

*DRAFT Meeting Summary  
South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force  
ZOOM Meeting  
October 22, 2020*

**1. Welcome, Goals for the Meeting and Administrative Items**

Dr. Timothy Petty, Task Force (TF) Chair, called the meeting to order at 9:00 AM. He congratulated Mr. Ryan Fisher and COL Andrew Kelly for a successful event at Tamiami Trail the prior day. He also noted many of the TF members spent three days out in the resources with federal members of the Water Sub Cabinet. Ms. Allyn Childress (OERI) provided some technical instructions for the ZOOM platform.

Mr. Noah Valenstein, TF Vice Chair, said he appreciated the field trips over the last couple of days. He was reminded of the Tribe's comments during the field trips to never let Everglades restoration simply be about infrastructure and to remember the ecosystem and people who live there. He noted the tremendous talent working on Everglades restoration from all the agencies. Regarding discharges, he appreciated those that took the time to come and get a first-hand look at the impacts the releases have on our communities. During the tours, they highlighted the progress that has been made and the progress that will continue because of stakeholders working together. There has been record funding from the federal and state administrations as well as the formation of the Water Sub Cabinet by the Trump Administration.

COL Andrew Kelly, regarding releases out of Lake Okeechobee, reported that they will be continuing what they started last Wednesday for at least another week, at which time they will re-assess. The USACE will continue the release schedule of 4,000 csf out of the Caloosahatchee and 1,800 csf out the S-80. They missed their target out of the St. Lucie, operators were conservative due to the king tides and they did not push out as much as they were anticipating. The algae situation on Lake Okeechobee is looking good. The USACE got approval for a deviation which allows them to release water when there is low algae risk.

Dr. Petty welcomed Ms. Mary Neumeier Chair of CEQ, an attendee on the ZOOM call. Dr. Petty acknowledged receipt of the letter from Secretary Valenstein appointing Dr. Wesley Brooks and Jason Watts to the Working Group and Dr. Thomas Frazer to the Science Coordination Group.

Mr. Adam Gelber reported on the passing of retired COL Terry Rice on September 30<sup>th</sup>.

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:

*Timothy Petty, Task Force Chair and Assistant Secretary for Water and Science, U.S. Department of the Interior*

*Noah Valenstein, Task Force Vice Chair and Secretary, Florida Department of Environmental Protection*

*Ron Bergeron Sr., Governing Board Member, South Florida Water Management District*

*Michael Bushbacker for Jeff Clark, Acting Assistant Attorney General, Environment and Natural Resources Division (ENRD), U.S. Department of Justice*

*Carrie Castille for Bill Northey, Under Secretary for Farm Production and Conservation, U.S. Department of Agriculture*

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

*Ryan Fisher, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for R.D. James, Assistant Secretary of the Army – Civil Works*

*Nicole LeBoeuf, Acting Assistant Administrator for NOAA's National Ocean Service, U.S. Department of Commerce*

*April Marchese for Joel Szabat, Acting Under Secretary for Policy, U.S. Department of Transportation*

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

*David Ross for Henry Darwin, Acting Deputy Administrator, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency*

*Kevin Ruane, City of Sanibel*

*Ed Smith, Director, Office of Water Policy and Ecosystem Restoration, Florida Department of Environmental Protection*

*Eric Sutton, Special Advisor and Executive Director, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission*

### **3. Approval of Meeting Minutes**

The draft minutes from the May 2020 TF meeting were presented for approval. Mr. Kevin Ruane made a motion to approve which was seconded by Mr. Ron Bergeron. There was no discussion, and the minutes were approved as presented.

### **4. Director's Report**

Mr. Gelber reported on those activities his office along with the WG an SCG have been working on for this Task Force, to include:

- Everglades Restoration Website - OERI has been working to upgrade the website to ensure it is user friendly and compatible with mobile devices. A live demo of Evergladesrestoration.gov was provided.
- Invasive Exotic Species – five documents (Strategic Action Framework, Case Studies, Priorities, Progress Report and 2019 Invasive Exotic Species Snapshot Budget) have been updated and are posted on Evergladesrestoration.gov
- Approval of Task Force Biennial Report - This report responds to the biennial reporting requirement as specified in WRDA 1996. The report is prepared by the OERI with information from the WG and SCG members. The report covers the timeframe from July 1, 2018 – June 30, 2020 and was unanimously accepted by the WG at their September 2020 meeting. Task Force approval is needed at this meeting. The Biennial Report will then go to OMB and DOI for clearance. Once clearance is received, the report will be transmitted to Congress.

Dr. Petty asked the members for approval, there were no objections, and the report was unanimously approved by the Task Force.

### **5. Integrated Delivery Schedule (IDS) Consultation**

Ms. Eva Velez provided an in-depth review of the projects included in the final 2020 IDS. The IDS is a forward-looking snapshot of upcoming planning, design and construction schedules and programmatic costs at a “top” line level for the South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Program – including Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP), Modified Water Deliveries to Everglades National Park (Mod Waters), the Critical Projects Program, Kissimmee River Restoration, and non-CERP Central and Southern Florida (C&SF) projects over the next 10 years. There are also five planning studies: Loxahatchee River Watershed Restoration Project (LRWRP); Lake Okeechobee Watershed Restoration

Project (LOWRP); Western Everglades Restoration Project (WERP); Biscayne Bay Southeastern Everglades Ecosystem Restoration (BBSEER); and the Southern Everglades Project that are on the current IDS. The estimate for total SFER construction from 2020 – 2030 is approximately \$7.4 billion. The IDS does not require agency action and is not a decision document. It is intended to be a tool to help decision-makers. It is a living document that is updated as needed to reflect progress and/or program changes. The IDS synchronizes program and project priorities with the State of Florida and achieves the CERP restoration objectives at the earliest practicable time, consistent with funding constraints and the interdependencies between project components. Water Resources Development Act (WRDAs) along with planning studies keep the program moving forward. The briefing also included a review of the System Operating Manual, the critical last step in getting the water right and achieving maximum system-wide benefits and the Report Card included in the 2019 System Status Report which illustrates progress in achieving the ecological goals in each Restoration, Coordination and Verification (RECOVER) region, and on a system-wide basis. Restoration of the Everglades, as envisioned in the CERP, is the best defense against the adverse effects of sea level rise and climate change and the best hope for a resilient Everglades ecosystem that can adapt to those future changes. In addition, an inventory was provided on the CERP components in the Yellow Book that were authorized by Congress in 2000 and continues to be their roadmap.

#### **6. 2020 Report to Congress (RTC) Consultation**

Ms. Eva Velez reminded the members that the 2020 Report to Congress on the CERP is the fourth in a series of periodic reports to fulfill the requirements of the WRDA of 2000 and the CERP Programmatic Regulations. This report provides an update on the progress of CERP over the five-year reporting period from July 1, 2015 through June 30, 2020, as well as activities that are planned for the next five years. The theme for the report is Building on Historic Momentum and the reporting period saw construction starts, project completions, accelerated planning efforts and record-breaking new investments. Their message is to keep the WRDAs coming which are needed to continue making progress. The USACE and the partners have collectively invested approximately \$1.3 billion in funding, in combined contributions from the federal and state partners over the past 5 fiscal years. CERP is cost shared 50/50 by the USACE and the SFWMD and they have cumulatively invested approximately \$3.23 billion through fiscal year 2019. The updated cost estimate for CERP is \$23.158 billion primarily due to new project authorizations. Non-CERP milestones with the C-111 South Dade, Modified Water Deliveries and Tamiami Trail next steps have led to the new Combined Operational Plan (COP) that is the foundation for moving more water across Tamiami Trail and ensures Central Everglades Planning Project (CEPP) South will be successful.

In last 5 years, events that profoundly impacted the Everglades system including seagrass die-off in Florida Bay, harmful algal blooms in the St. Lucie River and Estuary, and Hurricane Irma have occurred. These are challenges that a healthy and restored ecosystem will be better able to weather in the future and they underscore the need for continued support for current and future CERP projects. Investments in the South Florida Ecosystem Restoration program provides improved flexibility in operations of the C&SF system. While 2017 was challenging in terms of rainfall, it set conditions for a historic 2018 wading bird nesting season. This was a glimpse of what they hope to see when CERP is implemented. RECOVER is a multi-agency team of scientists who organize and apply scientific and technical information essential in supporting the objectives of the CERP. RECOVER helps them understand the state of the system. Additional information is available at: [www.evergladesecohealth.org](http://www.evergladesecohealth.org) . The positions of the Tribes are included in the report verbatim as provided by the Tribal staff. Consultation and coordination with the Tribes is ongoing. Public engagement begins today and will be ongoing. The determination letters from

EPA and Interior have been completed. The letters from the Army and the State of Florida are in progress. The final report will go to Congress in December 2020.

Dr. Petty noted the strides that have been made when compared to the 2015 report.

### **Public Comment**

Ms. Cara Capp (NPCA) congratulated the USACE, SFWMD and the other partners on the groundbreaking for CEPP South. ENP is in desperate need of more water and the situation is still dire. The northern estuaries are now bracing for another round of polluted discharges from Lake Okeechobee. Given the IDS presentation, she is optimistic in seeing that they are ready to build on several fronts. Past funding amounts will not get them there. The state and federal governments should work together to ensure that every dollar the USACE is able to spend, they must spend. Anything less than that full IDS funding means they are leaving progress on the table. Florida needs this investment. Not only are they restoring their ecosystem but they are bringing much needed jobs. In a post COVID recovery situation, people can get great jobs restoring the Everglades. She hoped the Task Force would take away the sense of urgency and opportunity and take back the message that it is time for bold investments.

Ms. Anna Upton (The Everglades Foundation) said she did not want to take away from the progress that has been highlighted but noted her frustration with the lack of progress on the EAA Reservoir. The President and the Governor have delivered historic budget recommendations to expedite the EAA Reservoir project and the USACE has fumbled the ball. Congress gave the USACE 90 days to deliver a report and it is now 640 days late. The USACE is now saying that it needs a new start designation to begin. She asked Mr. Fisher to help them resolve this issue.

Ms. Irela Bague served on the Governing Board during the start of many of these projects and she was pleased to see the significant progress that has been made on the Biscayne Bay Coastal Wetlands (BBCW) Phase 1 project and finally starting the planning process for Phase 2, now named BBSEER. She thanked the USACE, SFWMD and the TF for working so hard to make this happen. NOAA published a study last year that revealed Biscayne Bay is at a tipping point for irreversible ecological collapse. The bay has experienced seagrass die off, algal blooms, hyper salinity and most recently, an unprecedented fish kill. Biscayne Bay is an essential part of Miami Dade County's economy. A large part of the prosperity comes from property values, trade, tourism, fishing and recreation, all of which depends on a healthy bay ecosystem. She thanked the Task Force for hosting the Biscayne Bay and Southeastern Everglades Restoration Project (BBSEER) workshop so that the stakeholders and public can be better educated on the planning process.

Mr. Tom MacVicar (Water Resource Engineer) noted he has been working on the Everglades/Lake Okeechobee watershed for the last 42 years. Most of his clients are in agriculture and this kind of weather is not good for them. Those that grow vegetables in south Florida must have their green beans and lettuce on store shelves the week of Thanksgiving or the marketing opportunity will pass them by. He noted the SFWMD and the USACE are doing everything they can. The CEPP structures that the USACE broke ground on the prior day can't fully function until the new S-356 pump station is built and online. The USACE is aware and is accelerating the design of that pump station. The date when the pump station is operational is when they will get a return on their investment. The 8.5 square mile area is an impediment to COP and CEPP and they won't get the expected benefits until they resolve the 8.5 SMA problem.

Mr. Mike Elfenbein (resident) said it was an honor and a privilege to share the western Everglades with those Task Force members that participated in the field trips. He said that his experience with the USACE and this Task Force is that they are laser focused on solving these problems. Agriculture is part

of the solution and not part of the problem. He hoped they could find additional sources of funding and thanked the Task Force for their dedication and effort.

Ms. Nyla Pipes (One Florida Foundation) said they all work together on the IDS to meet the needs of all the stakeholders. Every time they talk about Everglades restoration, there is sticker shock. As far as the prioritization of the projects there were some comments made about the most important Everglades restoration project. The bottom line is that they are all important, projects to the north, IRL South and LOWRP. She encouraged them not to say one project is more important than another as it alienates others and can jeopardize funding.

Ms. Paola Ferreira (Tropical Audubon Society) applauded the progress on BBCW and are eager to see the benefits to Biscayne Bay. They urge the USACE to reconsider how it is managing the discharges from Lake Okeechobee. She echoed Ms. Capp's comments regarding the importance of funding.

Mr. Newton Cook (United Water Fowlers of Florida) said that all these projects, when done, will not provide a single gallon of water going to ENP under Tamiami Trail for nine months out of the year due to single species management for Cape Sable Seaside Sparrow (CSSS). USFWS must enforce the law and water will be restricted from flowing for nine months out of the year to protect the CSSS. Until that situation is resolved, none of the billions of dollars they have spent will do anything to prevent discharges out the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee estuaries.

#### **7. SFWMD Program and Project Update**

Ms. Megan Jacoby noted Everglades restoration has been moving forward despite the pandemic. She provided an overview of the state and federal projects that are currently underway. Efforts are ongoing throughout the SFWMD's 16 county boundary and there is tremendous momentum for Everglades restoration. Governor DeSantis' Executive Order 19-12 directed the state to achieve more now for Florida's environment with a focus on water quality, quantity, and supply improvement. The state Legislature is in full support of Everglades restoration and has appropriated \$370 million in FY20 and \$368 million in FY21. The SFWMD along with FDEP are focusing on increasing storage, treatment, and operational flexibility. They have also increased their monitoring station networks and increased their focus on pollution studies, coastal resiliency, and exotic species control. Update included a review of the LOWRP, C-43 Reservoir, C-44 Reservoir and STA, Everglades Agricultural Area (EAA) reservoir and STA, and the Restoration Strategies program.

Mr. Ronnie Bergeron stated that all the projects to complete Everglades restoration are important. He reviewed the historical flow of water and noted the importance of getting water to Florida Bay. He complimented the Task Force and the partners for all that has been accomplished with Everglades restoration. It is important to understand what the missing links are and to work to resolve the remaining issues such as with the 8 ½ square mile area and the S-12s.

#### **8. USACE Program and Project Update**

Mr. Howie Gonzales provided a presentation with a focus on FY20 execution. They currently have projects in all phases of development (planning, design and construction and operations). The FY21 budget includes \$333 million for construction which includes \$83 million carried over from FY20. For operations and maintenance, they have \$10.052 million. He reviewed those projects currently in the planning phase to include the LRWRP, C-43 West Basin Storage Reservoir, LOWRP and BBSEER. He reviewed the seven projects that are currently under design and construction to include the Kissimmee River Restoration (KRR), C-111 South Dade, Picayune Strand Restoration Project, Indian River Lagoon

South (IRL-S), C-44 Reservoir/STA, BBCW, CEPP, and the EAA Reservoir. The COP for Mod Waters is complete and the record of decision was signed on August 28, 2020. The goals, objectives and schedule for the Lake Okeechobee System Operating Manual were reviewed. The operating manual will be completed in October 2022.

## **9. Report on WG and SCG Activities**

Mr. James Erskine, WG Chair, reported that Dr. Wesley Brooks from FDEP and Mr. Jason Watts from FDOT will serve on the SCG and WG, respectively. Since the last Task Force meeting there have been two joint WG and SCG meetings as well as one sponsored workshop. The meetings and workshop were facilitated by OERI and conducted via ZOOM. They have received positive feedback on the ZOOM platform, specifically on the ease with which stakeholders and members of the public can provide comments. The WG worked on the Task Force's Biennial Report, 2020 Report to Congress, IDS, and invasive exotic species. The IDS workshop was designed to facilitate a two-way dialogue between the public and agency staff, provide planning and technical information to the public and add value to the public and agencies involved in Everglades restoration. For the IDS, there were 168 attendees as well as panelists representing the USACE, SFWMD, DOI and FWC to provide information and answer questions.

Mr. Bob Johnson, SCG Chair, reported that there will be an increased level of coordination with the SCG and the RECOVER, the interagency science arm of CERP. RECOVER is currently going through a five-year program update to make sure they have a robust monitoring and assessment program to track restoration progress. RECOVER had a 40% reduction in funding for CERP science. Given the amount of infrastructure they have invested in, they want to make sure they can cover the cost of evaluations for these new projects that are coming online. There will be standing updates by the RECOVER team that will include Everglades ecosystem condition assessments and restoration progress. This is an opportunity to evaluate the return on their investments. There will also be a review of system-wide ecological indicators to re-assess their effectiveness. These indicators are the science part of the Biennial Report to Congress and originally established in 2009. The National Academy of Science established the Committee on Independent Scientific Review of Everglades Restoration Progress (CISRERP), a congressionally mandated peer review of CERP's progress. CISRERP is in its eighth cycle of review. CISRERP's charge is to assess restoration progress, evaluate specific scientific or engineering issues which may impact or limit progress and to review the monitoring and assessment protocols that are used to track restoration success. Three organizations, USACE, SFWMD and DOI, jointly fund this effort. The CISRERP report is delayed due to a contractual issue which is being resolved.

### **Public Comment**

Mr. Chris Davidson (Sanibel hotel owner) thanked them for maintaining the lower lake levels before the wet season this year. The reduction in discharges has seen less harmful effects. He commended the progress that has been made to move water south without using taxpayer dollars to implement new projects.

Mr. Michael Collins (former Task Force member) noted he worked on the Yellow Book and served over a decade as a member of this Task Force. He commended the staff and members for putting together the field trips earlier that week. COL Rice was an inspirational leader and one of army of people who have devoted their time and lives to this project. There is more going on now than there ever has been. He reminded everyone that the agreement was that the existing legal users would not have their water taken away from them in this process. He is increasingly hearing more and more people suggest that this agreement be kicked to the side which could impact six million people living south of Lake Okeechobee.

Ms. Kellie Ralston (American Sport Fishing Association) said she appreciated the Water Sub Cabinet members as well as members of this Task Force for seeing the Everglades first-hand, meeting with the stakeholders and celebrating progress. This engagement shows the federal and state commitment to Everglades restoration that is critical for maintaining momentum. She thanked the Governor and the President for their leadership as well as the SFWMD, DEP, USACE, and TF for their support. She acknowledged the numbers in the IDS are daunting, but it is important to know what progress can be made when sufficient funding is available.

Ms. Almy Bartis (NPCA's Everglades and Climate Fellow) thanked the Task Force for their work on those projects that help enhance south Florida's climate resilience. She thanked NOAA and the other agencies for elevating the issues associated with sea level rise. South Florida is often noted as being ground zero for the impacts associated with climate change such as sea level rise, saltwater intrusion, increased intensity of storms and hurricanes, flooding, changing ocean conditions and extreme heat. Climate change threatens communities, livelihood and economies and poses harm to tourism, fisheries and agricultural economies that make up large portions of the state's GDP. Everglades restoration is one of many tools they can utilize to help Florida become more resilient to climate change. They know the Everglades is extremely sensitive to changes in water quantity and quality. While future rainfall projections for south Florida are uncertain, many scenarios predict less yearly rainfall. As the climate crisis unfolds it is more important than ever to ensure the completion of restoration projects and funding is secured in a timely manner. Florida's life support system, economy and quality of life depend on preserving and sustaining our natural resources over the long term

Mr. Newton Cook (SFWMD Recreational Public Forum) reminded the members that there are several million acres of public land open to recreation in south Florida. At this very moment there are tens of thousands of people recreating on these properties including anglers, hikers, bikers, bird watchers and stargazers. As a duck hunter, the STAs provide world class duck hunting and people come from all over the eastern US just to hunt ducks. People come from all over the world to fish on Lake Okeechobee. The FEB 1 is one of the best fishing locations in Florida today. All this hard work being done for restoration is also making a lot of good things available to the public for recreation. There is nothing that will make the public happier than to be able to recreate out there.

Ms. Anna Upton (Everglades Foundation) said she underscored Alligator Ron Bergeron's comments about the 8 ½ square mile area (SMA). During the groundbreaking of the S-333N the prior day, they could see the water flowing through the S-333 structure, but that structure is closed today. They need to stop constraining the L-29 canal because of 8 ½ SMA. They have spent over a billion dollars of taxpayer money on infrastructure that isn't being used properly. The water management strategies need to match the needs and demands of our 21<sup>st</sup> century economy. They need to do more to address the 8 ½ SMA so that they can achieve the full benefits of their investment. The Everglades Foundation stands ready to help.

Ms. Marisa Carrozzo (Conservancy of Southwest Florida) said she appreciated the attention brought to the harmful discharges to the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee estuaries that our communities are experiencing. They know by experience that these types of discharges have a ripple effect beyond the immediate harm to the estuaries. They have seen how they devastate the local communities and economies that rely on clean water year after year. She appreciated the comments by COL Kelly that the USACE will look at the discharges next week. They need to remain focused on investing in long term solutions and projects to send water south, reduce damaging discharges and develop lake operations that work with the projects. A major take-away from the updated IDS is how critical the next 6-7 years are for Everglades investment and implementation. Keeping those projects on track especially those that will be

sending water south are essential. During May 7<sup>th</sup> TF meeting there was a helpful graphic which showed how making the investment now will help save much more later. She suggested they update that graphic when they updated the IDS and include it in the Report to Congress.

Ms. Lisa Interlandi (Everglades Law Center) expressed her appreciation for the Task Force gathering and experiencing the Everglades in person. They appreciate all the work being done to move restoration forward. They appreciate the operational changes and the additional flexibility that the Corps has sought to implement over the past couple of years to help manage Lake Okeechobee levels. They are far from being able to declare victory on this problem and they won't be able to make progress until they get the EAA Reservoir project up and running. The EAA Reservoir was authorized in 2000 because of how critical it is. Here they are 20 years later, and they don't have any more time to waste. As they have heard with the IDS, they will need funding in magnitudes greater than they have seen in previous years.

Mr. Mark Perry (Florida Oceanographic) said this version of the IDS is very comprehensive. In implementing these big regional projects for Everglades restoration, it is important to understand the water control plans, and they are included in this update of the IDS. The operations of Lake Okeechobee can be designed in a way to better manage the water already in the system or coming into the system. They are wasting 1.7 billion gallons of freshwater a day to tide and destroying coastal habitats. They have 4.5 billion gallons of water going south from the EAA through the STAs into the WCAs which are already full and drowning tree islands. There is currently no water flowing south through S-354, S-351 and S-352. This Task Force can coordinate the recovery effort that is needed.

Mr. Chris Wittman (Captains for Clean Water) noted they are focused on restoring the Everglades and eliminating harmful discharges to our ecosystem which affect our economy and way of life. It is critical to focus on infrastructure projects such as EAA Reservoir, which is the heart of Everglades restoration. In the wet season, the capacity of STAs is taken up by run-off from the EAA. They need resources and funding on this project to have the tools needed to store water during the wet season and deliver it south during dry season. They also need to focus on management. He thanked the COL and the Corps for the work they did in 2019 during the dry season. They can move water south early in the dry season so that they have more capacity in Lake Okeechobee during the wet season. The status quo is unacceptable, one special interest group benefits from having unimpeded water supply and drainage while the rest of the system is either parched or inundated.

This past Spring the sugar industry and their advocates were screaming that there was not enough water in Lake Okeechobee while at the same time they were taking so much water out of the lake that the lake dropped 6 inches. The Everglades was on fire and during March and April, the EAA took over 70 billion gallons of water out of Lake Okeechobee. Not only are they battling bureaucracy, timelines and budgets but a well-funded misinformation confusion campaign perpetuated by that same special interest group, many of whom have spoken at this meeting today.

### **Assignments, Next Steps and Closing Comments**

Mr. Valenstein said he appreciates the Task Force gathering as a group and hearing from the public. They are proud of the work they are doing under Governor DeSantis and the Governor has committed \$2.5 billion over four years. Of that, \$20 million has gone to incentivizing innovative technologies over the past two years. The State is also working with the partners to expedite traditional infrastructure projects. They will be having a more coordinated approach working on water via the Water Sub Cabinet which not only brings value to Florida but will serve as a conduit for progress and success across the U.S. There have been several comments about resilience and the importance of Everglades restoration. He thanked



NOAA for pointing that out. He announced that Wes Brooks is on board and helping them with federal agencies.

Mr. Ron Bergeron thanked the Task Force for spending three days traveling through the Everglades. He said he was honored to be a part of this mission to save the beautiful Everglades. He thanked the Governor and the President for providing the ability to move forward. He has lived in the Everglades for three quarters of a century and said he hoped he could be of assistance. It is important to move the water south beyond Tamiami Trail all the way to Florida Bay. He looked forward to working with the USACE and SFWMD to remove these obstacles.

Mr. Ryan Fisher thanked everyone for their comments and announced that the CERP report is being signed and transmitted to Congress.

Mr. Gene Duncan thanked everyone for taking the time to come down to see the Everglades. He said he wished they could have climbed to the top of Lake Okeechobee so that they could see that it looks like an ocean up there. It is critical that they get Lake Okeechobee right. When the lake is too full and the conservation areas are flooded there are no options other than to blow it out the estuaries. They need to get the lake regulation schedule right and try to avoid discharging water unnecessarily. The reason they saw the tree island in the park and not in the conservation areas is because they are flooded. Thousands of small animals are dying because they need the tree islands to survive. One of the main reasons they can't move water south is that the gates on Tamiami Trail are closed for single species management. The new biological opinion is out and it removes the jeopardy for the Cape Sable Seaside Sparrow. It's time to embrace the idea of letting the water flow naturally the way it always had. He is glad they had the opportunity to see the beauty of the Everglades but reminded them that it is drowning.

Ms. Nicole LeBoeuf thanked the Chair for the fine execution of this meeting and to all the TF members for their dedication to these issues. She thanked Noah Valenstein for his comments on the ongoing work they are doing with NOAA on coastal resilience, and Adam Gelber and the OERI team for putting this virtual meeting together. Clear to her that the TF is making progress but still much more to be done. They at NOAA and Commerce are excited to do their part.

### **Next Steps and Closing Comments**

Mr. Gelber stated OERI will be facilitating a Task Force sponsored public workshop for BBSEER. Dr. Petty thanked everyone for their time and effort. He noted that President Trump signed an Executive Order establishing a Water Subcabinet on October 13, 2020. Five of the six Assistant Secretaries serving on the Water Subcabinet have traveled down to south Florida. They have had a great experience learning from people who live and work down here.

Meeting adjourned.

Handouts:

1. Administrative Items
2. Draft minutes, May 7, 2020
3. Director's Report presentation
4. Final Draft 2020 Biennial Report
5. Invasive Exotic Species
  - a. Strategic Action Framework
  - b. Case Studies
  - c. Priorities

- d. Progress
- e. 2019 Snapshot Budget
- 6. Integrated Delivery Schedule
  - a. Presentation
  - b. IDS Placemat
- 7. 2020 Report to Congress
- 8. SFWMD Program and Project Update
- 9. USACE Program and Project Update
- 10. Report on WG and SCG Activities