir. They are also fast tracking a Section 203 Feasibility Study for the Lake Okeechobee Component A Reservoir (LOCAR). Component A was part of the Lake Okeechobee Watershed Restoration Plan that did not make it into the final selected plan. The SFWMD will take the lead on a feasibility study to help locate a storage component north of Lake Okeechobee. She provided an in-depth update on projects currently underway to include Restoration Strategies.

8. Engineering with Nature (EWN) Program

Gina Ralph noted that Engineering with Nature (EWN) is the intentional alignment of natural and engineering processes to show, how with nature, they can achieve economic, social, and environmental benefits. The South Atlantic Comprehensive Coastal Study looks at initiatives to help them become more resilient in the face of climate change, storms, and catastrophic events. There were a series of recommendations that revolve around the Everglades program to build resilience with nature and nature-based features. One of the recommendations is to accelerate the planning and implementation of the CERP with special emphasis on all phases of the Central Everglades Planning Project, the Biscayne Bay and Southeastern Everglades Restoration (BBSEER) project, and the Southern Everglades Study. The South Florida Ecosystem Restoration program was selected as a proving ground. Proving grounds are places where innovative ideas are tested on the ground. They document processes, project milestones, and lessons learned in the implementation of EWN measures so others can learn from their experience. The USACE needs input from its partners and Tribes, and there will be opportunities to work with nature as part of their engineering solutions. Anyone wanting to be a non-federal sponsor with the USACE should look for partnering opportunities. Additional information is available at: [Home Page - Engineering With Nature \(dren.mil\)](#)

9. RECOVER

Gina Ralph reminded everyone that RECOVER ensures CERP implementation is guided by the best available science. All the data they are collecting works in a feedback loop to ensure that lessons learned are incorporated into their planning and design. With the Adaptive Assessment and Monitoring program, they are collecting all sorts of data to assess system response, measure status and trends, and tell the story about how all the money being invested by the federal and state governments are being

used to restore the Everglades. Monitoring is ongoing across the CERP footprint, and the data is used for CERP and non-CERP decisions. RECOVER needs increased coordination and leveraging of agency monitoring data. She asked the WG and SCG member agencies and Tribes to provide a dedicated member of their staff to help them complete a monitoring inventory survey by April 14, 2023. The SCG will be asked to host a RECOVER workshop at the end of July to review existing monitoring data, discuss science needs, and evaluate the Monitoring and Assessment Plan.

10. South Florida Clean Coastal Waters Act 2021, Interagency Working Group (IWG) for Harmful Algal Blooms and Hypoxia Research Control Act (HABHRCA) South Florida Assessment and Action Plan

David Kidwell (National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science via ZOOM) explained that the IWG-HABHRCA is the interagency forum formed at the request of Congress to coordinate and leverage activities when it comes to harmful algal blooms (HABs) and hypoxia. The South Florida Clean Coastal Waters Act, in the summer of 2022, tasked the IWG with developing an interim assessment, final scientific assessment, and an action plan for HABs and hypoxia in south Florida. South Florida is defined as all lands and waters within the administrative boundaries of the SFWMD. This includes regional coastal waters, including Biscayne Bay, Caloosahatchee Estuary, Florida Bay, Indian River Lagoon, and the St. Lucie River Estuary and the Florida Reef Tract. They are going to examine the causes, consequences, and potential approaches to reduce harmful algal blooms and hypoxia in south Florida as well as to assess the gaps in current research, monitoring, management, prevention, response, and control activities. The final product will be an Action Plan which will be provided to Congress based on their integrated assessment for reducing, mitigating, and controlling HABs and hypoxia in south Florida. They are currently working on the Interim Integrated Assessment and will solicit input in June 2023.

11. Planning Session

James Erskine noted the members were provided with Planning Session notes (raw information) from January 24, 2023. Allyn Childress facilitated a rapid prioritization two-part process with the members using the notes. The chairs will review the results and report back to the group.

Public Comment

None

Next Steps and Closing Comments

James Erskine reminded everyone that:

- The FCRCT will meet the following day via ZOOM
- Chairs and OERI will schedule a Joint WG/SCG meeting in May via ZOOM
- Task Force will meet on June 1st over in Southwest Florida

Meeting adjourned at 4:00PM

Note: This is a summary of the major highlights for the March 14th Joint WG/SCG meeting. The most accurate source and official record for the meeting referenced herein is the actual digital recording of the meeting which is readily available and posted for viewing on the OERI website at www.evergladesrestoration.gov.

Handouts:

- Agenda
- Draft meeting summaries
 - September 1, 2022
 - January 24, 2023
- Implementing WRDA 2020 presentation
- FCRCT presentation
- USACE Program and Project Update
- SFWMD Program and Project Update
- Engineering with Nature presentation
- RECOVER
 - Presentation
 - SCG Monitoring Survey Map
- South Florida Clean Coastal Waters Act 2021
- Planning Session
 - CISRERP recommendations
 - WG/SCG Planning Notes from January 24, 2023