

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

HYBRID IN PERSON SFWMD HQ and ZOOM, Sep 1, 2022

Full video recording of the meeting is available at: [September 1, 2022 — Everglades Restoration Initiatives](#)

1. Welcome and Introductions

James Erskine called the meeting to order at 9:30 a.m. and provided some administrative announcements. He thanked everyone for attending and reminded everyone the meeting was being recorded and webcast live at www.Evergladesrestoration.gov. He welcomed Lawrence Glenn and Angie Dunn who are now the Chair and Vice Chair of the SCG after having served in an interim capacity. James Erskine recognized Sandy Soto, Office of Everglades Restoration Initiatives (OERI), for the administrative announcements related to the Zoom platform.

2. Whip-around

Members were asked to provide brief introductory remarks. Following the whip-around, James Erskine noted the large number of comments received about the agenda density and meeting structure. Nick Aumen agreed with the concerns of having packed agendas with many important topics. He emphasized the importance of keeping the scientists and managers together as much as possible. He would rather see two-day meetings. Lawrence Glenn said it is important for the SCG to meet separately given that everything is science based. Angie Dunn agreed it is important for each group to meet separately to focus on what needs to get done and then come together as a larger group. While a two-day option might be difficult for some, it could be an option. James Erskine said he would work with OERI since this will require a lot of support and they will follow-up on this item. Members were invited to attend Everglades National Park's 75th Anniversary celebration on Dec. 3, 2022.

Working Group (WG) Members

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	-
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	√
Leonard Rawlings – Bureau of Indian Affairs	-

Alternate

Jennifer Reynolds – South Florida Water Management District	√	
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 – Seminole Tribe of Florida	-	Patty Power
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	√	
Stacy Myers – Seminole Tribe of Florida	-	
Mark Rains – Florida Department of Environmental Protection	√	
Stephanie Romañach – United States Geological Survey	√	
Dan Scheidt – U.S. Environmental Protection Agency	-	
Erik Stabenau – National Park Service, South Florida Natural Resources Center	√	
Jason Strenth – U.S. Department of Agriculture – NRCS	-	
Vacant – FL Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services	-	
Vacant – U.S. Department of Agriculture – ARS	-	

3. Approval of Meeting Summary

The summary from the July 2022 meeting was presented. Nick Aumen made a motion to approve, Lawrence Glenn seconded the motion. No one opposed and the meeting summary was approved.

4. Office of Everglades Restoration Initiatives (OERI) Update

Adam Gelber provided an update on the Task Force’s reporting requirements. The funding information for the FY 2022 Cross Cut Budget has been received and the completed document has been posted on the web: [Funding Reports — Everglades Restoration Initiatives](#) . The final draft of the Biennial Report will be distributed to the WG and SCG for acceptance via e-mail and then provided to the Task Force for approval. The Biennial Report, once cleared by OMB and DOI, will be transmitted to the Congress and posted on the web. The Integrated Financial Plan has been completed and is posted on the web: [Task Force Reports — Everglades Restoration Initiatives](#) . The next Task Force meeting is scheduled for October 19th in the Stewart Lee Udall Department of the Interior Building in Washington, DC.

5. Lake Okeechobee Watershed Restoration Project (LOWRP) – Aquifer Storage and Recover (ASR) Update

Elizabeth Caneja (SFWMD) provided an overview of the LOWRP revised recommended plan (Alt ASR) which includes 55 ASR wells, and approximately 5,900 acres of wetland restoration in the Paradise Run and Kissimmee River Center areas. By increasing water storage capacity within the watershed, the LOWRP Revised Recommended Plan will improve the amount of time Lake Okeechobee is within the ecologically preferred stage envelope, benefitting native vegetation and wildlife. The project objectives include:

- increasing water storage capacity in the watershed north of Lake Okeechobee resulting in improved Lake Okeechobee water levels;
- improving the quantity, timing, and distribution of water to the Northern Estuaries
- restoring wetlands within the project area; and
- improving water supply for existing legal users.

The Florida Legislature appropriated \$150 million to the SFWMD for LOWRP in 2019-2021 under State Appropriation 1642A. During the 2021 legislative session, the Florida Legislature also passed Senate Bill 2516 to further support the implementation of LOWRP and Senate Bill 2516. Implementation of LOWRP ASR wells will proceed in a phased approach and will address the 26 uncertainties identified by the National Research Council (NRC). Near term next steps were reviewed and noted that they may not make it into WRDA 2022 but will in WRDA 2024.

Anna Wachnika reviewed the studies that will be conducted to address the uncertainties identified by the NRC in their 2015 report. The 2022 ASR Well Science Plan will support a phased, science-based implementation of ASR wells as part of LOWRP. The Science Plan reflects the latest science and best available information on the use of ASR wells in Everglades projects. The draft report will be released for 30-day public review on September 24th and published by December 20, 2022. An independent panel of scientists was assembled to review the phased approach of ASR construction and review the progress of scientific investigations. The Peer-Review Panel (PRP) published a final report of recommended future tasks and stated that it is pleased with the progress made on the completion of various portions of the Science Plan. The PRP will convene annually throughout the implementation of the ASR program to review the progress of the scientific investigations contained in the ASR Science Plan. An in-depth review of the work being conducted for the ASR ecological risk assessment was provided.

Robert Verrastro highlighted the fact that the performance of an ASR system is dependent on the local hydrogeologic parameters of what the attributes of the aquifer and the subsurface conditions are like. They are drilling a series of large diameter test wells down to about 1,000 feet to pump ~ 3,500 gallons a minute per well to figure out if they can vertically stack storage zones. In addition, they will be looking at confinement, leakage? Leakage?, pumping pressures, and fracture potential. This information will be integrated into the local scale groundwater model where they will be able to predict how many wells can be completed, where they can be completed, and how large each wellfield can be. They will then use this information to build a local scale groundwater model using the models developed during the ASR Regional Study. First batch of wells will be completed by the end of this year. Florida Gulf Coast University, Mineralogy, Inc and two USGS offices in Davie and St. Pete are also conducting studies for them. Reports for LOWRP can be found at www.sfwmd.gov/lowrp or www.sfwmd.gov/asr Hydrologic, meteorologic, hydrogeologic and water quality data can be found at:

[DBHYDRO \(Environmental Data\) | South Florida Water Management District \(sfwmd.gov\)](#) or the new DataOne database: [Cerp-sfwmd.dataone.org/data](#). The extended demonstration for one of the clusters may be at the C-38 South site where the first set of test wells will be complete.

John Maehl noted that as project has evolved from its inception in the Yellow Book, it may be challenged to meet its objectives for water storage, he asked whether it would be appropriate for this group to suggest to the TF that some agency needs to be assigned to start looking at ways to augment this if it isn't going to meet those storage objectives.

Mark Rains said that one of the goals is to give us enhanced storage, 308,000 ac feet. He asked that in addition to how much is stored, how quickly can that water be brought out during recovery and into the lake. Hoping to operate the wells at 5 MGD so the recovery would be somewhere similar along those lines if the water is available. Not sure how many inches it would take off the lake and the amount of time it would take, he would have to do the math to figure it out.

Jennifer Reynolds added that the SFWMD's water managers will manage the ASR sites the same way they manage the reservoirs and other water storage features across the system.

Mark Rains noted, with regards to arsenic and buffer zone, that there is a finite amount of arsenic down there and when you go through the early cycles of storage and recovery that arsenic is being mobilized – if you stay within your bubble, after a while there is no more problem. The problem is that we don't go to ASR until we are in a shortage condition. He appreciates Bob's presentation stating that they will maintain that buffer zone which will be crucial when operating the system. Erik Stabenau said it is great to see the level of study that is going on with the chemistry and ecology being considered at the outset of the project.

Roland Ottolini asked about the thought process in the clustering. Robert Verrastro explained they started the clustering along the C-38 canal which is the main artery of water coming into Lake Okeechobee. The C-38 South site is across from the Kissimmee ASR Pilot Project which is essentially a laboratory of information on the performance of ASR. They never really know how many wells they will be able to do at any one cluster until they drill the well, pump the well and do the analysis of how many wells can be within a wellfield. They are hopeful that at those first two clusters they will be able to construct up to 10 wells in each of those clusters, then that would be 20 of the 55 planned ASR wells. The number of 55 ASR wells is just a number based on the assumption of 5 million gallons a day per well. If they get more water into any of the wells, they will certainly reduce the overall number of ASR wells.

6. Florida's Coral Reef Coordination Team (FCRCT) Charter

Wes Brooks reviewed the suggested revisions to the team charter which included more direct language from the Task Force Strategic Goal Objective 2A2 as justification for the team in the background section and additional representation from NOAA. FCRCT will now consist of 10 voting and 10 non-voting members. He also reviewed the three other suggestions that were not adopted by the team. The sub agency designations such as with EPA and NPS are not locked in stone and according to 5C in the charter, the agency could choose whoever they want. Deb Drum made a motion to approve the charter which was seconded by Jen Reynolds. The charter was unanimously approved.

7. WRDA 2020 – Invasive Species Risk Assessment Prioritization and Management

Adam Gelber noted the importance of this effort. The WRDA 2020 amended the duties of the Task Force to include invasive species and build on the Strategic Action Framework effort which was updated

in 2020. Several meetings of the group have already taken place and an update on their progress will be provided.

Carrie Beeler reminded everyone that at its May 3, 2022, meeting, the Task Force directed the WG, SCG, and the OERI to implement the direction in the WRDA 2020. They have begun to work on Part 1 which directs them to develop and update, as appropriate, a priority list of invasive species that: reflects an assessment of ecological risk that the listed invasive species represent; includes populations of invasive plants and animals that: (a) are significantly impacting the structure and function of ecological communities, native species, or habitat within the South Florida Ecosystem; or (b) demonstrates a strong potential to reduce, obscure, or otherwise alter key indicators used to measure Everglades restoration progress. The OERI has convened a group of experts to identify existing priority lists as well as the tool development. Each of the existing priority species lists represents a different scale, purpose, and different taxa. Some of the lists were developed through best professional judgement, some through a quantitative methodology, and some were legislative. The group decided the list will be split by taxa because of the different expertise and funding streams and discussed the process for selection and ranking of TF priority species. The group will develop the priority list of species using the following criteria:

- Assessment of ecological risk must be high or moderate,
- Include prevention and early detection and rapid response species, and
- Species list should be small and manageable.

The group will continue to meet regularly and bring products to the WG and SCG at future meetings.

Public Comment

Newton Cook (stakeholder) noted that twenty years ago, in the early days of restoration, a major goal was to save Everglades National Park (ENP) which was in danger and today it is a great success story. He questioned why they are putting together a program such as the Lake Okeechobee System Operating Manual that will purposefully do damage to the ecology of Lake Okeechobee, the heart of the Everglades. The Western Everglades Restoration Program (WERP) calls for bulldozing 500-year-old Cypress trees to build a Stormwater Treatment Area (STA). He questioned why they would be destroying pristine marshes to build STAs. The STAs have a great duck hunting program and he was out there recently. When they started putting that lake water in the STAs 5 – 6 years ago, the STAs did exactly what they said they would – they went to cattails. It was all political. They went from 18ppb to 28ppb and right now they are pushing 50 ppb in all except STA3/4. STAs were built to take Everglades Agricultural Area (EAA) farm water. Million-dollar mistakes and yet they have been fortunate to save the park.

Mike Elfenbein (stakeholder) agreed with Wes Brooks' comments about frustration with bureaucracy. As a stakeholder, he struggles with that daily. If the members around the table get frustrated, imagine how it feels like for a guy such as himself or Newton. Pedro Ramos mentioned the improvement in the super colonies over the last 3 years in the Everglades but 98% of the mammals are still missing in the Everglades and that phenomena continues to expand throughout Big Cypress National Preserve. In the previous scientific call for area 3A which he participated in there was mention that there was a bad patch this year for wading birds. We may have a couple of good years, but he doesn't think the trend suggests they are going in the right direction. A lot of the people from the public don't distinguish one federal agency from another, currently the NPS is in the 9th year of trying to implement a back country access plan. You have a deficiency in trust between you guys in the agency and the stakeholders you are intended to serve. It has taken 17 years to build a hotel that was destroyed in a hurricane and 9 years to

complete a document, put a signature on it, and give the public access to lands you are purportedly working to save that continues to degrade with invasive exotic species like Melaleuca, Brazilian pepper, pythons, and tegus. It is my understanding that we moved through with the C-44 Reservoir that is currently having trouble holding water. He thanked everyone for their hard work and dedication.

8. USACE Program and Project Update

Eva Velez announced that the Jacksonville District awarded the construction contract for the EAA Reservoir the prior evening. They have a healthy FY22 budget with an annual appropriation of \$352.5 million for construction. The FY23 President's Budget was historic for the Everglades program with \$407 million for construction. The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL 2022) which is the same thing as the Infrastructure Investments and Jobs Act (IIJA 2022) has \$1.097 billion allocated for construction. In FY22, they received \$500,000 to start the C&SF Resilience Study, a separate study not part of South Florida Ecosystem Restoration program. The study will determine how the most urgent areas of the C&SF system can be made more resilient to climate change and sea level rise. Program level activities include updating Integrated Delivery Schedule (IDS), working on the FY23 RECOVER workplan to support projects and the second Periodic Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) Update. The periodic update is intended to provide a basis for evaluating whether the goals and purposes of CERP are being achieved, to ensure that new information is regularly considered and incorporated, and to update the total quantity of water expected to be generated by the implementation of CERP, including the quantity generated for the environment and the quantity generated for water supply. This is a technical evaluation of the work accomplished in the overall CERP program. They did not have the Regional Simulation Model tool when they did the last update in 2005 as they were still using the SFWMM model.

Four planning studies [Biscayne Bay and Southeastern Everglades Ecosystem Restoration (BSEER), Indian River Lagoon – South (IRL-S), Lake Okeechobee Watershed Restoration Project (LOWRP), and Western Everglades Restoration Project (WERP)] were reviewed. The WERP alternative Hr milestone was completed in August 2022. There are several components in four distinct regions within the study area. They held a series of meetings with the landowners by region over the last several months. The last meeting was with the landowners centered around the Wingate Mill STA. There is a lot of concern by the landowners and stakeholders, and they are trying to come up with options to address those concerns. They will need more time to release the Draft PIR/EIS due to the review of the Wingate Mill STA.

The USACE currently has ~\$500 million in active construction with the potential of going up to \$3 billion in the next several years. An in-depth review was provided on those projects under Design and Construction [C-111 South Dade, Picayune Strand Restoration, IRL-S, Biscayne Bay Coastal Wetlands (BBCW), Central Everglades Planning Project (CEPP), Broward County Water Preserve Areas (WPAs), and the Loxahatchee River Watershed Restoration Project(LRWRP)]. Four projects in operations [Kissimmee River Restoration, –IRL-S, Lake Okeechobee System Operating Manual (LOSOM), and Combined Operations Plan (COP)] were also reviewed.

9. SFWMD Program and Project Update

Mindy Parrott reminded everyone that the SFWMD does a lot of other work related to restoration, but the focus of her presentation was on the SFWMD's South Florida Ecosystem Restoration and Restoration Strategies projects. She highlighted the IRL-S C-44 Reservoir and STA which is in the operational testing and monitoring phase. Turnover of the C-44 Reservoir to the SFWMD is expected in November 2023. The construction contract award is expected in October 2022 for the IRL-S C-23 to C-44 Interconnect.

The SFWMD has acquired the real estate for the IRL-S C-25 Reservoir and STA and the amendment of the PPA is pending WRDA 2022. Status updates were also provided on the C-43 West Basin Storage Reservoir, the Caloosahatchee Reservoir Water Quality Component (not a CERP project), CEPP EAA: A-2 Reservoir and STA, CEPP North, 8.5 SMA Limited Curtain Wall, BBCW Phase 1 Cutler Wetlands, and LRWRP. She also reviewed the Restoration Strategies program noting that they are on track to meet their goals. They have completed 8 out of the 13 projects. Two projects are construction complete but in the startup mode and three projects that remain in construction.

10. Integrated Delivery Schedule (IDS)

Tabitha Elkington (USACE) reminded everyone that the IDS is a roadmap that integrates the state and federal work for the Everglades restoration program. It is developed and reviewed each year through an extensive public process with participation of the Task Force and its Working Group. Projects and planning timelines are organized so that the beginning of one element coincides with the progress or completion of others. The IDS is in the form of a large double-sided 11x17 placemat that includes the 68 CERP components from the Yellow Book which are in different stages of implementation. An in-depth review was provided of what is currently included in the 2021 IDS. The USACE and SFWMD are currently doing a line-by-line review of each of those projects that are shown on the front page. They will update the top line with the latest budget information. They are currently developing the 2022 IDS and the working draft will be presented at the October Task Force meeting in Washington, DC. The final 2022 IDS will be released in November 2022.

11. Western Everglades Restoration Plan (WERP) Update

Steve Baisden reviewed the tentatively selected plan (TSP), Alternative Hr: hybrid revised, which includes a blend of features assembled from the final array of alternatives, as well as changes based on updated modeling information, Tribal coordination, and stakeholder engagement. The goals of WERP are to improve the quantity, quality, timing, and distribution of water in the western Everglades to re-establish ecological connectivity, reduce the severity and frequency of wildfires, and restore low nutrient conditions. The WERP is a component of the CERP, which was authorized under the WRDA 2000. The area is approximately 1,200 square miles and includes the Miccosukee Tribe's Alligator Alley Reservation as well as the Seminole Tribe's Big Cypress Reservation within the footprint. There are a lot of concerns about the location of the Wingate Mill STA and the USACE is currently considering potential courses of action. The USACE has a preliminary real estate analysis based on the current TSP and is pursuing the minimum real estate necessary to implement the project. The Seminole Tribe, Miccosukee Tribe and the WERP PDT have incorporated the Indigenous Traditional Ecological Knowledge (ITEK) into the plan formulation. The draft Report will be released for review and comment later than originally planned. The final PIR is scheduled for September 2023 and the Chief's Report in December 2023 and inclusion in WRDA 2024.

Pedro Ramos said it has been almost 10 years since the Seminole Tribe brought this topic before the Task Force. They also heard concerns from the Miccosukee Tribe because of what was happening at the bottom of the L-28 and the inability of Tribal members to use that area because it was becoming too dense. The Task Force held a series of workshops that eventually turned into the project they are working on now. The Congress directed the National Park Service (NPS) to write a report, which they completed in 2016. He emphasized the importance of this project to NPS assets down in south Florida, specifically BCNP and ENP. The chairmen of both Tribes have sent letters on the importance of this project. It is good that they are listening to the concerns, however, the project must continue to move forward. It is key that they take advantage of the ITEK that the Seminole and Miccosukee Tribes can bring to the table and hope they find a way to include that knowledge as they move forward.

Patty Power added that this project is composed of two Yellow Book components that were included at the behest of the Seminole and Miccosukee Tribes. This need was identified a long time ago. This area wasn't included in the Yellow Book analysis done in the 1990s, so they don't have a lot of the data that they have with other CERP projects and that contributes to the complications. The purpose of the STA is to ensure that the water that flows south from it is clean enough to flow into the native area on the Big Cypress reservation. This is an area that has not been impacted by other flows because of the canal system built around it. It is incredibly important to the Seminole Tribe that water that enters that area is clean enough that it won't cause more problems than having the area dry out. Pedro said it was the SFWMD that came through with funding to answer some of those questions and advance the project.

12. Lake Okeechobee System Operating Manual (LOSOM)

Tim Gysan provided an overview of the LOSOM process noting that it has been a collaborative process from the beginning involving all the stakeholders as they developed alternatives, evaluated, and compared alternatives and selected operational alternatives. He reviewed a snapshot of benefits for LOSOM based on 12 selected performance metrics out of a 144 metrics that they evaluated in the Environmental Impact Statement. They are showing improvement throughout except for the lake ecology. There is no perfect plan that can get benefits for every part of the system and there were trade-offs that were analyzed and discussed with all the stakeholders throughout the process. The preferred alternative will provide good performance for the estuaries, improved performance for water supply for all users, reduction in risk for harmful algal blooms, and improvement in the ability to send water south to the Everglades. The intent of the Water Control Plan is to use the water we have in the system for beneficial purposes whether that means holding back releases when it is not wanted or to make releases when the water is desired. They will utilize all the available information to make informed decisions. That process is currently accomplished through the periodic scientist calls and seasonal check-ins where they can look at the data and projections and make decisions on how the lake should be managed moving forward. An in-depth review of the LOSOM regulation schedule and the additional water management tools, should they be needed, was provided. The draft National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) document is currently out for public comment which ends on September 12, 2022. The final NEPA document is expected in February 2023 and approval of the Water Control Plan is planned for April 2023.

13. REStoration COordination and VERification (RECOVER) – Southwest Florida Module

Rodrigo Sedeno provided a brief background on Everglades restoration, the origins of RECOVER which was set up to evaluate, assess and plan CERP projects and provided an overview of the science of Everglades restoration. Because the CERP footprint covers a vast area, it is subdivided into geographical regions (Lake Okeechobee, Northern Estuaries, Greater Everglades, and Southern Coastal Systems) that provide a system for organizing similar landscapes for identification of threats and restoration options. The modules also form the basis for RECOVER evaluation and assessment activities. This past fiscal year, RECOVER has expanded its module framework to include Southwest Florida which covers the majority of the Big Cypress Basin and Southwest Florida Coast. The greater Big Cypress Basin is an area of forested wetlands with a diverse mosaic of pine flatwoods, tropical hammocks, and herbaceous wet prairie. There is also an extensive area in residential land use and in agriculture. Throughout the history of Everglades restoration, the southwest region has been overlooked, and at times misunderstood. Over the years, the landscape has experienced severe alteration of fire regimes coupled with lowered water levels and shorter hydroperiods. In some extreme years, the entire landscape has gone bone dry with the water table falling way below ground. Experiencing these conditions year after year causes shifts towards drier communities resulting in habitat loss and more intense fires. Additionally, the water

infrastructure that drains these lands have different chemistry with particularly high concentrations of nutrients compared to the natural waterways throughout the landscape. All of this has facilitated exotic plants and animals to colonize these disturbed areas leading towards dominance of these species and accelerating the negative shift of the function and composition of the system. Given all these challenges, they have identified the need for restoration. With WERP in the planning phase and the Picayune Strand Restoration project in the construction phase along with other non CERP restoration projects online in Collier County, south Lee County, Corkscrew, and Lake Trafford, RECOVER is ready to include the South West Florida module in its efforts to evaluate and assess restoration projects. The module is in its early stage and in the process of identifying key indicators for the greater Big Cypress Basin and updating our guiding documents.

14. National Research Council (NRC) Report

Bob Johnson reminded everyone that the National Academy of Sciences has been involved in external peer review on Everglades restoration efforts since 1999. The first committee was set up under the Task Force and ran for five years until 2004. The current Committee on Independent Scientific Review of Everglades Restoration Progress (CISRERP) has produced eight biennial reviews. CISRERP continues its focus on science support for CERP as we transition from planning to implementation and operational testing. The Committee met eleven times during this cycle and all their meetings were recorded and available online. An in-depth review of what was covered at each of the meetings was provided. The Ninth Biennial Review will be delivered to the sponsoring agencies for review and fact checking in late November 2022. CISRERP report will be available to the public the first week of December. CISRERP's ZOOM meetings and presentations are available at:

[Independent Scientific Review of Everglades Restoration Progress IX | National Academies](#)

Gina Ralph added that CISRERP's interest is on how science is organized and communicated across agencies and the restoration community. At the next joint meeting, RECOVER will share a graphic on how they see the coordination and communication occurring among agencies and where they think there could be improvement.

Public Comment

Nyla Pipes (One Florida Foundation) said that money plus speed equals mistakes. She cautioned them against making mistakes as they go faster than they have ever gone. She knows they are still trying to figure out what to do with the indigenous burial grounds, but she asked for an update on the EAA Reservoir. Glad to hear that on WERP, they are stepping back from the STA. As for LOWRP, it is frustrating to be stuck in a situation where they know the benefits of that project but not have it move forward at the federal level at the same speed as some of these other projects. She asked that they expedite the Chief's Report. In LOSOM, they have created a plan that puts the lake last. She likes the idea of a recovery period but the lake doesn't recover that quickly. LOSOM has problems with being too high for too long and potentially too low, both of which are ecologically bad for Lake Okeechobee. A lake that is not doing well ecologically is bad for everyone downstream. Yet again, they have prioritized everything but Lake Okeechobee. In LOSOM, Loxahatchee will also be negatively impacted. It wasn't modeled in the LOSOM process because they didn't think that anything was going to happen to Loxahatchee. They are looking at a drier Loxahatchee for an extended period. A lot of people are not currently on board with what is being proposed in LOSOM.

Newton Cook (United Water Fowlers of Florida) thanked the Corps for listening to the stakeholders in deciding that the STA was going to destroy a Cypress swamp. Recreation is a part of every CERP project

and if the recreation component is not done then everyone will hear from him. LOSOM is not good for Lake Okeechobee. At 15 ½ feet, the vegetation in the lake starts dying and if it stays that way for several months, it kills the vegetation permanently. Hurricane Irma destroyed 85% of the submerged aquatic vegetation and it takes about 5 years to get it back. South of the lake, they don't have anymore ridges and tree islands because they keep the water too high in WCA-3.

Mike Efenbein (Cypress Chapter of Izaak Walton League of America) provided his public comments via ZOOM. He said that he has had the opportunity to enjoy a lot of these places for a long time and he has shared that with his children. When he hears the justification for why WERP exists, to control wildfires because of too little water in the Big Cypress, he can't help but stress to everyone that if that was the ultimate concern, it could have been resolved at any point in the last 48 years. The NPS has failed to meet its management goals and objectives in the maintenance and management of this natural resource. The proposed two inches of water that they want to put on there is not going to make a difference. While he supports WERP, the Tribes, and supports the drainage WERP will provide, he can't help but wonder if some of the things they are claiming to be working on, aren't going to be achieved in the end.

Heather Cleckler (private landowner of Wingate Mill Ranch) provided her comments via ZOOM. She thanked Eva Velez and Steve Baisden for listening to her and her neighbors' concerns over this STA. She is a fourth-generation cattle rancher, and her family has been on this ranch for over 100 years. The thought of having her ranch taken from her for this has sickened her. She agreed with the earlier comment that money plus speed equals mistakes. It is important that in addition to listening to this group and the Tribes, that they also listen to the landowners. She had no idea about this project that has been in the works for 10 years. She would have told them that they wouldn't get enough rain there. She knows this land like the back of her hand. She implored them, that from now on, any decisions they make about private landowners' lands, that they get contact the landowners immediately.

Jeff Dixon (resident) provided his comments via ZOOM. They have 100 years of precedent that tells them that they cannot trust the Corps who have spent billions of dollars of taxpayer dollars to fix things their predecessors screwed up. They have a plethora of the world's most experienced glades men who agree that they do not need more water in their area of the Everglades and they do not need someone else's polluted water in a pristine ecosystem. Once they bulldoze the old growth forest they will be killing native animals like the black bear, panthers, gopher tortoises and many others. He asked that they leave their Everglades alone.

Daniel Watson (resident) provided his comments via ZOOM. Noted these folks spend countless hours in this area where WERP is proposed, they can be a valuable resource that can help. Big Cypress is not running drier every year and there have been frequent high-water events which is reflected in the deer counts. It is a barren wasteland due to high water. Big Cypress has never had sheet flow like the central Everglades. They will be destroying that habitat that is home to the endangered panther, bear and 500-year-old cypress trees for the STA. The scientists have lost credibility with the public in saying that they want to restore the Everglades while bulldozing 4,000 acres. Imminent domain does not sit well with him. He asked that they listen to the stakeholders adding that the decisions made here will last long after they are all gone.

Tom Van Note (resident) provided his comments via ZOOM said that he spent his teenage years in the Everglades but didn't get involved in conservation until late in life. As a delegate to the Everglades Coordinating Council, it is very encouraging to see the decades of work that has gone in to restoring the

Everglades. When talking about WERP, they need to take a hard stop, specifically with the Wingate Mill STA. He hoped they take these comments to heart. He thanked Eva and Steve for listening and or those who have spoken up.

Ron Bergeron (private property owner) provided his comments via ZOOM. He thanked the Corps, SFWMD and the WG for their hard work. As a private property owner, he has spent his entire life trying to save the Everglades. The Big Cypress Preserve, from what he has seen over the last 75 years, is primarily a rain driven system, so they need to be careful as they move forward with WERP. Everglades restoration is extremely important to the 9 million residents. The siting of the Wingate Mill STA in this majestic swamp with 500-year-old cypress trees and thousands of cypress trees that are 300-years old, is one on the most pristine environments in the global Everglades. They have always built these STAs in an altered environment and this would be the first time he has seen a STA put in a pristine environment. He looked forward to continuing working with this group.

Meredith Budd (Florida Wildlife Federation) provided her comments via ZOOM. The FWF represents over 100,000 members and supporters across the state. She expressed concern over the siting of the Wingate Mill STA. That area is critically important for wildlife, it is ecologically significant, recognized as a wildlife corridor, and documented panther use. While they are looking for hydrologic restoration, it must not be to the detriment of the Kissimmee Billie Strand Swamp, an ecologically significant area. The FWF recommends the Corps find an alternate location for the STA. As they continue with WERP, they urge the agencies to conduct comprehensive water quality analyses to address potential downstream impacts. They should also look at hydroperiods, water depths, and flow rates. The FWF looks forward to continue working with the Corps and the other agencies.

Next Steps and Closing Comments

James Erskine reminded everyone that:

- The Task Force will meet on October 19th in Wash., DC
- We are sponsoring an IDS workshop on November 18th
- The chairs will work with the OERI regarding meeting structure, agenda topics and density

James along with the co-chairs thanked the members, presenters, and the public for attending as well as the OERI staff. Meeting was adjourned.

Note: This is a summary of the major highlights for the September 1st 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/Presentations

1. Agenda
2. Membership Rosters
3. Meeting Summary, July 2022
4. OERI Update
5. Florida's Coral Reef Coordination Team Charter
 - a. Presentation
 - b. Draft Charter

6. Lake Okeechobee Watershed Restoration Project – Aquifer Storage and Recovery
 - a. Presentation
 - b. Placemat
7. WRDA 2020 – Invasive Species Risk Assessment Prioritization and Management
8. USACE Program and Project Update
9. SFWMD Program and Project Update
10. Integrated Delivery Schedule
 - a. Presentation
 - b. 2021 IDS Placemat
11. Western Everglades Restoration Plan (WERP) Update
12. Lake Okeechobee System Operating Manual (LOSOM)
13. Restoration Coordination and Verification (RECOVER) – Southwest Florida Module
14. National Research Council (NRC) CISRERP Report