

DRAFT Meeting Minutes
South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force
Main Interior Building
Washington, DC
July 25, 2018

Welcome, Goals for the Meeting and Administrative Items

Ms. Susan Combs called the meeting to order at 9:58 a.m. She welcomed the Task Force (TF) members and noted this was the first meeting of the newly appointed federal members. She announced that she along with Mr. R.D. James must be on the Hill and would leave around noon. Mr. Drew Bartlett, Vice Chair, would take over the meeting. Mr. Gene Duncan, who represents the Miccosukee Tribe, was unable to join them due to his flight being canceled.

Mr. Drew Bartlett, thanked Ms. Combs and everyone for attending. He noted this is a critical time for those experiencing the events in south Florida with the discharges. It highlights the importance of a comprehensive Everglades restoration. He reviewed some administrative items and reminded everyone the meeting was being webcast. Ms. Combs welcomed Ms. Mackenzie Landa from Rep. Kathy Castor's office, Mr. Martin Rivera from the Rep. Darren Soto's office and Commissioner Doug Smith from Martin County.

To view the webcast of the meeting in its entirety, please visit:

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

Task Force Member Introductions

Task Force members were asked to introduce themselves and provide brief opening remarks. The following members were in attendance:

Susan Combs, Chair, Senior Advisor to the Secretary, Exercising the Authority of the Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks, U.S. Department of the Interior

Drew Bartlett, Vice Chair, Deputy Secretary for Water Policy & Ecosystem Restoration, Florida Department of Environmental Protection

R.D. James, Assistant Secretary of the Army (Civil Works)

Nicole LeBoeuf, Deputy Assistant Administrator, U.S. Department of Commerce

Ernie Marks, Executive Director, South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD)

Kevin Ruane, Mayor, City of Sanibel

Patty Power for Jim Shore, General Counsel to the Seminole Tribe of Florida

Noah Valenstein, Secretary, Florida Department of Environmental Protection

Onis "Trey" Glenn, III, for Andrew Wheeler, Deputy Administrator, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

Jeffrey Wood, Acting Assistant Attorney General for the Environment and Natural Resources Division, U.S. Department of Justice

Brandon Tucker, Facilitator, Water Resources Analysis Coalition (an advisory group to the Task Force)

James Erskine, incoming WG Vice Chair, Everglades Coordinator, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission also sitting in for Eric Sutton, Executive Director, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (an advisory group to the Task Force)

Bob Johnson, incoming SCG Chair, Director, South Florida Natural Resources Center, National Park Service

Marshall Critchfield, Advisor to the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Fish, Wildlife and Parks

The following members were unable to attend:

Jose Pepe Diaz, Commissioner, Miami-Dade County

Gene Duncan, Water Resources Director, Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida

Gerald Solomon, U.S. Department of Transportation

Eric Sutton, Executive Director, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (an advisory group to the Task Force)

Ms. Susan Combs recognized Mr. Nathaniel (Nat) Reed, who recently passed away at the age of 84 after sustaining an injury while fishing. Nate was a tireless environmental advocate for six decades. She reviewed his many accomplishments which included serving as the Assistant Secretary for Fish, Wildlife and Parks under Presidents Nixon and Ford. She noted that she as the Senior Advisor to the Secretary, Exercising the authority of the Assistant Secretary for Fish, Wildlife and Parks had very big shoes to fill.

Power Point presentations and handouts from the meeting are available at:

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

Leadership Appointments and Updates

Mr. Kevin Burger provided a presentation reviewing the responsibilities of this TF which was established under the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) of 1996. WRDA specifies the duties of the TF which includes establishing a Florida based Working Group (WG) to help carry out its duties. WRDA also directs the TF to coordinate all scientific and other research associated with Everglades restoration, and it does so through the Science Coordination Group (SCG). The TF is exempt from the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) and the duties of the TF are accomplished mostly through the activities of the WG and SCG. The Office of Everglades Restoration Initiatives (OERI) supports the TF on a day-to-day basis on its reporting requirements, meetings, and anything that relates to the activities of the TF. The TF reports on restoration progress in the Biennial Report to Congress and the Integrated Financial Plan. The Cross-Cut Budget is also prepared annually. All the reports can be found on the web:

www.Evergladesrestoraion.gov

The TF, based on recommendations from the WG and SCG, collectively appoints the leadership to run the WG and SCG. Col Kirk served as the Chair of the WG and stepped aside at the June 2018 WG meeting. Mr. James Erskine and Mr. Nick Aumen are willing to serve as the Chair and Vice Chair, respectively, of the WG. Ms. Susan Gray and Mr. Bob Johnson are willing to serve as the Chair and Vice Chair, respectively, of the SCG. Their qualifications were reviewed and it was noted that this is a group of senior people who have been working on Everglades restoration for a very long time. Ms. Combs asked for consensus approval on the appointment of

Mr. Erskine and Mr. Aumen on the WG and Ms. Gray and Mr. Johnson on the SCG. Their appointments were approved without objections.

2018 Task Force Reporting Requirements

Ms. Allyn Childress provided a presentation reviewing the reports that are statutorily required from the TF. The Strategy is updated every two years, if needed, and responds to Congressional direction to outline how the restoration effort will occur. The Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) is a large part of what the TF works on, but it is not all the TF does. The Strategy is organized by three strategic goals. The first goal is on getting the water right which includes elements of CERP, water quality and the distribution of water throughout the system. The second goal deals with habitats and species with one of the biggest sub-goals dealing with invasive exotic species which are a threat to the Everglades because it is a welcome host to many creatures from the outside world. Also included in the second goal are the land conservation efforts with USDA's programs and land acquisition efforts led by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection. The third goal deals with the built system and the people that are part of this ecosystem along with the need for flood protection and water supply. The Biennial Report reports on progress and is required every two years. They are currently getting everyone's input for the reporting period which runs from July 1, 2016 – June 30, 2018. The report is being re-organized to highlight major accomplishments by program or category and this re-organization has been well received. The TF will receive a final draft for approval later in the year. The Integrated Financial Plan (IFP) is updated every year and contains the in-depth, detailed information on projects and programs. The reports can be found at:

www.Evergladesrestoration.gov

In addition, a web-based briefing tool will also be available on the website which will be helpful to those folks who are new to Everglades restoration. She thanked Mr. Pedro Ramos and his staff at Everglades National Park (ENP) who have provided some innovative, web-based information for those people who are more visual.

Mr. Nick Aumen provided an update on the System-wide Ecological Indicators Report. The full report is a digest of scientific findings that provides the status of a suite of indicators from a science perspective. A much more condensed version of the full report is included in the Biennial Report. The report is coordinated by Dr. Laura Brant with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. From a hydrologic standpoint, water year 2017 was an average wet season but below average dry season. In water year 2018, they had a record wet season and below average dry season. In south Florida, they do not have four traditional seasons, they have a wet season and a dry season. They also never have average seasons and a lot of what drives the restoration progress and the indicators is the hydrologic cycle. When this effort began, they got a team of scientists together to develop the system-wide ecological indicators. The first internal list of indicators was in the 100s and they worked hard to get them down to 11. A summary was provided of the type of information that is contained in both the full report and the condensed version. The report is nearing completion and will be available in the early fall.

Lake Okeechobee: Herbert Hoover Dike Construction/Water Management

Herbert Hoover Dike (HHD) Construction

Mr. Tim Murphy reported the State of Florida provided \$50 million last year and another \$50 million this year for the HHD. That funding, along with what the Corps has for FY18, FY19 and the supplemental funding, means that the HHD is fully funded. He reviewed the construction timelines that will get them to a 2022 completion date which has been moved up from 2025. Potential risks to the project schedule completion date are weather, contractors not doing what they say they will do and when, as well as having enough qualified employees to oversee the work to make sure it is done correctly. To operate the project when it is completed, they need to finish the Lake Okeechobee Regulation Schedule (LORS) in this 3 ½ to 4-year time frame. With the Administration's help this year they were able to find money to start LORS six months earlier than originally scheduled.

Water Management

LTC Jennifer Reynolds noted they have 18,000 square miles of ecosystem in south Florida that they are not just restoring but are managing on a daily and sometimes hourly basis. The water basins that feed Lake Okeechobee are 3 million acres while Lake Okeechobee is just 470,000 acres. Rain is falling into the basins and Lake Okeechobee at a rate 3-6 times faster than they can handle. People take flood control for granted in south Florida because it works. This last May was the wettest on record since 1895. In 1947, most of south Florida was underwater for six months and it was that rainfall that got the Central and Southern Florida (C&SF) project authorized by Congress in 1948. The C&SF project was originally developed for 2 million residents and is now being operated for 8.1 million residents living in south Florida. Although they are doing a good job with the flood control aspect, the efficient engineering and the way they move water is harmful to the environment. CERP is all about figuring out how to make incremental changes to the flood control system so they can protect the environment.

Mr. Jeff Wood noted the ambitious schedule and asked about possible risks to the project schedule and getting to a 2022 completion date. Mr. Murphy replied that the main risks to the project schedule were weather, contractors meeting their deadlines and having enough qualified employees to oversee the work to make sure it is done correctly. Mr. Ernie Marks added that the LORS is important for operating Lake Okeechobee because when done, it will tie into every storage project, the ones they are building and the ones they are planning. That schedule is critical for flood control, water supply, and Everglades restoration.

Congressman Brian Mast said he appreciated the work the Corps has done on everything from the southern reservoirs south of Lake Okeechobee to the repairing of the dike around Lake Okeechobee. Management of the lake during the dry season needs to be adjusted because communities are being devastated. The level of water being held in Lake Okeechobee for the benefit of other entities is to the detriment of many communities. He asked that this issue be addressed while they wait for other projects to be completed.

Mr. Ernie Marks explained that there isn't a specific number at which they can keep Lake Okeechobee. There are entities that depend on the water from Lake Okeechobee for their existence. The STAs, for example, become a user during dry periods to maintain the vegetation to treat the water and meet the stringent water quality standards each year. It is important that they remain focused on those projects that anticipate receiving that water so that they can

manage the lake in a way that is good for everyone. Ms. Patty Power suggested they talk about the capacity of the existing system at a future TF meeting. Although there will always be trade-offs, no one should bear the full burden. Ms. Combs noted this is a very important topic and proposed that a group meet with the Congressman to discuss this issue further and suggested it be held in 2 ½ weeks on or before August 10th.

Mayor Kevin Ruane provided a presentation highlighting the water quality concerns of the Caloosahatchee River. His presentation included photos of how Sanibel looked on May 24 before the releases and photos after the releases. He noted that of the 12 years he has been working on this issue, this is the worst he's ever seen these conditions. Although they have problems in their own backyard and have watershed issues, the releases from Lake Okeechobee compound the issue. In 2016 they had record rains and in 2017 they had Hurricane Irma. This situation is having a profound effect on their economy and there is \$2 trillion at stake between real estate values and tourism. They are on the verge of potentially putting southwest Florida into a recession. He asked that there be less releases and urged that there be some short-term operational flexibility.

Corps Program and Project Update

Mr. Howie Gonzales provided a presentation noting the south Florida ecosystem restoration program is a large-scale watershed program that will improve the health of over 2.4 million acres including Lake Okeechobee. It will provide flood risk management and water supply for over 8 million residents in the largest metropolitan area in the southeastern U.S. The Everglades is the economy in south Florida and the agricultural, recreational and tourism industries all rely on the Everglades. He reviewed the program structure showing the different projects and authorizations they work within. The Corps has projects in all phases of implementation, planning, design, and construction. A status update was provided on the Foundation Projects, First and Second-Generation Projects and the Central Everglades Planning Project (CEPP). An update was also provided on the 2016 SMART Planning studies that were initiated for the Loxahatchee River, Lake Okeechobee and the Western Everglades. He reviewed the FY18 allocations and the President's Budget for FY19 including the O&M costs which are cost shared 50/50 with the local sponsor. There is full acknowledgment from the Administration and the Congress as to the importance of this program.

Mr. Noah Valenstein reminded the members that funding is what makes the partnership successful. On the state side they are looking at recurring levels greater than \$200 million representing record funding. They have seen amazing progress in the last six years and they are close to seeing tremendous impacts. Mr. Ernie Marks said that in addition to the construction dollars, they need to be able to operate these projects as they were intended. He urged folks at the table to make sure they don't lose the O&M component when they are having discussions on future appropriations. Ms. Patty Power agreed that if there is no federal money to provide the cost share then it's not a fulfilled agreement. There has been a glitch in getting O&M funding budgeted for these projects and both the tribe and the SFWMD are suffering the consequences of that.

Mr. Brandon Tucker said that since 2000 there is a \$420 million gap between the federal and the state on this cost share program, not including what the state has spent on land acquisition. They are thankful for the \$107 million but it would be great to receive full funding at the \$200 million level. Mr. R.D. James said they are operating one of the largest budgets they have had and urged them to “make hay while the sun shines”. Ms. Susan Combs suggested that it would be helpful to humanize and localize a project by saying what the project does for the people in the area.

Ms. Susan Combs and Mr. R.D. James apologized for leaving the meeting early for a meeting up on the Hill. Mr. Drew Bartlett chaired the remainder of the meeting.

South Florida Water Management District Program and Project Update

Ms. Megan Jacoby provided a presentation on those projects the SFWMD and the State of Florida have that will help improve the quantity, quality, and timing of water to South Florida. The Stormwater Treatment Areas (STAs) are man-made wetlands that help clean the water as a flow-through system before it goes south. They are composed of different types of vegetation that take up different amounts of phosphorus. In the last water year almost 57,000 acres of STAs cleaned up the phosphorus, doing better than the water quality standards. As projects have started to come online the phosphorus output has gotten lower. In 2017 they had excessive rainfall, equivalent to the amount of water they got in 1947 which precipitated the C&SF Project. Even though they are doing well, more work needs to be done. The Restoration Strategies Program is a state-funded \$880 million program that will create new STAs and additional water storage features through construction of flow equalization basins (FEBs). At the end of Restoration Strategies, the state will have spent over \$3 billion for water quality treatment. Status updates were also provided on the C-43 and C-44 Reservoirs, Biscayne Bay Coastal Wetlands (BBCW) and C-111 South Dade projects.

Mr. Ernie Marks added that the SFWMD has been doing a lot of great things with support from the Legislature, Governor Scott and their partners. When they are done with Restoration Strategies they will have spent over \$3 billion in addition to about \$2 billion on CERP between land acquisition and construction. That is not including the work they are doing in the Northern Everglades. Mr. Kevin Ruane said that given the ongoing water quality issues in the Caloosahatchee, there have been many discussions about an STA component for the C-43, and he challenged everyone to seeing it happen.

Public Comment

Ms. Irela Bague (Miami-Dade County stakeholders) noted she is a longtime advocate of Biscayne Bay and provided comments in support of the Biscayne Bay Coastal Wetlands (BBCW) project. Biscayne Bay is an essential part of Miami-Dade County's economy whose GDP is well over \$100 billion a year. It is also the largest ad valorem contributor to the SFWMD's budget of any county within the 16-county region. Their income is largely based on real estate, tourism, and trade, all of which depend on a healthy Biscayne Bay ecosystem. She thanked the SFWMD and the Corps for the progress made on the project to date. However, Biscayne Bay continues to decline. The State of Florida appropriated \$1.5 million in the Senate Supplemental funding in 2017 and the SFWMD was instructed to commence planning efforts for Phase 2. This project has now been moved back on the IDS from 2019 to 2021. She asked the

state and federal governments to find a way to work with Miami-Dade County to expedite and start the Phase 2 planning process during FY19.

Ms. Julie Hill Gabriel (Audubon) said that although they have a lot of challenges ahead, the take-away should be that this has been a successful program because of the partnerships. They have an incredibly strong financial partner in the State of Florida and the SFWMD. Audubon started because of the plume hunting in the Everglades which resulted in the wading bird population plummeting. The draining of the Everglades worked, and the system is doing what it was designed to do. It is important to figure out how the restoration program can reverse some of the impacts. In 1938, Audubon was given authority over the 110,000 – 150,000 acres of marshes in Lake Okeechobee and the lake remains near and dear to Audubon. While it is great that they have the HHD funding, that is not an ecosystem restoration project. She urged them to build on the HHD funding momentum for the rest of CERP and the other restoration projects.

Commissioner Doug Smith (Martin County) stated they are working on several issues to include the Florida Reef Tract which is dying at an accelerated rate. The unprecedented disease is affecting 23 out of 45 species and they have lost 50% of the coral reef. Projects such as the C-23 and C-24 need to keep moving forward. At the National Association of Counties (NACo) Conference they were successful in passing a resolution supporting the reauthorization of the Coral Reef Act. He asked the TF to assist in making sure the Coral Reef Act is passed this year.

Ms. Sarah Barmeyer (National Parks Conservation Association) noted she coordinates a variety of conservation issues across the country but much of her work focuses on restoring America's Everglades. The impacts from Hurricane Irma are evident with the destruction of national park infrastructure and with their ability to move water. The key to recovery from that blue-green toxic algae that is now plaguing the coastal estuaries is returning freshwater flow south by completing the CERP projects that are currently under construction as well as those that are being planned. NPCA is pleased with projects spearheaded by the National Park Service such as Modified Water Deliveries (MWDs) and Tamiami Trail bridging as well as the Corps' CERP projects that are underway. They are also pleased with the movement of the Post Authorization Change Report (PACR) and hope it gets included in WRDA. The need for federal funding cannot be understated and they need to start seeing stronger budgets coming from OMB.

Mr. John Heim (South Florida Clean Water Movement) stated his group works on the East and West Coasts of Florida demanding clean water as a basic human right. They are dealing with the ramifications of the harmful toxic blue-green algae. While they are appreciative of CERP, CEPP and the Reservoir South project, the miles of blue-green algae down the Caloosahatchee River and in their canals spell mismanagement. He urged the state and federal governments to work together and fix this ecological disaster from turning into an economic disaster. He invited the TF members to come down and see the problem firsthand. He applauded Mayor Ruane, Congressman Mast and Congressman Rooney for their efforts.

Central Everglades Planning Project (CEPP) Post Authorization Change Report Update

Ms. Eva Velez reminded everyone that CEPP was authorized in the 2016 Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation (WIIN) Act. CEPP provides for the first increment of restoration

in the central Everglades by reducing some of the damaging discharges to the Northern Estuaries. Senate Bill 10 was passed in May 2017 and directed the SFWMD to modify CEPP and expedite the design and construction of a water storage reservoir with storage capacity of at least 240,000 acre-feet in the Everglades Agricultural Area (EAA) along with the necessary water quality treatment and conveyance features. Because of the strict timelines of Senate Bill 10 they used the authority given to them in Section 203 of WRDA 1986. This feasibility study provides the last increment of storage and necessary treatment to meet the goal of CERP. It continues to improve the quantity, quality, timing and distribution of water flows to the Northern Estuaries and central Everglades. It will be consistent with the federal program and policy requirements to maintain eligibility for the federal cost share. This project, along with the other authorized projects, will provide a 55% reduction in discharge volumes and a 63% reduction in the number of harmful discharge events to the Northern Estuaries from Lake Okeechobee. This will get them close to the 80% reduction goal of CERP. The Assistant Secretary of the Army (ASA) for Civil Works determined the project was feasible. They are the first non-federal sponsor in the nation to receive a feasibility determination under that authority. OMB completed its review and the ASA Civil Works submitted it to Congress in July.

Tamiami Trail Next Steps, Phase 2

Mr. Pedro Ramos provided some introductory remarks noting that the Tamiami Trail project is a cornerstone project and critically important to Everglades restoration because it will make that road invisible to the flow of water they want to bring south into the Park and ultimately to Florida Bay. The NPS completed an EIS several years ago that envisioned more bridging beyond the two bridges they are about to complete in partnership with the state of Florida. The NPS and its partners now believe they may be able to pull this project off with no additional bridging and more road reconstruction. They believe they can do it faster and get the resource benefits out of the project while possibly saving \$100 million.

Mr. Bob Johnson provided a presentation reminding everyone that Tamiami Trail is at the southern end of the WCAs and connects the cities of Tampa and Miami. He reviewed the history of how the original road was built and how it serves as an impediment to surface water flows. The Corps moved forward with the Modified Water Deliveries (MWDs) project and added the 1-mile bridge on the eastern side and partially raised the rest of the 10.7-mile roadway. MWDs restores hydrologic conditions in Everglades National Park. The Tamiami Trail Next Steps Phase 1 project, which is currently ahead of schedule, began in 2016 and includes 2.1 miles of additional bridging on the western side and adjacent roadway reconstruction. Since this project was started, circumstances have changed due to CEPP. Tamiami Trail Next Steps Phase 2 will add additional conveyance and raise the road while working around the existing infrastructure (two camps of the Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida, three commercial airboat facilities, two commercial radio towers and the original Florida Power and Light transmission corridor). They now believe that the addition of more bridges will not help them move additional flow. Phase 2 recommends raising roughly one mile to the west, one mile to the east and 4.5 miles in the middle to make it compatible with high water conditions. The preliminary gross cost estimate for Phase 2 is approximately \$100 million between the Federal Highway Administration and the Florida Department of Transportation. They will have a modern road with a wide paved

shoulder for emergencies and two dedicated lanes that could be used for evacuations during hurricanes. They got the approval to proceed from the NPS Director. Next steps include going through the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) revision of their original recommendation and looking for funding opportunities. The cost is currently broken down at roughly 60% federal and 40% state with the total cost being approximately \$100 million. Raising the road and timing of the expansion of the S-333 structure is critically important and they have optimistically put it in the IDS for completion by 2021. Mr. Johnson added that their goal is to move as much water south through the eastern flow path when the water levels are high. If they can create enough capacity on the eastern side, the seasonal closures will be less significant.

There was member discussion regarding the importance of removing other features such as Old Tamiami Trail and getting the water south for the benefit of the wildlife and those users whose public access in the WCAs has been restricted as a conservation measure to protect the wildlife.

Integrated Delivery Schedule (IDS)

Ms. Karen Smith provided a presentation noting that the last formally vetted IDS was presented in December 2016 at the last TF meeting. The Corps, the State of Florida, the SFWMD and the DOI have all provided input to this most recent update. The CERP feasibility study contained an implementation plan that showed sequencing implementation of projects over 35 plus years. It was based on a \$400 million a year investment, \$200 million federal and \$200 million non-federal. The Programmatic Regulations required a Master Implementation Sequencing Plan (MISP) be developed, which would maximize achievement of the goals and benefits. Because of the MISP, the IDS was developed in 2008. The IDS provides a schedule and sequencing plan for achieving restoration benefits as soon as possible consistent with state and federal authorizations and funding. It is a tool to provide guidance to decision-makers for scheduling, staffing and budgeting. It is a living document and requires regular updates in consultation with the TF. The process for updating the IDS was reviewed. The budgets and workplans were reviewed for both the South Florida Ecosystem Restoration program as well as other related efforts that are funded through other program authorities or entities.

Members were provided with a copy of the current 11x17 IDS placemat showing what changes have been made since 2016. The projects highlighted in blue are the non-CERP Foundation Projects, projects highlighted in green are the CERP Generation 1 projects, those in purple are the CERP Generation 2 projects, and orange are the CEPP projects authorized in WRDA 2016. Projects in white are in the planning phase. The Lake Okeechobee Regulations Schedule (LORS) revision is also included in the IDS but is funded from the O&M out of the C&SF flood risk management budget line item. They received \$250,000 from headquarters to initiate a project management plan for LORS but it is not represented in the FY19 President's Budget.

Mr. Marks highlighted the fact that they have expedited certain features but those features are also dependent on other features, so as they move forward they are looking at things like seepage walls in south Miami-Dade County, protecting our neighbors while getting the environmental benefits that they need to get. He believes there is a request from Senator Rubio's office and the SFWMD in their letter to the Corps had talked about certain things that would be appropriated

out of the supplemental bill that could be used for flood protection issues. They need to take a hard look at going forward and make sure they try to align them as such, that when these features are completed we can take advantage of them immediately.

Mr. Valenstein noted the State now has dedicated funding for Everglades restoration and asked if there was a way, on the IDS, to show what it would look like if they had the \$200 million from the federal agencies each year. Ms. Smith said that they could develop several iterations.

National Academies Report Update

Ms. Stephanie Johnson reviewed the history of the Committee on Independent Scientific Review of Everglades Restoration Progress (CISRERP) as well as the history of the National Academy of Sciences (NAS), an independent nongovernmental organization that has been around for over 150 years and chartered by the government to provide independent scientific advice to the nation. WRDA 2000 mandates an independent scientific review of CERP's progress towards achieving the natural system's restoration goals by a body such as the NAS. The NAS works under five-year contracts with the Corps, but the study is co-funded by Interior and the SFWMD. Under this study they work with the agencies and Hill staff to develop the charge questions that guide these committees. They are to produce a biennial report that looks at the measures of progress. In each biennial report, the Committee must assess the progress of restoring the natural system, discuss the significant accomplishments of restoration, discuss and evaluate specific scientific and engineering issues and review the monitoring and assessment protocols used to evaluate CERP progress. The Committee has published six reports and the seventh report is due out later this year. In addition to doing the basic charge questions of assessing progress, they discussed some topical areas in each of the reports such as Lake Okeechobee in 2008 and climate change in 2014. Ms. Johnson acknowledged the hard work of the committee which was chaired by Mr. Bill Boggess from Oregon State and reviewed the 2018 report process. She did not go into the findings of the report because they are currently in the review process and have set the tentative date of release for October 17th.

General Public Comment

Mr. Tom Van Lent (Everglades Foundation) said that first, there is a real tragedy unfolding in the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee estuaries and it is extremely important to make progress on addressing the fixes. They have been pushed to the brink of a recession in Southwest Florida. They appreciate the Chair's offer to use the authority that Congress gave this body to set up a forum to talk about this down in south Florida. Secondly, he echoed the comments about the importance of a federal financial commitment. The lack of federal funding is causing changes and slippage in the IDS. They will be looking to the Administration to demonstrate their commitment to Everglades restoration and see full Everglades funding of \$200 million reflected in the President's Budget. He thanked the TF for its renewed commitment to Everglades restoration.

Assignments, Next Steps and Closing Comments

Mr. Drew Bartlett reminded the members that the draft reports will be coming out in the next few months. A TF meeting will be scheduled in late 2018 or early 2019 in South Florida, depending

on everyone's availability. They also talked about having a "what if" scenario on the IDS and what it could look like with dedicated funding at the federal level. They will also talk about the management of Lake Okeechobee in the next 2 ½ weeks.

Mr. Marks recognized COL Kirk, who was enjoying some well-deserved time off and not in attendance, who will be moving out of his position at the end of August. Over the past three years, he has worked by the SFWMD's side. He asked that his folks carry the message back to him that the TF wishes him the best in his new adventures.

Ms. Nicole LeBoeuf said she listened and heard of opportunities throughout the day to enhance what NOAA is doing on and for this TF. While she lost track of how many times algae blooms were mentioned, she would have loved to have heard more about the devastating disease event in south Florida's coral reef tract. As a member of the Coral Reef Task Force they are developing a response to the coral reef issue. She looked forward to working with this TF to figure out how NOAA could provide its expertise.

Mr. Wood thanked everyone on behalf of the DOJ for their dedication. He recognized his colleagues Ms. Judy Coleman, Mr. Steve Bartell and Mr. Mark Brown who work on these issues. DOJ recently completed the acquisition of three parcels within ENP, enabling the Park service to promote ongoing conservation efforts while preserving commercial operations. They continue to defend the Clean Water Act and the Endangered Species Act permits for state and local projects and they continue to support the effort of the technical oversight committee on that important work. Today's conversations have reinforced several important principles that first, they should maintain a laser focus on the commitment to restoration and protection of the Everglades. Second, they should continue to stay in close consultation with all stakeholders. Cooperation rather than conflict will help them do more for the betterment of the environment in south Florida. Third, they must remain committed to science, ensuring that decisions made are based on good technical data. Finally, tremendous progress is being made because of the commitment of time and resources by so many.

Mr. Critchfield thanked the TF, Mr. Bartlett for filling in for Ms. Combs and the OERI staff. He recognized the outdoor recreation community and the environmental groups who showed up to this meeting in support of this effort adding that the Department recognizes that connection is conservation. Secretary Zinke visited south Florida last fall and gave his assurance that Everglades Restoration is a priority for him and the Trump Administration. Two of Secretary Zinke's top departmental priorities are to strike a regulatory balance and modernize the infrastructure. These are two critical areas where they can make strides to restore the ecosystem. Mr. Pedro Ramos said they should remember Ms. Combs' suggestion about humanizing or localizing this and remember that this is about people. He encouraged everyone to do something about it in their respective roles. Mr. Valenstein said he hoped that every time they met they could celebrate the completion of at least one project. Mr. Bartlett thanked everyone for joining them at this TF meeting and for sharing their thoughts and presenting information. They have challenges ahead, a lot to celebrate, but should keep making progress.

Meeting adjourned.

Briefing Book

1. Administrative Items
 - Agenda
 - Final Minutes, December 2016 meeting
2. Task Force Member Introductions
 - Task Force Membership Roster
 - Task Force Member Bios
 - Task Force Charter
 - Vice Chair Protocol
 - Voting Protocols
3. WG and SCG Leadership Appointments and Updates
 - Power Point Presentation
 - Working Group Membership Roster
 - Working Group Charter
 - Science Coordination Group Membership Roster
 - Science Coordination Group Charter
4. 2018 Reporting Requirements
 - Strategy, Biennial Report and Integrated Financial Plan
 - System-wide Ecological Indicators
5. Lake Okeechobee: Herbert Hoover Dike Construction/Water Management
6. Corps Program and Project Update
7. South Florida Water Management Program and Project Update
8. Central Everglades Planning Project (CEPP) – Post Authorization Change Report Update
9. Tamiami Trail Next Steps, Phase 2 Update
10. Integrated Delivery Schedule (IDS) Update
 - Power Point Presentation
 - IDS Placemat
11. National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine Report Update
12. Additional Information
 - WRDA 1996 excerpt