

**APPROVED Summary
SOUTH FLORIDA ECOSYSTEM RESTORATION
WORKING GROUP (WG) AND SCIENCE COORDINATION GROUP (SCG)
ZOOM Meeting**

May 2, 2023

Full video recording of the meeting is available at: [May 2, 2023 - Working Group/ Science Coordination Group Meeting — Everglades Restoration Initiatives](#)

1. Welcome and Introductions

James Erskine called the meeting to order at 12:31PM and reviewed some administrative announcements. Adam Gelber thanked everyone for participating in the meeting in advance of the June 1st Task Force meeting that would be held in Florida. Sandy Soto reviewed the instructions for the ZOOM platform. James thanked the members for participating in the two planning sessions which were held in January and March and noted the planning session results were distributed to the members via e-mail. Many of the topics are already being addressed either by this group or a combination of other efforts. Some topics will require additional communication and/or increased effort and the work will continue. The goal for this meeting is to gather information to better prepare the Task Force principals in advance of the Task Force meeting. Lawrence Glenn also thanked the members for their effort in the planning sessions. The chairs and OERI are looking at how to address the different topics raised and he encouraged the members to review the list. Nick Aumen provided a brief report on the 2023 GEER Conference held in April 2023. GEER had record attendance and he reminded everyone that this is the premiere outlet for Everglades science. Angie Dunn also provided some introductory remarks. Elected officials, Mike Elfenbein, Chairman of the Charlotte County Soil and Water Conservation District and Sarah Heard, Martin County Commissioner were recognized. Members were asked to provide brief introductory remarks.

2. Member Whip-Around

Working Group (WG) Members

	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 Statewide Office of Resilience	√	
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

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 Summary

James Erskine noted the March 2023 meeting summary was provided via e-mail. Lawrence Glenn made a motion to approve which was seconded by Amy Castaneda. No one opposed and the meeting summary was approved.

4. Office of Everglades Restoration Initiatives Update

Adam Gelber recognized the dozens of people who have worked on this effort. 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. The group developed a list of 19 priority species broken into 5 taxa. An in-depth review was provided on the applicable laws, authorities and recommended actions for interrupting pathways and response planning. The group has three meetings scheduled on May 9, 22 and 25th. A status update will be provided to the Task Force at its June meeting. The group will develop recommendations for WG and SCG approval at a future meeting.

Jed Redwine noted his concern that the way they administer policy, nature of their approach through the law and their ability to address these challenges as individual agencies is nowhere near what is required to address the scope of the challenge with invasive species.

5. U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) Program and Project Update

Eva Velez noted the Corps has projects in planning, design and construction, and water management operations and maintenance. They also have an enormous amount of work they are doing at the program level. They are executing historic amounts of funding in their annual appropriations and in the supplemental funds they received in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. The FY23 Omnibus Bill provided \$453.84 million for construction and \$10.67 million for O&M. The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law provided an additional \$1.097 billion for construction. The President's Budget for FY24 includes \$415 million for construction and \$12.9 million for O&M. For the Central and Southern Florida (C&SF) Resiliency Section 216 Study they received \$975K from the Congress. The Comprehensive Central and Southern Florida Resilience Study is a new authority in WRDA 2022, and they do not yet have funding for this effort. For program level activities, they will initiate the 2023 Integrated Delivery Schedule (IDS) update in June 2023. Workshops on the IDS are planned for August and September. The draft IDS will be brought before the WG/SCG in Sep and the final will be brought before the Task Force at its fall meeting. An in-depth review was provided on those projects in planning, design/construction, and operations.

Jed Redwine recommended, with respect to the C-44 seepage challenge, that the Corps conduct an exercise with GIS where they overlay the historical creeks and flowpaths with the existing design/footprint. He has observed in many cases that they get more rapid rates of seepage at locations that were historically creeks, and the geology tends to be more transmissive at those locations. On Lake Okeechobee System Operating Manual (LOSOM) and the Combined Operations Plan (COP), the SCG could weigh in on this matter and make recommendations for how best to move forward with LOSOM while trying to minimize the challenges associated with water quality. The SCG could identify a subgroup to focus on two of the areas in the COP that presents the greatest challenges. The resolution of these challenges could contribute significantly to enhancing the quality of the COP update. This same group could also make a list of recommendations for priorities and adaptive management. There is a tendency to try to focus on everything and he suggested they narrow down the issues and identify the top 5 priorities for adaptive management.

6. South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) Program and Project Update

Leslye Waugh noted the SFWMD continues to work with the USACE on the federal projects such as the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) & Foundation Projects and the C&SF Section 216 Infrastructure Resiliency Plan as well as the state led efforts such as Restoration Strategies, Northern Everglades and Estuaries Program, local projects, dispersed water management, and resiliency. She reviewed recent CERP milestones to include the Governing Board awarding contracts for the Biscayne

Bay Coastal Wetlands Phase 1 project in September, the EAA Reservoir Groundbreaking in February and the A2 STA inflow/outflow canal contract awarded in March. The Governor's Executive Order 23-06 provides \$3.5 billion to expedite projects that minimize the risk of harmful discharges and send water south. The SFWMD is working with the USACE to assume responsibility for construction of the EAA A-2 Reservoir Pump Station and the IRL-South C-23/C24 South Reservoir in 2024. The SFWMD is also preparing a Section 203 Feasibility Study for the Lake Okeechobee Component A Reservoir (LOCAR). The Feasibility Study and EIS will evaluate opportunities for aboveground water storage north of Lake Okeechobee with an estimated water storage capacity of 200,000 acre-feet. The purpose is to retain water during wet periods for later use during dry periods to benefit Lake Okeechobee. A Public scoping meeting was held on April 27 and additional information is available at: www.sfwmd.gov/LOCAR. An in-depth review was provided on those projects currently underway as part of CERP, Restoration Strategies and the Northern Everglades and Estuaries Protection Program.

7. Restoration Coordination and Verification (RECOVER)

Jenna May reminded everyone of the purposes of the CERP Monitoring and Assessment Plan (MAP) are to:

- Provide a framework that supports measurement of system-wide responses to determine how well CERP is achieving its goals and objectives and;
- Support and enable adaptive management for updating and improving the Plan, when needed.

The success of the monitoring plan depends on the long-term participation of several federal, state, Tribal and non-governmental organizations that currently conduct monitoring in south Florida. The CERP MAP provides an assessment of the system-wide responses and supports scientific investigations designed to increase ecosystem understanding among other things. She reviewed that RECOVER Five-Year Plan (2022-2026) tasks and products to get them to the MAP update. The Committee on Independent Scientific Review of Everglades Restoration Progress (CISRERP) has recommended a South Florida Science Plan be completed and recommended the SCG lead the effort. The committee envisions a consolidated list of high priority science actions, including model development, targeted data collection, data analysis, and research and synthesis. RECOVER is working on several tasks applicable to the South Florida Science Plan. RECOVER is still resource challenged and support to RECOVER tasks will also benefit the development of the South Florida Science Plan.

Chad Kennedy clarified the Task Force will need to weigh in on whether the SCG will lead the effort to develop the South Florida Science Plan. He is not opposed to a Science Plan but would like to go before the Task Force to get their blessing. Nick Aumen said that none of them have ever thought that CISRERP mandates what the SCG need to do but they should look at CISRERP's recommendations thoughtfully.

Jed Redwine said that over the last three years he continues to hear the Corps of Engineers request more resources from the other agencies to support RECOVER's function. At a moment when Everglades restoration is funded at its highest level in history, he didn't think it was appropriate for the implementing agencies, who are the recipients of these large amounts of resources, to be requesting other agencies to put up resources to support their endeavor. The appropriate approach is to invest in monitoring programs from the resources that have been authorized.

Wes Brooks said he has heard about resource challenges from RECOVER for years. He has no doubt that their ability to monitor and assess all the implementation that is going on right now has stagnated relative to what was happening even a decade ago. Resources are necessary for RECOVER to ensure they are delivering on the promise of these programs and promoting efficient use of taxpayer resources. It is sometimes difficult for the agencies to answer what the needs are. If the Task Force is not blessing the Science Plan, then that raises some interesting issues that they need to look at. If the Task Force were to bless the Science Plan, then that may open the membership of the Task Force to play a deeper role in resourcing that plan.

Lawrence Glenn noted that as they go through the notes from the planning session, they will find that some sort of guidance document would be helpful. It would be helpful, at a future meeting, to have a discussion with all the members to determine their path forward. They need to decide what is best for their on coordination moving forward and whether they want to have some type of formalized plan. Nick Aumen said USGS would view that as a very good discussion to have. He personally uses several different sources of information when deciding how and where USGS money should be spent in support of restoration and takes CISRERP's recommendations into consideration. Ed Smith said the Science Plan effort will take more resources and they should be prepared to tell the Task Force what they will need to get this done and how this will impact their ability to continue the work they've been challenged to do. RECOVER and the SCG do not have the resources to meet the recommendations by the CISRERP.

James Erskine noted RECOVER is charged with working on products simultaneously from FY2022-FY2026. They have had conversation about the role the MAP summary and evaluation would play in the Science Plan. He believes they have some time between now and authoring a Science Plan as they wait for these RECOVER products to provide the information that will feed into the Science Plan. The Task Force will have the opportunity to comment on the Science Plan at its meeting in June. The co-chairs think that they may be undertaking the Science Plan a little later as they wait for the RECOVER products. Lawrence Glenn agreed and clarified Bob Johnson will present CISRERP's recommendations to the Task Force at its next meeting and this discussion may be a bit premature.

8. National Academy of Sciences Committee on Independent Scientific Review of Everglades Restoration Progress (CISRERP) Update

Bob Johnson said it is good to see what RECOVER is doing and what the SCG could be doing in parallel. The CISRERP committee wants to know what their plan is and how components of it are going to be done. CISRERP sees this Science Plan as a long-term effort. The final pre-publication of the Ninth Biennial review was released in mid-December 2022, and he encouraged everyone to read the report to better understand what was recommended. The report covered evaluations of funding and prioritizing investments in response to the unprecedented funding that came from both the state and the federal governments. The report also looked at Stormwater Treatment Area performance, climate change integration in CERP/BBSEER, and development of an Everglades Science Plan in parallel with the IDS. The committee is aware of where RECOVER is with the MAP update. It is their hope that the WG and SCG do some of the tasks identified in the recent planning effort while RECOVER works on the MAP update.

The CISRERP X effort kicks off on May 8th and a series of pre-recorded videos will be provided at that meeting. Virtual meeting will be livestreamed and additional information is available at: [Independent Scientific Review of Everglades Restoration Progress X | National Academies](#)

9. Florida's Coral Reef Coordination Team (FCRCT) Update

Wes Brooks provided an update on the FCRCT noting that two meetings have been held to date. At the second meeting they had a robust discussion on water quality monitoring and started to compile a database of all the monitoring efforts currently underway that provides information about water quality on the reef. A group is pulling this information together to begin drafting a unified water quality framework. What they currently have is a very piecemeal system of data coming in that is collected in different ways, sometime looking at different parameters. This makes it hard to make some of the decisions that are needed. He clarified this team is not setting water quality standards but putting together a water quality framework. He invited everyone to the next virtual team meeting scheduled for June 28th.

Jed Redwine suggested the team could identify the specific attributes that are of the greatest concern as a first step.

Public Comment

Mike Elfenbein (Cypress Chapter Izaak Walton) recognizing the scale of the invasive species issue and the deficiency in resources, asked how there is no conversation and objection to currently proposed and already existing wilderness designations. There is currently a fire in Big Cypress National Preserve (BCNP) that started overnight. The crews in BCNP are limited in their ability to address that fire because there is limited access because the secondary trails are gone. Sportsmen such as himself continue to continue to offer their knowledge and equipment to address these issues. They are falling short on the invasive species challenge. As a member of the public seeing LOSOM delayed because of a biological opinion seems odd. The State Legislature passed HB 1305 with an amendment which directs the State of Florida to assume control of Loop Road including that portion that is owned by the Park Service in NE Monroe County. This could cause some challenges to accomplish some of the water conveyance for WERP.

Rhonda Rolff (resident) said that water quality like sea level rise is a moving target. As the climate warms and the oceans and coastal waters warm, the proliferation of harmful algal blooms increases. She asked what role the WG and SCG or the National Academy play in monitoring state and regional level activities that might interfere with the work of the C&SF. For example, Turkey Point Nuclear Power Plant is looking for a license extension and they know that they are contaminating the bay and inland waters. Sea level rise will swallow up the cooling canals and she asked whether this group is monitoring those types of things. She finds it unconscionable when they are facing algal blooms on both coasts to hold up any type of reduction in nutrients until impacts are studied.

Nyla Pipes (One Florida Foundation) on the IDS, she thanked the Corps for continuing to push forward on completion of all the projects within the Indian River Lagoon South. On the northern storage, they need both the Lake Okeechobee Watershed Restoration Project (LOWRP) and the new reservoir. She is cautiously optimistic they are going to get this right.

Joe Frank (landowner/resident) said he is hopeful all the federal and state agencies will continue working together to address the water quality issues and the water is clean enough for everyone's sake.

Next Steps and Closing Comments

James Erskine thanked everyone for participating. Lawrence Glenn added that although they all have different mandates and the group is diverse, they are all working toward the same goal. It is important for the Task Force to hear that RECOVER is challenged for resources. Adam Gelber reminded everyone o the Task Force meet on June 1st over in Southwest Florida

Meeting adjourned at 4:02PM

Note: This is a summary of the major highlights for the May 2nd 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:

1. Agenda
2. Membership Rosters
3. Draft meeting summary, March 2023
4. OERI's Implementing WRDA 2020 Update
5. USACE Program and Project Update
6. SFWMD Program and Project Update
7. RECOVER Update
8. Florida's Coral Reef Coordination Team (FCRCT) Update
9. National Research Council (NRC) Update