

DRAFT Minutes  
 Joint Working Group (WG)/SCG Meeting  
 West Palm Beach, FL 33406  
 September 23, 2015

**Welcome and Introductions**

Ernie Marks called the meeting to order at 10:00 AM. The agenda (Encl. 1a) and draft minutes (Encl. 1b) from the April 2015 meeting were provided. Minutes were approved as presented without objection. Ernie recognized Gintautas Zavadzkas and Leonard Rawlings new Working Group members representing the Miccosukee Tribe and Bureau of Indian Affairs, respectively. Shannon Estenoz noted Barry Rosen’s absence due to Yom Kippur and reminded everyone of the Nov 19<sup>th</sup> Task Force meeting. Nick Aumen announced the next USGS/ FAU Workshop is scheduled on Oct 20-21<sup>st</sup> at FAU’s Boca Campus and will focus on developing an invasive species screening tool. Shannon added the objective will be to develop a screening tool that will allow for a low burden of proof in order to address and remove invasive species. She asked the members to send their experts to this workshop. Nick also reminded everyone of the upcoming National Conference on Ecosystem Restoration (NCER) on April 18-22, 2016 at the Coral Springs Marriott. The SOFIA website is being reviewed and members were asked to provide their comments and suggestions to Fred Sklar. Susan Gray reported the SFWMD has been working with their partner agencies with regards to the conditions in Florida Bay. Brian Carlstrom noted the General Management Plan for Biscayne National park is now complete and implementation will begin. He also announced that he this would be his last meeting, he will be assuming his new duties as the Deputy Associate Director, Budget and Policy, Natural Resource Stewardship and Science at Interior in Washington, DC. Members were asked to introduce themselves and provide brief opening remarks.

**In Attendance:**

Sep 23

**Working Group (WG) Members**

Alternates

Ernie Marks – Chair – Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation	√	
Barry Rosen – Vice Chair - United States Geological Survey	-	
Brian Carlstrom – Biscayne National Park	√	
Billy Causey – NOAA, FL Keys Nat’l Marine Sanctuary	-	
Deb Drum – Martin County	√	
Veronica Harrell-James – U.S. Attorney’s Office	√	
Lee Hefty – Miami Dade County	√	
Eric Hughes – U.S. Environmental Protection Agency	√	
COL Jason A. Kirk - U.S. Army Corps of Engineers	-	Kim Taplin
Cherise Maples – Seminole Tribe of Florida	√	
Russell Morgan - U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, NRCS	-	
Fred Noble - FL Dept. of Transportation	-	
Roland Ottolini – Lee County Division of Natural Resources	√	
Bonnie Ponwith – NOAA, National Marine Fisheries Service	-	
Pedro Ramos – NPS, ENP & Dry Tortugas National Parks	√	
Leonard Rawlings - Bureau of Indian Affairs	√	
Robert Robbins – Palm Beach County	-	
W. Ray Scott - FL Dept. of Agriculture and Consumer Services	√	
Edward Smith – Florida Department of Environmental Protection	√	
Tom Teets - South Florida Water Management District	√	
Larry Williams – U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	-	Bob Progulske

Gintas Zavadzkas - Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of FL	√
Vacant – Local Government	-
Vacant – U.S. Department of Transportation	-
Shannon Estenez – U.S. Department of the Interior	√
<b>Science Coordination Group (SCG) Members</b>	
Nick Aumen – Chair – United States Geological Survey	√
Susan Gray – Vice Chair - South Florida Water Management District	√
John Baldwin – Florida Atlantic University	-
Lisa Beever – Charlotte Harbor National Estuary Program	-
Joan Browder - NOAA, National Marine Fisheries Service	√
Amy Castaneda - Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of FL	-
James Evans – City of Sanibel Natural Resources Department	√
Chris Kelble - NOAA, AOML	-
Chad Kennedy - FL Dept. of Environmental Protection	√
Cherise Maples - Seminole Tribe of Florida	-
Gil McRae – Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Comm.	-
Bob Progulske – U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	√
Gina Ralph - U.S. Army Corps of Engineers	√
William Reck - U.S. Department of Agriculture – NRCS	-
Dave Rudnick – Everglades National Park, NPS	√
Dan Scheidt – U.S. Environmental Protection Agency	-
Bob Johnson – U.S. Department of the Interior, Special Advisor	√
Vacant – Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services	
Vacant – Local Government	

**Corps Program and Project Update**

Howie Gonzales provided a Power Point presentation (Encl. 2) providing an overview of the South Florida Ecosystem Restoration (SFER) program. A significant step for the Corps was the authorization of the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Program (CERP) back in 2000 which has paved the way for the last 15 years of progress. He reviewed several foundation projects to include the Kissimmee River Restoration which is 86% complete and Modified Water Deliveries to Everglades National Park which is 95% complete. He provided an in depth review of first generation CERP projects (IRL-S, C-44 Reservoir, Site 1 impoundment and Picayune Strand) and second generation projects (C-43 Reservoir, Broward County WPAs, Biscayne Bay Coastal Wetlands and C-111 Spreader Canal) which are currently in various phases of construction, planning and completion.

The Corps is also working on planning efforts to include CEPP (Central Everglades Planning Project) and the Loxahatchee River Watershed Restoration Project. On CEPP, the record of decision was signed on August 31, 2015. The Project Implementation Report and Chief’s Report were transmitted to Congress for authorization. Project elements have been identified for implementation in the Integrated Delivery Schedule (IDS). On the Loxahatchee River Watershed Restoration Project they are finalizing the SMART planning compliance waiver required to initiate the study as well as confirming the availability of FY16 funding to conduct the study. Howie reviewed the FY15 and FY16 program budget to include C&SF non CERP and CERP. The path forward includes completing foundation projects and first generation projects, beginning work on second generation projects, getting Task Force endorsement on the Integrated Delivery Schedule (IDS) and refining operations in the southern portion of the system. Strategic communication and engagements will continue. The South Florida Ecosystem Restoration

program has been identified as a MEGA project and requires that senior leadership be briefed quarterly and regional leadership monthly. This keeps the entire vertical team engaged in the program. The C-44 Groundbreaking will be held on Nov 20<sup>th</sup> following the Nov 19<sup>th</sup> Task Force meeting and the C-111 South Dade Contract 8 Groundbreaking will be held in January 2016 in conjunction with the Everglades Coalition Conference.

Shannon noted her concern with the timeline of Contract 8 since Contract 9 is expected to quickly follow. Howie said he did not expect there to be any impact to Contract 9 unless there is no support for the current contractor under consideration. Tom Teets commended Howie's presentation and reported all four units in the S-356 are on. Ernie Marks noted that FWC in conjunction with the National Park Service have been doing the survey work for Old Tamiami Trail for its future removal which they hope to start that in 2016.

### **Integrated Delivery Schedule (IDS)**

Kim Taplin provided a power point presentation (Encl. 3) noting the purpose is to develop a realistic schedule and sequencing plan for achieving restoration benefits as soon as possible consistent with state and federal authorizations and funding. The IDS is required as part of the CERP Programmatic Regulations. Regular updates to the IDS are done in consultation with the Task Force. The Working Group sponsored four workshops to engage stakeholders in updating the IDS. The IDS process began in January 2015 and the final IDS is expected in November 2015. It is important to remember this is a "living document" that will be continuously updated to reflect things such as funding changes.

Kim reviewed the Draft IDS which was used as the starting point with the foundation projects highlighted in blue and first generation projects highlighted in green. They held a series of workshops that allowed the public to prioritize projects and provide sequencing plans. As a result they were able to come up with five common themes based on that input. Theme 5 has been selected as the current draft IDS. Some benefits of IDS include: maximizing benefits to the system as early as possible by ensuring a constant stream of construction; ensuring additional projects will be equipped to continue restoration progress; and ensuring projects are completed in a timely fashion. The feedback received, which has been very positive, was reviewed. They have been asked to consider looking at storage regionally/holistically and consider the ability to move up projects that are deemed critical. If additional funding becomes available they will be able to move projects forward. Next steps include briefing the Task Force in November and begin using the IDS to guide their planning, design and construction sequencing.

Bob Johnson expressed concern with the next phase of Tamiami Trail and how they need to sequence that with construction components in the southern end of the system for the central Everglades. Groundbreaking for the next phase is scheduled in April 2016 and he asked they do some coordinating. Kim Taplin clarified the IDS projections assume a WRDA 2016 and right now central Everglades is not authorized and agreed there needs to be coordination. Shannon suggested they talk through the "triggering events" that officially cause them to go back to the IDS such as significant deviation in appropriations and possibly bring it up at the Task Force meeting. Chad Kennedy added the IDS has to be revisited every five years at a minimum and there is no constraint on doing it more frequently. Shannon clarified there should be an understanding that the IDS will be revisited, if for example, there is an influx of dollars or a Presidential/Legislative request. If CEPP is authorized the issues Bob Johnson raised have to be addressed in the IDS. She suggested they could do an IDS "check-in" once a year to make sure they are still on schedule.

Joan Browder asked they reconsider how BBCW Phase 2 is scheduled and noted her concern that planning will not start until 2020. Kim explained that in initiating new studies they now have to have a commitment that they will be successful in a three year time period or get a waiver all the way up the line for taking longer than the three years or if the project will cost more than \$3 million. They also have to

have a preliminary operating plan as part of the PIR and they need to get through the testing of the infrastructure that is currently out there. Ray Scott reminded everyone it is not simply about money but also about the organizational capacity such as staff resources to move things forward and it is important to be mindful of that in planning these projects. Tom Teets reported they are starting a south Dade initiative process as a management measure to identify those things that are small and can be done by the state independently.

### **Restoration Rally Cry for the Big Cypress Swamp**

Bob Sobczak provided a presentation (Encl. 4) on the Big Cypress reviewing the history of the water table in Big Cypress National Preserve from 1992 to the present noting that orange or red on the graph signifies moderate or extreme drought. Since 2007, \$60 million has been spent on wildfires yet from an investment standpoint \$0 has been spent on increasing the swamp's long term resilience. A Master Plan was developed for Big Cypress to address these concerns and make it more resilient with the cost estimated at \$25 million. He reviewed several projects included in the Master Plan to include shovel ready projects such as Tamiami Trail culverts and plugs and the Fakahatchee Flow Way.

Ernie Marks said FWC would like to help and offered to work closely with Big Cypress to address stakeholder concerns and ensure they have the correct messaging for this project. Nick Aumen expressed excitement that some projects have already been completed and asked about the hydrologic data that is being collected. Data that shows expanded hydro periods, depth and seasonal changes will help the cause. Bob expressed an interest in involving USGS. Pedro Ramos said the Big Cypress National Preserve is a remarkable place and it needs to be restored. He believes it is a no brainer to spend \$25 million to add value to not just Big Cypress but also the neighboring areas, estuaries and endangered species. Cherise Maples said the Seminole Tribe is grateful to all the efforts of the National Park Service. The Tribe has completed a few studies and sees the impacts. She asked how old the \$25 million figures were since they seemed very cheap and added she was encouraged to see the western Everglades on the IDS. Bob Sobczak replied the \$25 million were rough numbers and would become more precise during the formal planning process.

### **Public Comment**

Cara Capp (NPCA) said NPCA is very sad Brian Carlstrom is leaving but excited at his new opportunity. She reminded everyone of the Everglades Coalition scheduled for January 7 – 10, 2016. On the IDS schedule, NPCA has advocated for combining storage planning for both north and south of the lake. A recent UF study stated they need a million acre feet north and south of the lake combined. NPCA would like to see this move forward together rather than separately. NPCA did send in a letter to the Corps representing several groups throughout the Everglades community. The four IDS themes had EAA storage and planning in 2017 yet Theme 5 of the IDS showed this project would not begin until 2021. She hoped they would be able to start that process sooner since there is significant public support. She thanked them for the amount of feedback which was accepted during the IDS stakeholder process.

Joan Bausch (FNPS and MCFNPS) voiced her concern about the natural lands purchase which was in Theme 4 but not Theme 5 of the IDS. As part of a group that cares about wetlands they would like to see that happen sooner rather than later.

### **Developing a Coordinated Management Response to Invasive Tegus**

Christina Romagosa, faculty at the University of Florida in Gainesville provided a remote presentation (Encl. 5) from Gainesville, FL. In addition to the Argentine black and white tegu, the gold and red tegus have both been identified in Florida. The Argentine black and white tegu is native to Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay and northern Argentina. They are found in a wide range of habitats and climate such as tropical, subtropical and temperate which has implications for the populations here in the United States. They are very popular in the pet trade for their dog-like disposition. Christina reviewed the EDD Maps website

<https://www.eddmaps.org> which is a resource for sightings of any non-native animal in Florida. There are two established populations of the black and white tegus in Florida, one in St. Petersburg and the other in South Dade close to Everglades National Park. They are most concerned with the population that is currently breeding in Miami-Dade County. The Tegu is a habitat generalist and can attain high local densities. They have been known to live in trailer parks and natural habitats utilizing burrows that are self-made or the product of other animal efforts. She reviewed some of the efforts used since 2008 to detect and remove tegus.

A three-day workshop was held in August 2015 to develop a coordinated management response to invasive tegus. It was organized by the National Park Service (NPS) and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC). They used a structured decision-making (SDM) approach and participants included resource professionals from federal/state agencies and academic institutions. The fundamental objective identified by the group is to minimize ecological damage to valuable resources and maximize the probability of exclusion from the greater Everglades and ecologically important areas while minimizing cost. The group determined that by minimizing the density and distribution of tegus as well as drafting a tegu containment strategy they might be successful. She provided an in depth review of the Draft Tegu Containment Strategy as well as upcoming efforts for 2016.

Shannon added they now have a set of objectives and a plan for what they are trying to achieve for tegus. They are now assigning some rough dollar amounts to those goals. They are in a better position to start thinking about how to share the ‘dollar burden’ among the agencies, how to think about folding that in to existing budgets as well as determine whether there needs to be budget increases. In October they will be holding an EDRR (early detection rapid response) workshop so that this model can be implemented with not just tegus but other invasive species as well. In the short term the immediate “ask” is to increase and intensify trapping efforts, particularly in the eradication zone and they are asking scientists to determine what it would take to increase the body count. The only dollar amount they have as of now is with increased trapping.

Gintas Zavadzkas noted his concern if this effort fails and asked about other technologies they could explore such as pheromone trapping. Christina noted that at this point in time the genetic tools have not been developed. The first step is to figure out how to navigate this problem and identify whether they are reaching that goal then they need to ask what is needed if they don’t reach their goals. Gintas agreed rapid response is fundamental but noted they can’t ask Congress to give them money forever. They need to have an end game and if they don’t start on a tool they can generalize among other species then it is hard for them to have someone commit to this plan aside from EDRR. He noted that another population of tegus has been sighted on the west coast. This is a big concern for the Miccosukee Tribe which is being squeezed by the python on one side and the tegus on the other. It is causing a strain on their resources. Shannon said she agreed 100% and added that the best chance they have for finding the dollars is for their approach to be goal driven. This issue is gaining awareness on a state level and the OERI office is in the process of responding to a letter from Senator Nelson and other members of the Florida Delegation.

Nick Aumen addressed the question regarding pheromones, expressing that currently there has been no success in the application of pheromones to reptile species anywhere in the world. However, it does not mean that it is not possible and it should be pursued. It is important to strive for a balance and optimally utilize the resources available towards research and eradication goals. LTC Reynolds asked about the disposition of the Tegu, whether they were dangerous and could an individual capture or approach this animal. Christina responded that tegus run very fast and would not recommend the public interact with wild tegus as their behavior could be unpredictable. However, if a member of the public should come across one they should call 1-888-I’ve-Got-One. LTC Reynolds also noted that when she googled the tegu she came across a dozen YouTube videos portraying the tegus as cool and there were no YouTube

videos educating the public about how dangerous they are for the ecosystem. She asked they discuss sometime in the future how to message this better and spread the word to their contractors working in these areas to incentivize the public and contractors to assist with this problem.

### **USGS Invasive Species Research Projects**

Cindy Kolar provided a presentation (Encl. 6) explaining that USGS is organized into six mission areas and the vast majority of invasive species research is funded through the Ecosystems Mission Area's two primary programs: Priority Ecosystems Science and Invasive Species Science. Approximately \$1.9 million was put towards invasive species in FY 2015. There were 13 Everglades research projects totaling \$1.2 million in 2015 to include six on Burmese pythons, four on Argentine tegus, two on fish and one on plants. 75% of the funding went towards risk assessment, early detection and rapid response. She provided an in depth overview of several of the research projects.

Chad Kennedy said he was impressed by the variety of studies and asked if these projects were published and available on the USGS website for review. Cindy said there is a publication record, although the publication process to the website is lagging. She offered to gather the publications into a list and supply it to those who were interested.

### **Next Steps and Closing Statements**

Members were reminded of the November 19<sup>th</sup> Task Force meeting followed by a Groundbreaking Ceremony on the 20<sup>th</sup>. CISRERP will also be meeting on October 29<sup>th</sup> in Miami.

Meeting adjourned at 2:10 PM.

Enclosures:

1. Administrative Items
  - a. Agenda
  - b. Draft minutes, April 2015 meeting
2. Corps Program and Project Update presentation
3. IDS presentation
4. Restoration Rally Cry for the Big Cypress Swamp presentation
5. Developing a Coordinated Management Response to Invasive Tegus
6. USGS Invasive Species Research Projects