Approved Meeting Summary
South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force Meeting
April 25-26, 2019

Field Trip: Day 1 – April 25, 2019

The members participated in on-site visits to restoration projects underway in the region. The District and the Corps provided access and informative briefings for these sites. The first stop was Stormwater Treatment Area 3/4 (STA 3/4). District staff provided briefings and gave a tour of the control room and pump station. They discussed how the STAs were constructed to reduce total phosphorus prior to runoff entering the Everglades Protection Area (EPA). In addition to the STAs, participants learned how the neighboring A-1 Flow Equalization Basin (A-1 FEB) is operated to attenuate peak stormwater flows and improve inflow delivery rates to the downstream STAs. The next stop was the C-44 Reservoir and STA. This project located just north of the C-44 Canal will capture, store, and treat local runoff from the C-44 basin, improving salinity in the St. Lucie Estuary and southern portion of Indian River Lagoon. The 3,400-acre reservoir is encircled by a 10-mile-long, 30-foot-high earthen embankment. In addition to the reservoir underway, there are also the associated 6,300 acres of STAs, drainage canals, intake canals, control structures, levees, pumps, etc. Task Force members gave positive reviews of the site visits and said the tour helped inform discussions the following day at the meeting.

Approved Meeting Summary
South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force
West Palm Beach, Florida
April 25-26, 2019

Meeting: Day 2 – April 26, 2019

1. Welcome, Goals and Administrative Items

Ms. Andrea Travnicek called her first Task Force meeting to order at 9:03 AM. Mr. Adam Gelber provided some administrative announcements. Task Force members were provided with briefing books and asked to review the minutes from the last meeting. It was noted that many of the Task Force members were able to participate in the field trip to the Stormwater Treatment Area 3/4 and the C-44 Reservoir and STA the prior day.

To view the webcast in its entirety and access power point presentations and handouts, please visit:

https://www.evergladesrestoration.gov/tfm/

2. Task Force Member Introductions and Opening Remarks

Task Force members were asked to introduce themselves and provide brief introductory remarks.

The Following Task Force Members were in attendance:
Andrea Travnicek, Task Force Chair and Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks Exercising the Authority for the Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks, U.S. Department of the Interior
Noah Valenstein, Task Force Vice Chair and Secretary, Florida Department of Environmental Protection
Ron Bergeron, Governing Board Member, South Florida Water Management District
Jeff Clark, Acting Assistant Attorney General, Environment and Natural Resources Division (ENRD), U.S. Department of Justice
Gene Duncan, Water Resources Director, Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida
Lee Hefty, Director, Miami Dade County Division of Environmental Resources Management for Jose "Pepe" Diaz, Miami Dade County Commissioner
Nicole LeBoeuf, Acting Assistant Administrator for NOAA's National Ocean Service, U.S. Department of Commerce
Gib Owen, Water Resources Policy & Legislation for R.D. James, Assistant Secretary of the Army – Civil Works
Patty Power for Jim Shore, General Counsel to the Seminole Tribe of Florida
Kevin Ruane, Mayor for the City of Sanibel
Jeff Schmidt, Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations, Natural Resources Conservation Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture
Mary Walker, Acting Regional Administrator for Region 4 alternate for Henry Darwin, Acting Deputy Administrator, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

The Following Non-Voting Members were in attendance:
James Erskine, Chair, Working Group, Everglades Coordinator, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
Bob Johnson, Vice Chair, Science Coordination Group, Director of the South Florida Natural Resources Center, Everglades National Park
Eric Sutton, Special Advisor, Executive Director, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

Ms. Travnicek noted that President Trump and Secretary Bernhardt were in Florida three weeks prior and Everglades restoration is important to the Administration. It is important to not forget all the work that has been done, although more is still needed. Mr. Gelber noted that Mr. Drew Bartlett, former Task Force Vice Chair has moved from FDEP to be the Executive Director of the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD). He thanked Mr. Bartlett for his leadership and service. The Vice Chair has historically been a representative from the State of Florida. Mr. Kevin Ruane made a motion to nominate Mr. Noah Valenstein as the new Vice Chair which was seconded by Ms. Patty Power. There was no discussion and the Task Force voted unanimously in favor of Mr. Valenstein serving as Vice Chair.

3. Corps of Engineers Program and Project Update

Mr. Howie Gonzales (Corps) reviewed the South Florida Ecosystem Restoration program including the status of the foundation projects, the 1st, 2nd and 3rd generation Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) projects and the Central Everglades Planning Project (CEPP). Three planning studies (Loxahatchee River Watershed Restoration Project, Lake Okeechobee Watershed Restoration Project and Western Everglades Restoration Project) are currently underway. FY19 construction funds and the FY20 President's Budget were reviewed. The Corps is working to identify the FY20 work plan funds. The Integrated Delivery Schedule (IDS) was last updated in July 2018 and is a roadmap for implementing projects. The Corps will work closely with the SFWMD and FDEP for the next IDS update. Consultation on Project Implementation Reports (PIRs) will be provided at the next Task Force meeting.

Ms. Patty Power noted the FY20 funding for construction is little more than half of FY19 and asked about the plan to address the shortfall. Mr. Gonzales noted they are constantly running scenarios with the SFWMD and the $63.255 million is allocated to specific efforts and ongoing construction projects. For the items that didn't make the cut, they will focus on preventing too many delays with ongoing planning and design efforts. With full funding of IRL-South this year, they can transition to the next set of projects in the queue. Ms. Power encouraged those who were able, to let Congress know they need higher levels of funding for this effort. Mr. Valenstein suggested they have an agenda item at a future meeting to discuss project delays as well as funding levels and finding creative funding solutions.

Mr. Ronnie Bergeron said they have a lot of projects under construction that will help minimize discharges and algal blooms. They need to determine if there are any missing links or obstacles to getting the downstream benefits from what has been constructed. Ms. Nicole LeBoeuf said that they all have a vested interest in the success of this effort and there may be some messaging they can do within the federal family to tell their departments why the work of this Task Force is important. Mr. Gene Duncan highlighted the fact that some STAs are not meeting water quality standards, 805 acres of Miccosukee tribal lands were confiscated, and the Cape Sable Seaside Sparrow is the cause of yearly flooding in the Water Conservation Areas. Now they are faced with the Everglades Agricultural Area (EAA) Reservoir that is going to increase phosphorus loads on tribal lands. Mr. Kevin Ruane suggested they revise the IDS schedule to show what it may look like as funding slows down. Mr. Lee Hefty echoed

Mr. Valenstein's comments and encouraged looking at opportunities for additional partnerships at the local level as well as maximizing things like operational changes.

4. SFWMD Program and Project Update

Ms. Megan Jacoby reviewed the status of several ongoing projects to include the C-44 Reservoir and STA, C-43 Reservoir, EAA Reservoir, Biscayne Bay Coastal Wetlands (BBCW) and Restoration Strategies. An update was also provided on the South Florida Environmental Report which is prepared by the SFWMD in cooperation with FDEP. It goes through a public and peer review process and streamlines 70+ mandated reports into one three-volume report. The reports can be found at www.sfwmd.gov

5. National Academies Report Update

Ms. Stephanie Johnson reminded the group that the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine provide independent scientific advice to the nation. WRDA 2000 mandated an independent scientific review of CERP progress. The primary audience is Congress, the Secretaries of the Army and Interior and the Governor. The study has been funded since 2004 under 5-year contracts with the USACE with funding support from Interior and the SFWMD. The Committee on Independent Scientific Review of Everglades Restoration Progress (CISRERP) found that all the major hydrologic modification projects are in some stage of completion. The efforts underway made important strides towards advancing the vision for CERP storage. The vision for storage is now clear but a holistic understanding of the combined benefits is still lacking. It is difficult to see what the benefits of the whole CERP project versus no CERP project are. The Committee also found there is a need to examine the resilience of the projects to a changing climate and sea level rise. The Committee wrote a chapter on the ecological response to higher water levels in Lake Okeechobee based on a request by the SFWMD.

The key finding for this report is the recommendation for a mid-course assessment. This would be an opportunity to pull together advanced tools, information learned through planning, design and research and assess the benefits of CERP, not just on a project by project basis. The mid-course assessment would be a comprehensive modeling analysis that could document the benefits provided by CERP and inform decisions on sequencing. The Committee supports a strong science program to bring the latest information and tools into the CERP planning and implementation process. They also believe there should be an independent Everglades lead scientist that is not housed by a single organization but CERP-wide to help coordinate this information and promote the needed scientific advances.

Mr. Gene Duncan pointed to page 96 of the report showing one red dot on the entire map where phosphorus levels exceed 50ppb and he can personally say that sometimes it is 4 or 5 times that amount. This is in the heart of the Everglades and a serious problem that needs to be addressed as soon as possible. He complimented the Committee for acknowledging the water quality issue. He did not want to wait for more modeling and a mid-course correction and asked the agencies to get involved immediately and buy the STA land in the western basins.

6. Working Group and Science Coordination Group Priorities

Mr. James Erskine reported the November 2018 WG and SCG meeting agenda included a facilitated discussion on priorities that covered approximately 20 topics. Those topics were subsequently assessed by the chairs, vice chairs and the Office of Everglades Restoration Initiatives (OERI) and a priority list of six items was developed for Task Force consideration.

System-wide Ecological Indicators
The system-wide ecological indicators are used for communicating information on the health of the ecosystem and to help guide restoration efforts. A summary of the full indicator report goes into the Task Force's Biennial Report. The indicators were chosen based on their collective ability to comprehensively examine ecosystem health. The SCG has expressed an interest in holding a series of workshops to re-assess, review and update the current suite of 11 system-wide ecological indicators.

Invasive Exotic Species
Florida has the most threatened areas in the continental U.S. in terms of invasive exotic species due to its climate and multiple ports of entry. Recognizing the importance of managing the growing threats of invasive exotic species, the Task Force developed an Invasive Exotic Species Strategic Action Framework in 2014. The proposal is to update the Strategic Action Framework to reflect successful new efforts in addition to new invaders that have been identified.

Florida Bay
Florida Bay has suffered the last few decades with seagrass die-offs and algal blooms. The Bay is affected by periods of low rainfall as well as the chronic shortfall of freshwater flows. The goal is to redirect the harmful discharges in the northern estuaries back to the south. The issue of seepage management is important, and the proposal is for the SCG to participate in the SFWMD's evaluation of Florida Bay's water budget.

Task Force Strategy
The Strategy document describes the overall Everglades restoration effort with three broad strategic goals. To simplify reporting requirements, the Task Force's Biennial Report now reports restoration progress by program area instead of strategic goals. The proposal is for OERI staff to develop a one-pager of results by strategic goal to help a broader audience connect to the restoration effort.

Web Based Briefing Tool
In 2018, OERI in partnership with ENP developed a web-based briefing tool that was made available on Evergladesrestoration.gov. The proposal is to improve the existing web-based tool, incorporate more member agency materials, and enhance the ability for users to access detailed information on Everglades restoration.

Reporting Efficiencies
The Task Force has multiple Congressionally mandated reporting requirements. Reports may be similar to individual agency reports but often have different scopes and time frames. The proposal is for OERI to work with member agencies to identify possible ways to improve reporting efficiencies.

Mr. Eric Sutton encouraged they look at invasive animals as a possible indicator for Everglades restoration because even if the flows, timing and water quality are corrected in the Everglades, it will not affect those populations. The Governor and the FWC Commissioners as well as many other folks are working closely to find solutions to reduce invasive species. Ms. Andrea Travnicek noted Secretary Bernhardt had discussions with Governor DeSantis with regards to the management of the pythons and they will be looking at opportunities for expansion. Mr. Adam Gelber stated that OERI will work on all the priorities with the WG and SCG on behalf of the Task Force.

Public Comment

Ms. Irela Bague (Chair, Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce) thanked the SFWMD and USACE for allocating the funds to begin the study for Phase 2 of BBCW project. Biscayne Bay is an essential part of Miami-Dade County's economy and has experienced hyper-salinity, seagrass die-off, coral reef disease, periods of algal blooms and red tide and is now in serious ecological decline. The County Commission recently created a Biscayne Bay Task Force to prioritize actions for the bay's recovery. The BBCW project is essential for achieving restoration goals for Biscayne Bay and Biscayne National Park.

Ms. Joan Lawrence (Miami Dade County resident and member of the boating community) thanked the TF for expediting BBCW Phase 1 and moving forward with Phase 2. The BBCW project is the only CERP project to directly benefit Biscayne Bay and Biscayne National Park. Biscayne Bay is a huge economic driver for Miami-Dade County and a consistent source of freshwater is critical for the health of the bay. The BBCW project will provide this fresh water. She appreciated the conversation about funding because as everyone knows, without adequate funding none of these projects will move forward.

Ms. Sarah Barmeyer (National Parks Conservation Association) announced NPCA is celebrating its centennial year. In 1920, one of their priorities was to protect the Everglades. They worked for decades to establish Everglades National Park and subsequently Biscayne National Park and Big Cypress National Preserve. They are pleased with the progress being made to restore the central part of the system with the bridging of Tamiami Trail and the CEPP. NPCA looks forward to seeing a Combined Operations Plan that maximizes ecosystem benefits to ENP and Florida Bay. However, they are not going to see a restored Everglades without stronger construction and O&M funding for the Corps.

Ms. Celeste DePalma (Audubon Florida) noted her organization has been around for 119 years and started because of the Everglades. Audubon agrees that the IDS needs to be updated as Audubon uses it when ask Congress for more Everglades restoration funding. Gov. Ron DeSantis put a historic funding request of $625 million towards Everglades restoration and water quality projects including a $40 million match to raise unbridged portions of Tamiami Trail. Everglades restoration is a 50/50 partnership and they need their federal partner to match Florida's commitment. This Administration has an opportunity to drive shovel-ready projects over the finish line. The C-43, C-44, Tamiami Trail and the EAA Reservoir could all be finished within the next four years. Audubon encourages the Corps to update the IDS and for the Administration to join Gov. DeSantis and push for environmental victories today that result in clean waters and thriving businesses for years to come.

Ms. Shannon Estenoz (Everglades Foundation) said the issue at the forefront is federal funding and the lack thereof. As previously stated, there are rules in Congress such as the earmark rule that limits Congress' ability to plus up a Presidential Budget request for the Everglades. The federal budgeting process is mysterious even for those in the government and she suggested the Corps explain their budget process. Florida, its economy and the threatened and endangered species cannot wait for 20 years for restoration. She echoed the request for the Corps to update the IDS to help the public understand the implications of the budget requests. She also said she wanted to see a scenario of what the IDS would look like if they had $200 million a year in federal funding. Gov. DeSantis put in a record budget request and the momentum that creates only works if the feds step up as well.

Mr. Mark Perry (Florida Oceanographic Society) said it is frustrating to see 1.7 billion gallons a day going to tide when that water should be going south. In 2007, Martin County gave over $26 million in local

funding through a bond issue to help buy the lands for the C-44 project. They receive billions of gallons of water every year from Lake Okeechobee that destroy those habitats, oysters, seagrass beds and nearshore reefs and their goal is to stop those discharges. He asked to see the IDS with federal and state funding equal at $200 million. Two days after being inaugurated, the Governor signed Executive Order 19-12 with more than $2.5 billion over the next 4 years.

Mr. Drew Martin (Loxahatchee Group of the Sierra Club) thanked the TF and the member agencies for being very inclusive of the public. They would like to make sure there is funding for invasive species. The python is having a huge impact and they now know it is in Loxahatchee NWR. They also know that climate change is having an impact. The changes over the last 100 years have impacted the environmental system. Agricultural decisions led to the Dust Bowl and similarly agricultural decisions in the EAA are having consequences. The funding that comes here to deal with carbon sequestration, climate change and sea level rise will benefit the entire nation.

Mr. Gib Owen reported they have already developed their FY20 budget and it was submitted by the President in March. They have initiated efforts to develop the FY21 budget that is due in September. The President will then move that forward in February 2020. They are seeing about 30-40% of the entire national Aquatic Ecosystem Restoration budget coming to the Everglades. At a national level they are seeing strong support for the work in the Everglades.

Meeting Minutes

Ms. Patty Power made a motion to approve the minutes which were seconded by Mr. Ruane. There was no discussion and the minutes were approved without objection.

7. Lake Okeechobee System Operating Manual (LOSOM) Study

COL Andrew Kelly provided a presentation noting the current operations schedule is the Lake Okeechobee Regulation Schedule (LORS). LOSOM will be completed to coincide with the completion of the Herbert Hoover Dike (HHD) rehabilitation project. The result of the study will be a new system operating manual. They are not recommending any new infrastructure. Incremental regulation schedules will be developed to account for future infrastructure. They anticipate having both the C-43 and C-44 identified in the operating manual when those come online. The execution of the new manual is planned for September 2022. He also noted that he made the decision, within his authority, to execute operational flexibility in October 2018 and to continue at 1,000 csf.

Mr. Bergeron added the intent is to have more controllable discharges for the safety and welfare of the public. Mr. Ruane thanked the COL and said he appreciated the operational flexibility which is allowing the system to slowly recover. Congressman Brian Mast said he was glad to see everyone working collaboratively on a whole system approach looking at not only where the water comes from but where it is stored, where it goes and what's contained in it.

8. Combined Operations Plan (COP)

Mr. Jed Redwine (ENP) noted that COP is the first step towards getting to CERP flows and moving towards the goal of pre-drainage conditions. They have a lot of inter-annual variability with the volume of flows crossing Tamiami Trail into ENP and move an annual average of 0.86 million ac-ft per year. When they get to CERP flows they expect to move an annual average of 1.4 million ac-ft per year in context with the pre-drainage condition which was 2.0 million ac-ft per year. The COP project

description, scale, objectives and constraints were reviewed as well as general comments that have been received. Alternative O is the preferred alternative and they are on the third round of modelling. The plans they are developing are forward compatible with CEPP and future actions. Those plans include improving water deliveries (timing, location, volume) into ENP and taking steps to restore natural hydrologic conditions in ENP given current C&SF infrastructure and features expected to be completed by the time of implementation. They are on track to complete the draft EA in June 2019 and the ROD is expected in June 2020. Mr. Redwine showed a video on nesting efforts and explained that the nesting effort in 2018 is comparable to that of the 1930's and 1940's. They started operating the COP in 2015 and while the COP was not solely responsible for why this improvement, it didn't hurt. While some indicators are showing challenges, there are clear indications they are on the right track.

Mr. Gene Duncan said the problems in the WCAs are not going away. They have carved up the Everglades yet still have the same water needs in Florida Bay and ENP. Every year, tree islands go under water, sometimes for 6 months at a time, destroying the WCAs and tree islands. The S-12s are closed 6 months out of the year to protect the sparrow in the park while the woodstork and snail kite on tribal lands are being killed. The lake and WCAs are full so they have no choice but to destroy the estuaries; meanwhile Florida Bay is dying of hypersalinity. Congress put this Task Force in place to resolve differences between the agencies. This Task Force is needed to help resolve these high-level disagreements on how the Everglades is being restored. It can't be restored at the sacrifice of the center of the system. Mr. Bergeron agreed with Mr. Duncan and said they are micro-managing the system. Wildlife are drowning in the central Everglades, ENP is dying from lack of water and seagrass is dying in Florida Bay. He believes they can save the Everglades but they have to stop some of the irreversible damage to the central Everglades. They cannot protect one species and put a hundred species on the Endangered Species list. Ms. Travnicek said she looked forward to continuing these discussions with Mr. Duncan and others.

9. Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs)

A Primer on Cyanobacteria Blooms and Red Tide

Mr. Barry Rosen noted that he works on issues related to harmful algal blooms in Lake Okeechobee and across the country. He reviewed the difference between cyanobacteria blooms versus red tide outbreaks, environmental health concerns of blooms, potential causative factors of blooms and scientific studies that are underway and planned. Algae are a broad term for a diverse group of photosynthetic organisms. In a bloom there are a lot of variants but basically it is an accumulation of organisms that are a nuisance. They may or may not contain toxins and almost all the different groups of algae can bloom at one time or another. Cyanobacteria referred to as blue-green algae are bacteria unlike red algae which is an algae. Cyanobacteria and red tide can accumulate near shore and are disrupted by turbulence. The bigger problem with red tide is that they last a long time. The last bloom lasted 16 months (4th longest bloom) and the record bloom lasted 30 months.

Mr. Keith Loftin discussed toxins produced by HABs. One of the things he wanted to impress upon the TF is that just because they see a bloom, it doesn't mean it is always producing toxin. Cyanobacteria was traditionally thought of as a freshwater issue and USGS, academic researchers and other agencies have been trying to better understand transport of inland blooms to the estuarine environment. A study showed impacts of inland cyanotoxins being transported or potentially produced in the estuaries in California. Pathological effects were shown on sea otters. Ongoing studies and experiments in Lake

Okeechobee were reviewed. Treatment options are being investigated by some universities since there could be unintended consequences and they must be careful with what is done and how it is done.

Corps' Harmful Algal Bloom Investigation Activities for 2019
COL Kelly reported that WRDA 2018 authorized the USACE Engineer R&D Center (ERDC) under the Aquatic Nuisance Research Program to identify and develop improved, scalable strategies for early detection, prevention and management techniques to reduce occurrence and effects of HABs. They received $2.3 million for ERDC and solicited input from DEP, SFWMD, USGS and Jacksonville District technical staff to select HAB research projects for Lake Okeechobee. Four efforts have been identified and a multi-agency team is working to better understand cyanobacteria bloom dynamics in the Lake.

Mr. Valenstein reported the Governor's Executive Order directed FWC and DEP to set up an Algal Bloom Task Force to expedite progress on research, mitigation and management techniques. They have seen that same collaboration on the federal side with the Hypoxia Task Force and the Water SubCabinet. He said it would be helpful to interact with the federal partners and possibly host meetings in Florida. The Governor has also directed the Department of Health to work with the CDC. Ms. Travnicek offered to help coordinate those discussions with the Hypoxia Task Force and the Water Subcabinet.

Ms. LeBoeuf said she was happy to see harmful algal blooms on the agenda. NOAA is the lead for marine harmful algal bloom forecasting and study in the U.S. and they work closely with USGS, EPA and others. NOAA has two operational HAB forecasts in the country with one in Florida. She suggested having this issue or a different aspect of this issue on a future agenda as it seems to be a pervasive issue for both freshwater and saltwater systems.

Mr. Duncan said the SFWMD's data shows that local basin run-off in the St. Lucie accounts for 74% of the flows going to the estuaries. Lake Okeechobee only provides 26% of the flows going to that estuary. The local basin produces 82% of the phosphorus and a similar amount of nitrogen and Lake Okeechobee provides 18% of the phosphorus. He hopes the C-43 and C-44 reservoirs aren't going to be a breeding ground for more algae in those reservoirs. COL Kelly clarified those reservoirs will be able to store and move the water through the STA that is associated with it to do the proper cleaning. Mr. Duncan said he hoped there is some other effort on the part of the local government to address the local basin problem.

10. Update on Florida Reef Tract Coral Disease Outbreak Response Efforts

Ms. Joanna Walczak, FDEP, noted that the Florida reef tract runs 330 nautical miles from the Dry Tortugas to the St. Lucie Inlet. They have over 38 million visitors coming to Florida. The Southeast Florida Coral Reef Ecosystem Conservation Area (ECA) was newly minted by the Florida Legislature and is the first time the entire Florida reef tract has been designated as ecologically important. The reefs started about 10,000 years ago while the Everglades started 5,000 years ago. While one may think of them as separate ecosystems, they are one big connected ecosystem that needs to be managed holistically. The Florida Reef Tract is ecologically diverse and is south Florida's first line of defense for the coastal system. The healthier and taller a coral reef is, the more benefit in shoreline protection. A meter of change in growth equates to hundreds of millions of dollars of protection from flood and protection for the built infrastructure. These reefs provide the recreational and commercial opportunities that make Florida a world leader in fishing. A $6 billion tourism industry is specifically tied to the reefs. Unfortunately, coral reefs are under severe stress globally due to the increased frequency in severity of extreme thermal events and increasing coastal and ocean acidification.

An unprecedented disease event called Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease that eats the living tissue of the coral and leaves behind the skeleton is progressing rapidly. They are looking at functional extinction potential of at least 23 species. The Florida Legislature provided funding to FDEP for coral disease projects. They have coordinated an unprecedented response effort co-led by FDEP, FWC, NOAA and NPS. They have had an overwhelming response and local government, academia, NGOs and others are collaborating. They have started immediate intervention while they study the disease, including coral rescue to capture genetic material as well as locating and propagating survivors.

Ms. Sarah Fangman highlighted the fact that the reefs are connected to what's happening in the Everglades. They also understand how economically important the marine ecosystem is in south Florida. In Monroe County alone, a healthy marine ecosystem supports $2.1 billion in spending, 33,000 jobs and over 60% of the Monroe County economy. The effort in addressing this issue is unprecedented and they appreciate the opportunity to work with this Task Force. FEMA is considering a policy change that would allow them to look at coral reefs as maintained infrastructure. In the aftermath of a storm, FEMA funds could be used to assess, triage and potentially restore the reefs. They are also hoping that the Coral Reef Conservation Act of 2000 will be re-authorized. Language in that act could add the opportunity to use funds for emergency events and allow money to be moved more quickly.

Mr. Gene Duncan said Miami pumps 300 million gallons of treated sewage into the ocean daily and that local governments are going to have to solve this problem. He asked what was being done to energize those local governments. Ms. Joanna Walczak replied that their biggest champions have been Martin, Broward, Palm Beach, Monroe and Miami-Dade counties. They are also working with the Regional Planning Councils. Ms. Nicole LeBoeuf asked whether there was an interest by the Task Force to look at the ranges of water quality that healthy coral communities need adding that it is important for the goals of the Task Force to be comparable to what they would want for a healthy coral community.

11. Biennial Report Update

Mr. Kevin Burger provided an update on the 2018 report. On March 13th they had unanimous approval by the Task Force to move forward with transmittal to Congress. The report must first go through DOI approval and OMB clearance and then the Task Force Chair will transmit the Biennial Report to Congress. Members of the Task Force will also be provided with a copy of the final report.

Public Comment

Mr. Doug Gaston (Audubon Florida) said he toured Lake Okeechobee earlier in the year with their lead scientist, Dr. Paul Gray. Where the submerged vegetation (SAV) was healthy, the water was crystal clear, but where SAV was lacking, the water was dirty and degraded. In 2012, there were over 40,000 acres of SAV and now there are only 5,000 acres. Due to the Corps' operational flexibility, SAV is blooming where it had been barren earlier in the year. They are going to advocate for healthy lake conditions and for the lake itself to be treated as an equal stakeholder in the LOSOM process.

Ms. Celeste De Palma (Audubon Florida) urged they remove obstacles and send the water south. It is critically important that the infrastructure that took nearly 30 years to build, be put to good use. Between MWD and the C-111 SC, they have spent nearly $1 billion of taxpayer dollars and Audubon wants to see $1 billion in ecological restoration benefits. They are seeing through the incremental

testing that that infrastructure is holding and doing its job. She thanked the PDT members and said she appreciated stakeholder input being incorporated into the alternatives.

Mr. Mark Perry (Florida Oceanographic Society) said it was great to see that the scope of LOSOM will be more than LORS 2008; it is a great opportunity for the whole system to be addressed. In 2016, they had 2.2 million ac-ft going east/west to the estuaries while only 147,000 ac-ft went south. A lot more water needs to be available, even in the dry season to the Everglades and Florida Bay. There are freshwater cyanobacteria that don't exist in these estuaries until they are discharged from the Lake. These harmful algal blooms are tragic. In 2013, 2016 and 2018 they had numerous times when local communities were frustrated at not knowing who was coordinating where the algal blooms were, how toxic they were and whether it was safe to go in the water and suggested they add the Florida Dept. of Health.

Ms. Nyla Pipes (One Florida Foundation) said they tend to blame the lake and forget the lake is also getting discharges from the north that come with a lot of sediment and nutrients. They must be careful about the ecology of the lake not only when it gets too high but also when it gets too low and woody plants take over. There is a misnomer that if they get discharges to the rivers during the dry season, they aren't going to get them in the summer. That depends on how much rainfall they get, where they get it and how fast the lake rises. Harmful algal blooms come back to source control and nutrient loading and the more they can do to get nitrogen and phosphorus under control, the better. Septic and sewage issues are also well-known sources of nutrient loading. She asked the TF to consider what is being done with sewage in this state.

Ms. Cara Capp (National Parks Conservation Association) said NPCA is looking forward to the completion of the Tamiami Trail project, a successful partnership between the state and federal governments. It is the largest capital improvement project in the history of the NPS and they want to ensure they get a billion-dollars' worth of restoration benefits from it. The key is getting more water to Florida Bay in the dry season and the limiting factor is infrastructure. They also need to talk about the benefits of this project for the fishery and tourism economies they support. Every time Mr. Redwine said ecosystem benefits, he could have said economic benefits because in Florida they are one and the same. NPCA thanks FDEP and the FKNMS for the presentation highlighting the connection between the Florida reef tract and the greater Everglades. It is the 3rd largest barrier reef in the world and it is not immune to water crisis that has been in the headlines in Florida. There is a strong connection between the reefs and the Everglades and they will continue to talk about the joint benefits of Everglades restoration.

Mr. Drew Martin (Loxahatchee Group of the Sierra Club) said we should assume we are having some impact on the severity of algal blooms with over 7 million people with fertilizer and lawns, agriculture, septic tanks and stormwater runoff. They need to go after the nutrients that are causing the problem. Sierra Club supports the work on coral reefs and suggested they look at plastics' impact on coral reefs and algal blooms. They should discuss issues such as the loss of wetlands in urban areas. When they lose wetlands, they are losing that ability to clean the water system. He urged the Task Force to look at how urban areas that are not maintaining their wetlands may be contributing to the problem.

Ms. Jennifer Hecker (Charlotte Harbor National Estuary Program (CHNEP) soon to be the Coastal and Heartland National Estuary Partnership) said they will soon serve 10 counties in the central and SW Florida region. In the Caloosahatchee they suffer from too much freshwater flows in the wet season and too little freshwater flows from Lake Okeechobee during the dry season. They understand that the Lake's health and water quality directly affect their river and estuary. The SAV decline from 44,000

acres in 2012 to 5,000 acres in 2018 is of great concern. In 1993, they had over 2,000 acres of SAV in the Caloosahatchee and today the tape grass has been almost eliminated due to repeated high salinity events. They are working hard with their partners to keep the river and estuary on life support and have been physically replanting seagrasses. The C-43 Reservoir will provide some of the dry season flow they need, however, that project is being pushed back from 2020 to 2022. She thanked Gov. DeSantis, SFWMD and FDEP for addressing this issue and undertaking the feasibility study to look at adding a water quality treatment component to the C-43 Reservoir. As a member of the SCG, she noted there is a lot of investment going into HAB research and perhaps they can look at adding a science priority for the SCG to gather, analyze, synthesize and disseminate that information back to the Task Force.

Assignment, Next Steps and Closing Comments

Ms. Travnicek thanked everyone for their comments noting they are all very important. She noted there were possible suggestions for OERI, WG or SCG to further discuss the HABs and how they tie that research a little bit further given all research that is going on, discussion on goals related to the restoration of the coral reefs and an update to the IDS schedule.

Mr. Valenstein added the IDS is the most important, the core function of this TF is to ensure forward progress on Everglades restoration. The more clarity they give as a TF helps inform what their own staff should be doing and how they work with the partners. There are projects that have fallen years behind and the TF needs to hold itself accountable. He suggested it would be useful for staff to help inform the best way to work on the HABs and coral reef issues. These are critical issues that should be discussed regularly. He urged they take the time as federal entities to figure out how that intersects with the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force, the Hypoxia Task Force and the Water Sub-Cabinet. He wants to make sure things are happening in an orderly fashion. Ms. Travnicek agreed she wants to make sure they are coordinating closely with the state. She has had the opportunity to sit on the Hypoxia Task Force and work closely with the Water Sub-Cabinet. She offered to get those conversations going and coordinate with Mr. Gelber and his team to make sure they keep that close coordination.

Mr. Bob Johnson added there has been a lot of discussion on the goal of sending more water south as well as constraints. It would be helpful to discuss what the constraints are and what issues need to be worked through because they are on a timeline with the HHD and the regulation schedule. They need to make sure those constraints are not there when they are ready to move the water south. Investing all this money in the north and then not being able to send the water south will not help any of them. Mr. Duncan agreed and added that part of the purpose of this TF is to facilitate the resolution of interagency and intergovernmental conflicts associated with restoration and they have done a horrible job at doing that. A lot of it is due to this group not meeting regularly. He hoped that with the chair's leadership, things will change.

Mr. Valenstein said Everglades restoration is a tremendous example of how a massive group of stakeholders are working on an incredibly complex issue. The Administration has shown a commitment to this effort and the fact that they are ending the meeting with concrete things to focus on and tee up for the next meeting is a sign it is working. Mayor Ruane echoed Mr. Valenstein's comments about the importance of updating the IDS which is a useful tool when they are advocating for funding. Mr. Jeff Clark said the Administration is working on certain things that, if put in place and are successful, will reduce the volume of lawsuits, such as the ESA and NEPA reform efforts. Mr. Bergeron said it was an honor for him to be there and he looked forward to working with the Task Force member agencies.

Ms. Travnicek thanked the SFWMD for hosting the meeting. She also thanked Mr. Gelber and the OERI team. Mr. Gelber reminded folks the next meeting is planned for October 2019.

Meeting adjourned at 3:52PM

Handouts:

Briefing book

1. Administrative Items
    a. Agenda
    b. Draft minutes, July 2018 meeting
2. Task Force Member Introductions
    a. Membership Roster
    b. Member Bios
    c. Task Force Overview
3. Corps of Engineers Program and Project Update
    a. Presentation
    b. Integrated Delivery Schedule Placemat (2018 update)
4. South Florida Water Management District Program and Project Update
    a. Presentation
5. National Academies of Sciences
    a. Presentation
    b. 2018 Biennial Report
6. WG and SCG Draft Priorities for 2019
7. Lake Okeechobee System Operating Manual (LOSOM) Study
8. Combined Operations Plan (COP)
9. Harmful Algal Blooms
    a. Cyanobacteria and Red Tide Presentation
    b. Corps' Harmful Algal Bloom Investigation Activities Presentation
10. Update on Florida Reef Tract
    a. Coral Disease Outbreak Response Efforts Presentation
    b. Connections between the Florida Reef Tract and the South Florida Ecosystem Presentation
11. 2018 Biennial Report Update
12. Additional Information
    a. WRDA excerpt
    b. Task Force Charter
    c. Vice Chair Protocol
    d. Consensus and Voting Protocols