

An Overview of South Florida

Alterations to the Natural System

The South Florida ecosystem stretches from the northern Kissimmee River Basin and Lake Okeechobee south through the coral reefs adjacent to the Florida Keys, and from the Caloosahatchee River estuary located on the southwest coast to the St. Lucie River estuary on the east coast. The area is home to 5.8 million people and includes all or part of 16 counties. Included in the area are the tourist meccas (Disney World, etc.) south of Orlando; the Everglades Agricultural Area (EAA) south of Lake Okeechobee; small interior towns such as Pahokee, La Belle, and Belle Glade; and urban centers such as Fort Myers on the west coast and the highly urbanized cities on the east coast stretching from Fort Pierce in the northeast, through the Miami megalopolis, all the way through Key West. The South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) also uses the same geographical delineation for its domain of responsibilities. (See map, Figure 1)



Historically, the natural system was not conducive for intensive human habitation. Beginning in the 1800s, a number of private, State, and federal efforts drained parts of the Everglades and allowed for limited development in the region, primarily centered along the high coastal ridge paralleling the southeast coast. The coastal ridge lies roughly 10-20 feet above sea level and it provides a relatively safe haven from seasonal flooding events experienced in the remainder of the region. To provide for more development and agriculture, and in response to severe flooding from a series of hurricanes, Congress authorized the Central and Southern Florida Project (C&SF Project) in 1948, one of the largest drainage and flood control systems in the world. The C&SF Project now consists of a 1000-mile regional network of canals, levees, storage areas, and water control structures designed to provide reliable water supply and flood protection for existing and future development in

South Florida. It was originally designed to service approximately 2 million residents (U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, 1998).

To construct this drainage system, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) made major changes to the landscape beginning in the 1950s. By the 1960s, the impoundments surrounding Lake Okeechobee were completed to store water for urban and agricultural uses, as well as to prevent recurring flooding disasters similar to the ones in the 1920s (SFWMD, 1999).

Completed in 1971, the once meandering Kissimmee River was dredged and straightened to allow for maximum flow of water to Lake Okeechobee. Improvements were made to maximize water flows from Lake Okeechobee through the Caloosahatchee and St. Lucie Rivers. Canals, levees, and water control structures further allowed for the easy drainage of the land immediately below Lake Okeechobee and to the west of the coastal ridge on the southeast coast.

The delicate hydrological system of the Everglades was forever altered. Water historically meandered through the Kissimmee River and its flood plains, collected in Lake Okeechobee and spilled over its banks into the “River of Grass”, and flowed through the southern portion of the Everglades into Florida Bay and other estuaries. Today, that water flow is artificially regulated and controlled, altering the natural quality, quantity, timing, and distribution that once defined and supported the historical Everglades ecosystem. Over half of the original Everglades is lost to development and agriculture (GCSSF, 1995a). The remnant Everglades is in serious decline.

The ability of the C&SF Project to drain approximately 2 million acre feet of water per year is testament to the success and efficiency of the drainage system (GCSSF, 1995b). However, sending this enormous volume of water to tide, oftentimes in large pulses over an extended period, has seriously threatened the health of the region’s estuaries and bays. Generally, these water bodies now receive more water in the wet seasons and less water in the dry seasons than they historically received. Today salinity fluctuations resulting from these regulated water cycles and degraded water quality are fundamental threats to the vitality and health of these ecosystems.

With an average yearly rainfall of about 58 inches (GCSSF, 1995b), historical freshwater sheetflow resulted in a head pressure that created large freshwater plumes well offshore in Florida and Biscayne Bays. With much of that water now stored in Lake Okeechobee and redirected into the Caloosahatchee and St. Lucie estuaries, saltwater intrusion threatens many of the region's wellfields and water supplies. Further exacerbating the problem is the loss of lands necessary to recharge the aquifers and provide for a more historical sheetflow and water gradient (GCSSF, 1995b). Most of these lands have been developed or paved.

Changes in the Human Landscape

The success of the C&SF Project; the desirability of South Florida’s climate, geographical location; and economic opportunities are factors that have fueled the region’s population explosion. After 50 years of intensive development, the region suffers in many areas from suburban sprawl. The southeast coast has voraciously developed much of the lands west of the coastal ridge. Broward County, for example, has barely 4000 acres of undeveloped land available for either preservation or development. As development further encroaches inland, many of the resources necessary to support and maintain older urban areas are diverted to support new growth. Left behind, in many cases, are urban areas that remain in a state of disrepair. Oftentimes, these areas are littered with brownfields, sites that are contaminated or are perceived to be contaminated. Old infrastructure, a lack of financial incentives, and liability concerns prevent many of these areas from attracting developers and being revitalized. Many people feel the southwest coast is on the verge of making some of the same growth management “mistakes” as its southeast counterpart.

A fundamental component of Everglades ecosystem restoration is the redirection of a proportion of the new growth back into these overlooked communities and areas. On the

southeast coast, the Eastward Ho! movement aims to spur redevelopment of an urban corridor spanning much of Miami-Dade, Broward, Palm Beach, Martin, and St. Lucie Counties through a public/private partnership. While limited to the southeast coast, the philosophy of Eastward Ho!, the rejuvenation and revitalization of existing urban areas, is transferable to all urban areas in South Florida.

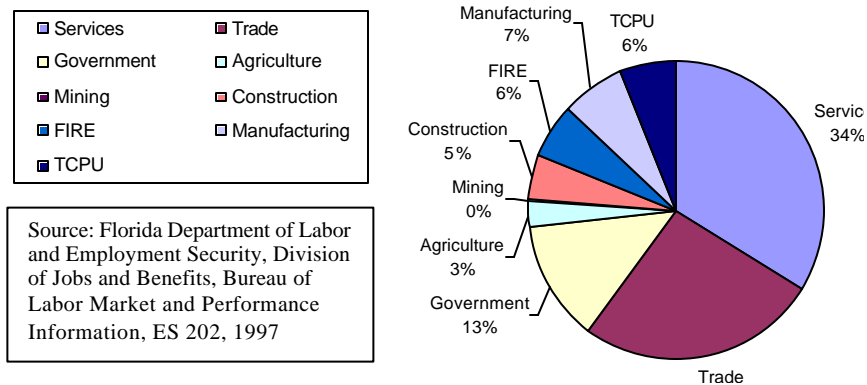
The Florida Department of Community Affairs (champion of the Eastward Ho! initiative) was authorized in 1996 by Section 163.3244, Florida Statutes, to designate up to five local governments as “Sustainable Communities”. The Sustainable Communities Program aims to promote enhanced planning efforts by rewarding communities that pursue balanced and harmonious economic growth, promote infill development and redevelopment, define urban development boundaries, and promote social progress and environmental protection. Legislation provided for regulatory and fiscal incentives for communities that achieve the above-stated goals. Earlier this year, Governor Jeb Bush initiated an urban revitalization effort called Front Porch Florida. This effort seeks to advance an urban policy that will release the power of local communities in Florida’s urban cores to rebuild their neighborhoods through a redevelopment process that is neighborhood-driven, asset-based, and focused on community relationships (Office of the Governor, 1999).

Today, there is a heightened awareness of the adverse impacts resulting from conversion of agricultural lands to developed lands, or the loss of open space for environmental preservation or recreation. Studies are beginning to supply information about the true costs associated with South Florida’s past and current growth patterns. For example, one recent report states that a growth management strategy that emphasizes compact growth rather than current sprawl patterns in the Eastward Ho! corridor would result in a \$6.16 billion savings to local and State governments over a 25 year period (Burchell, 1999).

Economic Trends/Employment

Traditionally, the economy of South Florida has been dominated by construction, agriculture, tourism, and the service demands of a rapidly increasing resident base. The current trend, however, is for growth of more service-oriented industries including banking, real estate, accounting, legal, and retail enterprises. Overall the service industry is the largest employer sector in the State followed by trade (34%, 26% respectively – See Figure 2)(FDLES, 1997). Although

Figure 2: South Florida Employment by Sector



this data represents the entire State, it holds true for most of the South Florida region. Total employment in South Florida is expected to grow from about 3 million in 1990 to about 5 million by 2050 (U. S. Army Corps of Engineers, 1999).

The Service Industry - In the period between 1982 and 1992, total employment in South Florida grew by 37.9%, a significantly higher percentage than the national rate of 22.0% for the same period. During this period the region's service sector grew by 71.7% while employment in manufacturing increased by only 1.9% (FDLES, 1994). Manufacturing is currently experiencing job losses due to international competition (Rust, 1998). Employment in manufacturing and goods-producing industries have historically provided significantly higher wages than those in service-oriented enterprises (GCSSF, 1995a). Average annual salaries in South Florida for 1998 were about \$24K for jobs in the service sector, compared to \$33K for manufacturing, \$36K for mining, and \$26K for construction (FDLES, 1999).

Trade - The South Florida region has recently emerged as a leading hub for trade within the global economy and as a result growth in international trade and port activity has accelerated significantly. While trade between South Florida and Latin America remains substantial, emerging trade with Europe and the Far East provides a critical juncture for global distribution of goods through South Florida ports (Loiry, 1995). Miami, in particular, has emerged as a leading city and "gateway" for trade within this hemisphere and the greater global economy. The Florida Department of Commerce has estimated that each additional \$1 billion of foreign trade creates approximately 16,000 additional jobs (University of Massachusetts, 1994).

South Florida is home to 4 major ports: West Palm Beach, Everglades (at Ft. Lauderdale), Miami, and Key West. In 1994, the former 3 facilities collectively handled \$18.5 billion in imports and exports. There are nearly 250,000 seaport related jobs statewide. In addition to servicing the State's growing international trade industry, South Florida ports also provide for large waves of vacationing public (FDOC, 1994).

Tourism and trade also depend on the ability of Florida's airports to attract goods and passengers to the State. South Florida's airport facilities have experienced growth throughout the 1990's, largely due to merchandise trade between the South Florida region and Latin American/Caribbean markets (University of Massachusetts, 1994). The fifth largest cargo airport in the world serves the region - Miami International (GCSSF, 1995a). Likewise, airports are critically important to the region's tourist economy. Ninety-seven percent of Miami-Dade County's overnight visitors arrive in South Florida by air (Ibid.).

Tourism - Since the 1920s, tourism has been highly visible and constituted a major component of the South Florida economy. Although the annual growth in visitors began to decline in the 1990's, South Florida continues to attract millions each year. In 1994, southeast Florida attracted 13.4 million out-of-state visitors, or 33% of Florida's total 41 million visitors (Florida Consensus Estimating Conference, 1995). In 1995 the region drew in nearly \$14 billion in tourism-related revenues. Miami-Dade County alone attracted 9.4 million visitors who spent \$8.4 billion (Working Group, 1998). Everglades National Park is ranked in the top five tourist destinations the nation, and the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary is the number one dive destination in the world (US Army Corps of Engineers, 1998). Overall, the tourist growth rate and the number of tourism-related jobs in South Florida have contributed significantly to the economic well being of the region's citizens. As an industry, tourism employs more than 700,000 people and generates over \$33 billion in taxable spending throughout the State. South Florida alone accounts for nearly 35% of these jobs (GCSSF, 1995a).

Aggressive competition, image and safety concerns, and immigration events in South Florida, however, threaten prosperity in tourism. Because tourism plays such a critical role in the region's economy, even modest decreases in visitors and expenditures are felt throughout the region. For every 1,000 international visitors lost, the State loses \$1.1 million in tourism spending, 20 area jobs, and \$295,000 in local payrolls (Cook, 1993).

Agriculture - Florida is the nation's ninth leading agricultural state, with annual farm cash receipts totaling \$6 billion. Agriculture also contributes \$18 billion in farm-related economic activities and employs 80,000 people per month (Working Group, 1998). South Florida produces \$2.8 billion annually, or almost half the value of all farm cash receipts in the State (Weisskoff, 1999). South Florida counties lead the nation in sugar cane production (Palm Beach), oranges (Hendry), grapefruit (St. Lucie), and snap beans (Miami-Dade). Together, agriculture in these four counties generates approximately \$2 billion annually (Working Group, 1998). More citrus is produced in this region than in any other state. The region also produces nearly 70% of the nation's winter and spring vegetables (GCSSF, 1995a).

Although agriculture contributes billions of dollars to the State's economy, the industry is facing economic as well as environmental challenges. Agricultural acreage in Florida and across the nation has decreased as local, regional, and state economies have grown and diversified. Between 1982 and 1992, the number of acres designated as agricultural in South Florida has decreased from 12.8 million acres to 10.7 million acres, a loss of 16% (U.S. DOC, 1984, 1994). This reduction stems from increasing urban sprawl, soil subsidence, and the conversion of some agricultural lands to other uses (water preserve areas, etc.) (Working Group, 1998).

Agriculture in South Florida has also been negatively impacted, especially the tomato industry, by trade agreements with Mexico and other market factors. The impact of the North American Free Trade Agreement on the competitiveness of domestic products is a critical issue for all of the region's industries. Manufacturers, producers, processors, and shippers warn of unfair advantages and a loss of their current competitive edge. They also express concern for the future normalization of relations with Cuba, especially as that country's products enter the same market arena (FDOC, 1993). In spite of this trend, agriculture continues to demonstrate an ability to adjust by shifting to international markets, specialty products, and domestic niche marketing (GCSSF, 1995a).

Unemployment/Poverty - Florida's unemployment rate, at 4.3%, mirrors the national average of 4.5% (Rust, 1998). South Florida, though, has unemployment "hot spots." Hendry County has the highest unemployment rate in Florida, with 21.4%. This is mostly due to the seasonal nature of agriculture jobs, which account for half of all jobs in the county. Other counties with exceptionally high unemployment rates include: St. Lucie, 15.1%; Glades, 12%; Okeechobee, 10.4%; and Highlands, 10.3% (FDLES, 1998).

While Miami-Dade County's unemployment rate is not as high as the other hot spots, at 6.4% it ranks above the State and national average (FDLES, 1998). The County's problems are compounded by the large number of people coming off welfare and joining the workforce, and the large numbers of immigrants. The dilemma is that there are not enough low-skilled positions for all these people - South Florida has reached a saturation point in low-skilled employment. A deficiency in South Florida is that the region has 50% of the State's employment, while containing only 32% of the job growth (Rust, 1998).

In Florida 2.2 million people live in poverty with 52% in South Florida. Twenty-three percent live in Miami-Dade County which has the highest poverty rate in South Florida at 25.4% (US Bureau of Census, 1993).

Demographics

The South Florida region contains approximately 5.8 million people (SFWMD, 1998) - 40% of Florida's total population (Lenze, 1994). Figure 3 shows historic population growth for each of the planning areas in the South Florida region. The population of the region is expected to reach 8 million by the year 2010 (SFWMD, 1995) and triple by the year 2050 (SFWMD, 1994). According to Lenze (1994), the majority of the growth will be concentrated in the urban centers. Currently, almost 85% of South Florida's population reside in these urban areas.

While the Lower East Coast (West Palm Beach, Ft. Lauderdale, and Miami-Dade Counties) comprises only 9.5% of the State's land area it is home to 31% of Florida's population (U. S. Army Corps of Engineers, 1999). Almost half of South Florida's future growth is projected for this area as it is expected to grow by 72% from just over four million in 1990 to nearly seven million by 2050 (G.E.C., 1996). By contrast the group of primarily agrarian counties bordering Lake Okeechobee (Glades, Hendry, Highlands, Martin, Okeechobee, St. Lucie) contain approximately the same amount of land area but comprise only 3% of the region's population (U. S. Army Corps of Engineers, 1999).

The Big Cypress and Caloosahatchee River regions (Lee, most of Collier and Hendry, and part of Charlotte and Glades Counties) are two of the fastest growing regions in the country. The estimated total population of these counties for 1990 was 632,000. The total population is expected to increase by 63% to 1,032,000 by 2010 and to 1,401,000 by 2050 (Ibid.).

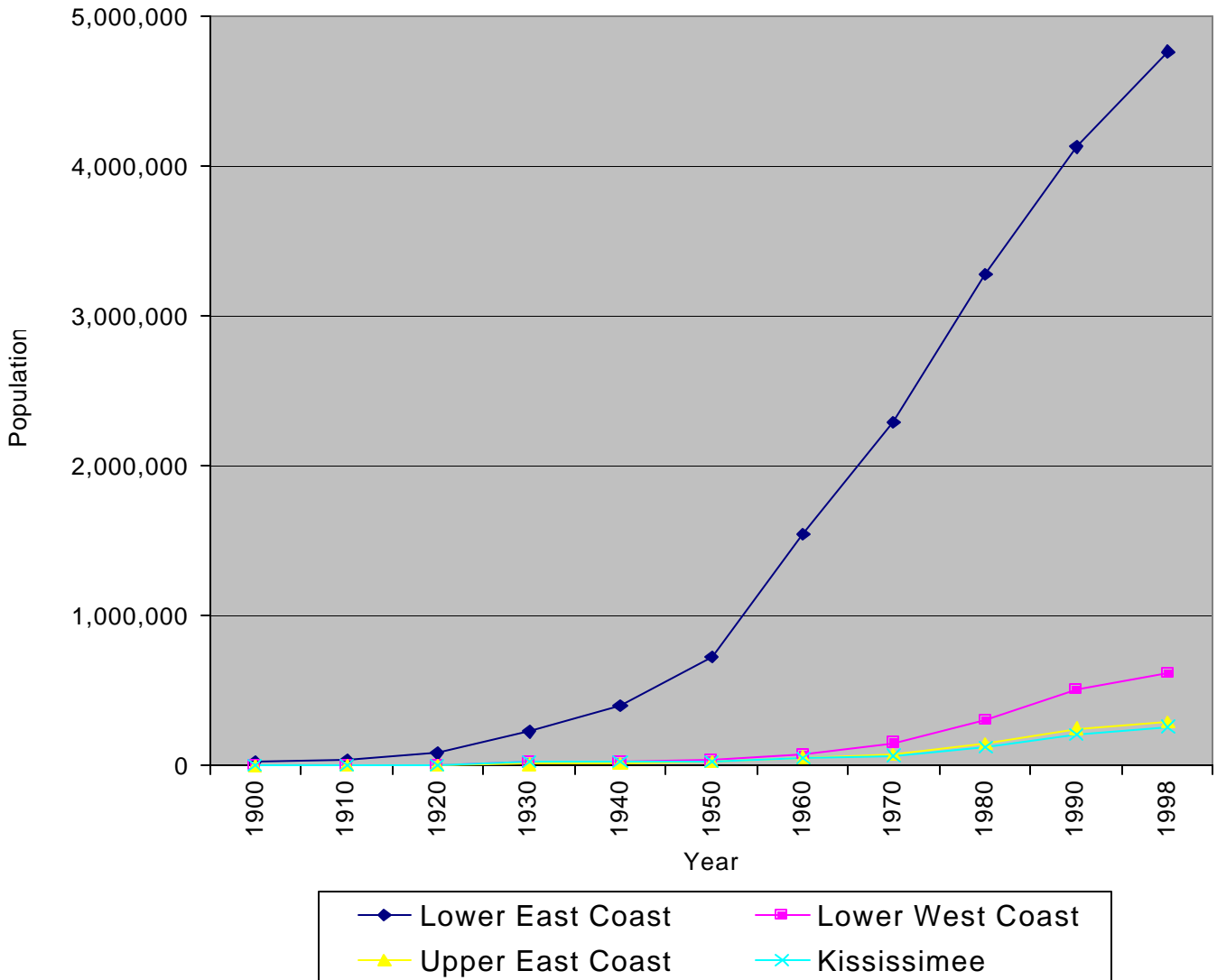
Population of the Upper East Coast region, Martin and St. Lucie Counties is expected to more than double by 2050 to about 529,000. However, this will still only comprise about 5% of the South Florida population (Ibid.).

Migration has played the predominant role in South Florida's population growth, accounting for 85% of the new residents in the three southeast counties between 1950 and 1990 (SFRPC, 1995). International migration plays a significant role in population increases in the Lower East Coast area. Between 1997 and 1998 Miami-Dade County had a net increase of 37,239 people through international migration while Broward experienced an increase of 12,959 and Palm Beach had a net increase of 7,074. Of these three counties, only Miami-Dade had a net out-migration domestically (-27,466) during the same period (U. S. Bureau of Census, 1999).

In addition to year-round residents, seasonal residents (snowbirds) and tourists cause a significant variation in South Florida's population. The degree to which this factor affects population varies, dependent on two factors: location and time of year. The Lower West Coast seasonal population may change over 30% during the year, while Miami-Dade County's population typically experiences a 10% variation (SFWMD, 1995). During 1996 the State averaged 472,200 temporary residents per day throughout the year. However, this impact was felt predominantly during the dry winter months. Because the migratory behavior is predominantly weather related, there were nearly a million (971,200) temporary residents in the State on an average January day, while in the hotter Summer month of August, only about 113,700 stayed (BEBR, 1997).

As noted, population growth trends will continue in the Southeast urban areas. More recently however, Southwest Florida's population increases have brought attention to growth management practices. The Southwest region of the State has been growing at rapid rates in the past decades and its current pace is only accelerating (GCSSF, 1998). Between 1997 and 1998 Collier County's population increased by 3.6% and Lee County grew by 1.9% in the same one-year period (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1999). Growth in Collier and Lee Counties has gained

Figure 3: South Florida Population (1900 - 1998)



Note: Lower East Coast = Palm Beach, Broward, Miami-Dade & Monroe Counties
 Lower West Coast = Collier, Hendry & Lee Counties
 Upper East Coast = St. Lucie & Martin Counties
 Kissimmee = Glades, Highlands, Okeechobee & Osceola Counties

Charlotte, Orange and Polk counties were excluded from population numbers because a large percentage of the counties' population base does not reside within the SFWMD boundaries.

Source: Population Division, U.S. Bureau of Census, Washington D.C., 1999

State and national attention prompting the Corps to perform an EIS to improve the regulatory process in Southwest Florida.

Age plays a large role in the demographic composition of South Florida. The region's population is older when compared to the rest of the country and the State as a whole (SFRPC, 1995 and SWFRPC, 1995). Less than one-half of South Florida's population (47%) is in its prime working years (20-54), approximately 19% is 65 or older, and approximately 18% is school age (5-19)(Lenze, 1994). The highest number of residents 65 and older are in Miami-Dade (337,380), Broward (292,215), and Palm Beach Counties (274,353). The counties with the highest percent of their populations being over 65 are Martin (31%), Lee (28 %), Collier (27 %), Palm Beach (27 %), and St. Lucie (24 %) (U. S. Census Bureau, 1999).

South Florida is rich in ethnic and cultural diversity. This diversity varies greatly throughout the South Florida region. One-third of the Dade, Broward, and Palm Beach Counties' 1990 population was foreign-born. Eighty-one percent of Florida's Hispanic population resides in South Florida, and 56% of the total are in Miami-Dade County (Rust, 1998). Minority and migrant farmworkers populations are large in predominantly agricultural based areas such as Belle Glade, Clewiston, Pahokee, La Belle, and South Miami-Dade County.

Regional Governance

The Region - Governance and planning in the South Florida region involve a myriad of federal, state, tribal, regional, and local agencies. The region is delineated by the boundaries of the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD). This includes 16 county governments, 122 municipalities, two tribal governments, numerous special districts, six metropolitan planning organizations, five regional planning councils, the SFWMD, five major state environmental planning and regulatory agencies, and 11 federal agency managers. Of the 16 counties, 10 lie entirely within the SFWMD boundary (Monroe, Miami-Dade, Broward, Palm Beach, Martin, St. Lucie, Collier, Hendry, Lee, and Glades); six counties are only partially included (Charlotte, Highlands, Osceola, Polk, Orange, and Okeechobee).

The South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) - The mission of the SFWMD is to manage water resources for the benefit of the region, balancing the needs of the present generation with those of future generations. Equally important elements of this stewardship are the conservation and development of water supply, the protection and improvement of water quality, the mitigation of impacts from flood and drought, and the restoration and preservation of natural resources. The SFWMD is responsible for operating the Corps-constructed C&SF Project. The boundaries of the SFWMD cover a 16 county region stretching from the Kissimmee River area in the north, to the Florida Keys in the South. The SFWMD is the local sponsor for the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (Restudy).

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) - The Corps is the federal sponsor for the C&SF Project Restudy. The Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) of 1992 charged the Corps to develop a comprehensive review study for restoring the hydrology of South Florida. This comprehensive review is now known as the Restudy. The WRDA 1996 bill established a South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force.

The South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force/Working Group and the Governor's Commission for the Everglades - The purpose of the Task Force is to facilitate implementation of the overall restoration effort. In this capacity it serves as an information clearinghouse, referee, and coordinating entity that helps guide the restoration effort, keep it on

track, and ensure fiscal accountability (Working Group, 1998). In 1993 the Task Force formed its Florida-based Working Group to be its “action arm” in restoration activities. The Working Group was established to formulate, recommend, coordinate, and implement the policies, strategies, plans, programs, projects, activities, and priorities of the Task Force. In 1996 the Governor’s Commission for a Sustainable South Florida became the advisory body to the Task Force and Working Group. The Governor’s Commission for the Everglades has replaced that Commission and will continue in this role.

Applied Behavioral Research

The South Florida ecosystem is not limited to the natural environment, rather, it is comprised of both the natural and the “built” or “human” system. In South Florida, the society, economy and environment are highly interrelated and interdependent. Understanding precisely how they are interrelated and the explicit nature and magnitude of those linkages is needed to achieve successful ecosystem restoration. A scientific framework that collects, analyzes, disseminates, and integrates cultural and socio-economic data with on-going ecological and hydrological modeling can enhance future research, funding and policy decisions related to Everglades restoration.

South Florida offers a rich array of cultures, beliefs, attitudes, institutions, economies, land use and history. Historically the human and natural systems have been managed in relative isolation from one another—with scientists selecting only a few "givens" to connect the two such as gross population increase or daily per capita water consumption. Because ecosystem restoration affects both the social and natural systems, the majority of decisions that managers face often involve a bewildering assortment of cultural, political, and economic concerns.

The first steps toward integrating applied behavioral science data and research into restoration planning, management and decision-making are described in the *South Florida Action Plan for Applied Behavioral Sciences* (Working Group, 1999). The plan has been developed as a guide for managers involved in South Florida ecosystem restoration; to help integrate cultural, social, and economic concerns into the decision-making process. Five specific themes are included that highlight discrete applied behavioral science projects, some proposing research and others suggesting ways to apply existing information and techniques to restoration activities. These themes include Agriculture, Demographics and Community Studies, the Economic Benefits of Ecosystem Restoration, Planning and Environmental Justice, and Public Outreach. The Action Plan recommendations stem from strategies developed at a South Florida Social Science Symposium held February 26-27, 1998. The plan is intended to link applied behavioral science projects and research to specific ecosystem restoration projects and provide an overview of the utility of applied behavioral science tools and methodologies applicable to the South Florida ecosystem effort.

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