

HISTORICAL HIGHLIGHTS
OF
THE SOUTH FLORIDA ECOSYSTEM
TASK FORCE

**This document was prepared as a discussion aide for
the Lessons Learned Workshop of the
Working Group
of the
South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force
February 29 and March 1, 2000
River Ranch, Florida**

Prepared by
FLORIDA CENTER FOR ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES

Stuart Langton, Senior Fellow
Walter A. Rosenbaum, Professor
University of Florida

*Readers are encouraged to send
proposed additions or corrections of this document to
slangton@mindspring.com*

INTRODUCTION

This report has been prepared as a part of a “lessons learned” initiative that is being undertaken by the Working Group of the South Florida Ecosystem Task Force (SFERTF or Task Force). The Task Force has been mandated by Congress to coordinate the work being undertaken among government agencies to restore the South Florida ecosystem. The purpose of this document is to provide a historical summary of important developments of the Task Force from its inception in 1993 through 1999. It is intended that this report provide background material that may be used to identify important lessons from the past that will help to guide improvements and developments of the Task Force. As an additional benefit, it is hoped that this document will help those interested in ecosystem restoration in South Florida to understand the role and challenges of the Task Force.

BACKGROUND

Ecosystem restoration in South Florida is unique in its extent, complexity, and cost. It involves environmental clean-up and restoration of water flows, natural habitat, and flora and fauna in an 18,000 square mile area that encompasses the Kissimmee River basin, Lake Okeechobee, the Everglades, Big Cypress National Preserve, the Ten Thousand Islands, Biscayne Bay, and Florida Bay – all the way to the coral reef tract off the Florida Keys. The restoration effort in South Florida includes a range of different efforts from the re-plumbing of the Central and Southern Florida (C&SF) Project, to restoring Florida Bay, to protecting threatened habitat and species in Southwest Florida, to promoting less polluting agricultural practices, et al. Restoration of the South Florida ecosystem will involve hundreds of projects, supported by extensive research, and involving scores of governmental representatives (federal, state, tribal and local) as well as the agricultural industry. The cost of this effort over a 30-year period has been estimated to be between 10 and 15 billion dollars to be shared between federal and state government, making this the largest ecosystem restoration project in history.

Once an abundant and well-integrated system, the South Florida ecosystem has been degraded over the past century. Much of the area's wetlands have been filled-in, and an extensive series of canals and channels have been created to support agricultural and urban development. Water quality throughout South Florida has also deteriorated over the past 50 years since construction started on the C&SF Project. Consequently, less water, which was also polluted, flowed into the Everglades; and, often, too much water, also polluted and high in nutrients, flowed into the bays and estuaries of the region.

By the late 1960s, public concern about the South Florida environment, and particularly the Everglades, had grown substantially due to increased canal building, the growth of the sugar industry in the Everglades Agricultural Area, and a proposal to build a new airport in the middle of the Everglades. In 1968, environmental groups formed a coalition to stop the proposed airport, to preserve the Big Cypress swamp (adjacent to the

Everglades), and to promote environmental clean up and restoration. The press and public opinion, more than not, supported these protective and corrective measures.

During the 1970s and 1980s, public policy, in line with predominant public opinion, moved in the direction of environmental protection and restoration in South Florida. In 1972 the Florida legislature passed the Florida Water Resources Act authorizing the state water management districts to consider water quality as one of the elements regarding the management of water and other related resources and to promote water quality through environmental enhancement. In the same year, the Florida Land and Conservation Act was enacted to protect lands for environmental protection and recreation. In 1983, under the leadership of Governor Bob Graham, the Save Our Everglades Act was passed to protect the Kissimmee River Basin, Lake Okeechobee, the Western Conservation area, Big Cypress Swamp, Everglades National Park and Florida Bay, and endangered wildlife. In 1987, the Florida legislature passed the Surface Water and Improvement and Management Act (SWIM) requiring the water management districts to create and implement plans to protect and restore designated water bodies. The rainfall plan to create more natural hydrologic conditions in the Shark Valley Slough in Everglades National Park was implemented in 1985 by the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD). By 1988, the SFWMD had begun design on the 3,700 acre Everglades Nutrient Removal Project, the largest constructed wetland in the United States. Also in 1988, Governor Bob Martinez' Executive Order No. 88-25 included requirements for strict scrutiny for proposed development in the Everglades. In 1989, Congress passed the Everglades Expansion and Protection Act, which added 107,600 acres to Everglades National Park and called for increased and improved water flows to the park.

Despite progress in the 1980s, the population of South Florida grew dramatically with concurrent development pressure on the environment. Research at this time reflected declines in many native species of flora and fauna and heightened phosphorous pollution of the Everglades. Of particular alarm was evidence of the decline of Florida Bay indicated by dramatic losses in sea grass habitat, algae blooms, reduction in shrimp and many fish species, and decline in water clarity.

In 1988, the federal government sued the SFWMD and the Florida Department of Environmental Regulation, alleging that the agencies had failed to enforce State water quality standards in discharges into Everglades National Park and the Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge. After three years of litigation, the parties reached a settlement that recognized the problem of phosphorus pollution. The settlement agreement was entered as a consent decree by the federal court in 1992. The agreement and related State actions were then challenged by agricultural interests, who filled dozens of legal actions to block its implementation. After several more years of litigation, the Florida legislature passed the Everglades Forever Act in 1994 that expanded the clean up program contained in the settlement agreement but extended deadlines for its completion. As a result of these efforts, the phosphorus pollution to the Everglades has been substantially reduced, best management practices have been adopted by agricultural interests, and thousands of acres of stormwater treatment areas have been constructed by the SFWMD.

THE TASK FORCE IN BRIEF

The SFERTF was founded in 1993 based upon an agreement between five federal Departments and the Environmental Protection Agency under the leadership of the Secretary of Interior. The mission of the Task Force was and remains to, “coordinate the development of consistent policies, strategies, plans, programs and priorities for addressing the environmental concerns of South Florida.” Simultaneously, the Task Force created a Florida-based management team of senior officials from each participating agency which came to be known as the Working Group. While the Task Force addresses broader policy issues, the Working Group addresses more particular tasks of coordination. At the outset, the Working Group established committees to address issues of science, infrastructure, and management, and, soon after, a committee to promote public outreach. The science and public outreach committees have continued as major sub-committees of the Working Group. An Office of Executive Director, with a small staff, was created in 1994 and is located in Miami to provide guidance and support to the Task Force, Working Group, and committees.

From the outset, it was recognized across federal and state lines that a comprehensive, coordinated approach to restoration was needed. In 1995, the Task Force was expanded to include representatives from the Miccosukee and Seminole Tribes and from the Office of the Governor of Florida. The Water Resources Development Act of 1996 established the Task Force in federal law, identified its duties, and expanded the Task Force to include two representatives from Florida state government, a representative from the South Florida Water Management District, and two representatives from local government. In 1997, the Task Force established Project Coordination teams in six regions within South Florida (including representatives from federal, state, county, and local agencies in each area) to further decentralize efforts.

ABOUT LESSONS LEARNED

“Lessons Learned” is a general term for a process of developing practical lessons from experience. The U.S. Army, as an example, has created a Center for Lessons Learned as a way to evaluate important military events (e.g. Desert Storm, Bosnia intervention, etc.) and to distill lessons that may promote success in future endeavors. Other branches of the armed forces, the Department of Energy, and a number of corporations have similar programs.

While the development of the Task Force is not a singular event, it is a continuous and coherent initiative about which the learning of practical lessons could be of benefit both to those involved as well as to those engaged in similar efforts elsewhere. Because the Task Force has been in existence for over six years, the Lessons Learned design that is being used to review its experience begins with a summary of historical highlights.

These highlights, which are contained in this document, have been examined by the Working Group as the first step in identifying lessons.

THE NATURE OF THIS REPORT

There are two distinctive qualities about this report. First, it is a selective summary of the most important events and developments of the Task Force. As such, it contains short descriptions of historical highlights. It should not be construed to be a history of the Task Force – which would involve a much broader and detailed examination. Nonetheless, this document could serve as an outline or starting point for anyone interested in or charged with such an assignment.

Most of the highlights selected for this report deal with the organizational features and experience of the Task Force. In this regard, the purpose of the highlights is to tell the story of what the Task Force did and how it did it. Yet, in order to understand this story, it is also necessary to identify the important challenges and accomplishments of particular agencies or groups regarding ecosystem restoration that shape the agenda and situation of the Task Force. *Italics are used in describing highlights of this kind*

Second, this report is designed to be an “iterative” document. This is to say that it is intended to be revised, as appropriate, and additions have been and are further expected to be made to it. The Working Group reviewed the historical highlights as the first item of business at its Lessons Learned Workshop on February 29 and March 1, 2000. They analyzed the highlight events to help them identify the greatest challenges, successes, and shortcomings of the Task Force. Important lessons were identified and applied to current and anticipated challenges. This information is being forwarded to the Task Force.

1993/1994 HIGHLIGHTS

Introduction

Throughout 1993 and 1994, the Task Force was engaged in the challenging, and unprecedented, task of translating the vision embodied in South Florida ecosystem restoration into a strategic plan and an organizational structure for coordination. The Working Group confronted fundamental issues such as defining the meaning of 'restoration,' setting priorities, and characterizing the original South Florida ecosystem before drainage. The key regional participating agencies had to be located and restoration programs already underway had to be identified, contacted, and involved. A strong commitment to collaboration with the State of Florida was affirmed. Passage of the Florida Everglades Forever Act, and the creation of the Governor's Commission for a Sustainable South Florida, established a strong foundation for partnering. From the outset, federal and state representatives worked closely in identifying scientific objectives and information needs.

Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt Frames the Restoration Effort: Bruce Babbitt, U.S. Secretary of Interior, in a speech to the Everglades Coalition, identifies two key principles for ecosystem restoration in South Florida. He emphasizes that the approach should deal with the entire South Florida ecosystem. He also calls for strong working partnerships among government agencies as well as with stakeholders. Florida Lieutenant Governor, Buddy MacKay, promises to help organize state resources to partner with federal agencies in restoration efforts.

Task Force Established Through an Interagency Agreement: In September, 1993, six federal agencies (Interior, Army, Justice, Agriculture, EPA, and Commerce) sign an agreement to establish a Task Force to coordinate the development of, "consistent policies, strategies, plans, programs, and priorities for addressing the concerns of the South Florida environment." The Task Force consists of undersecretaries of the six agencies. A management and coordinating committee, the Working Group, is also established and consists of 11 Florida-based senior managers from the cooperating agencies. The Task Force is conceived as a policy group, whereas the Working Group is designed to undertake tasks in support of the Task Force. Although the Task Force consisted solely of federal agencies at this time, the agreement recognizes the importance of partnering beyond federal agencies.

Science Sub-Group Identifies Objectives and Success Criteria: Prior to the first meeting of the Working group, a group of agency scientists in South Florida are asked to organize themselves to create a report on restoration goals. On November 15, 1993, the group publishes a report (Federal Objectives for the South Florida Restoration) identifying objectives and success criteria for the entire region and nine ecological sub-regions. The report focuses primarily on hydrological restoration and is particularly intended as a resource for U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Central and South Florida Restudy initiative authorized the previous year.

Working Group Organizes: The first meeting of the Working Group is held in Key Largo in December, 1993. The group is charged with developing a report on ecosystem restoration within one year. Three sub-committees are organized to address issues regarding science, infrastructure and management. The group determines that its major mission is to promote “sustainable development” which is defined as, “balancing human activity and ecosystem development.” The group acknowledges that the lead agency responsible for the implementation is the South Florida Water Management District and its partnering agency, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Richard Ring, Superintendent of Everglades National Park, is selected as the first Chair.

Working Group Establishes Strategy and Goals: In early 1994, the Working Group identifies four key goals to promote sustainable development: partnering with a wide range of public and private entities, building strong ties with the SFWMD and the proposed Governor’s Commission, creating a Public Involvement and Education subcommittee (PIE), and undertaking a science research study to identify information gaps and needs.

Governor’s Commission Appointed: *In March, 1994, Governor Lawton Chiles appoints a 40 member Governor’s Commission for a Sustainable South Florida. The Commission includes a wide range of stakeholders and several representatives who also serve on the Working Group. The mission of the Commission is to develop restoration plans that protect the economy and the environment. The Commission pledges to work closely with the Working Group. It determines that it will seek consensus rather than majority opinion in developing recommendations.*

Task Force Executive Director Selected: In mid 1994, Col. Terrence “Rock” Salt is selected by the Department of Interior, with the agreement of the Task Force, to serve as Executive Director of the Task Force. Col. Salt, as Chief of Engineers of the Jacksonville District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, had previously served as a member of the Working Group since its inception in 1993.

Everglades Forever Act Passed: *The Everglades Forever Act, enacted by the Florida legislature, establishes the funding mechanisms and construction timetable for a comprehensive program of six stormwater treatment areas, implementation of best management practices, additional research, establishing water quality criteria and implementation of advanced water quality treatment measures.*

Science Sub-Group Publishes Report on Science Information Needs: In September, 1994, the Science Sub-group completes a report (Scientific Information Needs) identifying recommendations for continued and additional research related to ecosystem restoration. The report addresses information needs on a system-wide basis, within ten sub-regions, and in relation to four issues: modeling, mercury, endangered species, and non-indigenous species.

Spatial Information Workshop Held: In September, the Task Force co-sponsors a workshop with state and federal agencies to promote communication in regard to the development and use of spatial data information. Workshop participants identify current efforts, gaps, and opportunities for coordination. A workshop report is published in May, 1995.

Corps of Engineers Completes Reconnaissance Study of the C&SF Project: *Two years earlier, Congress directed the Corps of Engineers to review the need for modifications in the water control system of the Everglades and South Florida. Referred to as the "Restudy," the Corps publishes its preliminary findings in a reconnaissance report in 1994. The report identifies the need for modifications and outlines six alternatives for project development.*

Working Group Publishes First Annual Report: In December, the first of five annual reports required by Congress is published by the Working Group. The report identifies objectives, accomplishments and recommended critical tasks in nine priority areas (e.g. establishing research priorities, partnering with state and local government in land acquisition, support in developing a wetlands permit mitigation strategy, et al.)

1995 HIGHLIGHTS

Introduction

Sound science, organizational refinement, and expanded outreach were major concerns through the 1995 activities of the Task Force. The crucial importance of high-quality scientific data and scientific rigor throughout the restoration effort was emphasized by the Working Group's emphasis on creation of a Science Plan, initiation of an inventory of needed scientific information, outreach to scientists and institutions relevant to the restoration work, and sponsorship of the Florida Bay Scientific Conference. The Working Group continually worked to eliminate obstacles to closer collaboration with the Governor's Commission. Project planning was greatly facilitated by authorization in the federal Farm Bill of \$200 million for land acquisition and by the initiation of the C-111 project, restoration of the Kissimmee basin project, and advancement of the Modified Water Delivery project.

Establishment of Task Force Office: By Spring , an agreement is established with Florida International University to provide office space for the Office of the Executive Director of the Task Force at the Southeast Florida Environmental Program. The FIU location is selected because of its central location with convenient access to the Florida Turnpike, the presence of several ecosystem restoration scientists on campus, and the potential for expansion.

Work Begins on Integrated Financial Plan: One of the original mandates of the Task Force in the 1993 interagency agreement is to create an integrated financial plan

reflecting the nature and costs of the projects to be undertaken by all federal agencies involved in ecosystem restoration. This task becomes the priority project for the new Deputy Director with the cooperation of Working Group members throughout the year.

Cooperation With the Center for Environmental Studies: At the time the Task Force is being formed, the State University System of Florida approves the creation of a center to promote communication and cooperation among the various environmental programs within their 10 branches and beyond. The Center for Environmental Studies (C.E.S.) is located at Florida Atlantic University with funding from the Florida legislature. When the Executive Director of the Task Force first meets with the Governor's office, an agreement is made to have the Task Force work closely with the C.E.S. in building connections with the universities within the state university system as well as other academic, research and non-profit entities.

Additional Staff Selected: In the spring of 1995, a Deputy Director and a secretary are selected for the Office of the Executive Director.

Exploration of an Everglades Partnership: In May, the Task Force and C.E.S. bring together leaders involved and interested in ecosystem restoration from the public and private sectors to explore how to strengthen communication and cooperation. By summer a plan is created to create a not-for-profit institute, the Everglades Partnership, to help promote and assist with consensus-building and cooperation in ecosystem restoration in South Florida. The partnership calls for three program initiatives: a Science Forum and Integration program, an Information Sharing Initiative, and a Partnership Development Laboratory (to help build consensus and manage conflicts). By Fall, an implementation plan is developed for 1996 to illustrate how the partnership would work involving volunteers from government, universities, non-profit groups and business.

Concern About Federal Advisory Committee Act: While the original interagency agreement identified the importance of partnering beyond federal agencies, the rigid features of the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) make this very difficult for the Task Force. FACA regulations make it difficult to involve the two tribal nations or enter into a project like the Everglades Partnership. In late 1995, Task Force leaders are able to gain some relief from FACA through the Unfunded Mandates Reform Act.

Inclusion of Non-Federal Task Force Members: A special provision in the Unfunded Mandates Reform Act of 1995 make it possible for the Task Force to appoint the first non-federal representatives to the Task Force and Working Group. These included the Miccosukee and Seminole tribal nations and the Office of the Governor of Florida.

Task Force Priorities Revised: The Working Group reviews Task Force priorities in relation to the passage of the Everglades Forever Act in 1994. It decides to maintain its priorities and two new ones are adopted: to facilitate the implementation of the Everglades Forever Act, and to eradicate invasive exotic flora.

Meeting Coordination: A persistent concern of Working Group members at this time is the proliferation of meetings associated with the restoration. To reduce travel and conserve time and costs, the Working Group agrees to hold its meetings in the same location, just prior to or after, the meetings of the Governor's Commission since many members serve on both groups. It is also agreed that many committee meetings will be held at or prior to these meetings.

Science and Technology Oversight Committee Discussed: Because of the extent of scientific research being undertaken and considered in regard to the restoration, as well as frequent differences of opinion among researchers, the Science Sub-Committee discusses and proposes the creation of an independent oversight committee to provide peer review and technical guidance. Action is not completed on this matter until 1999.

Strategic Communication Plan Developed: The Public Information and Education Committee prepares, and the Working Group approves, a strategic communication plan outlining principles and protocols for communicating with the press and the public. Among the features of the plan is a requirement to provide opportunities for public comment at all meetings of the Task Force, Working Group and committees.

Governor's Commission Completes Plan: *In October, the Governor's Commission completes its initial report including 110 recommendations. The report proposes a holistic approach to restoration and links considerations of environmental, social, and economic matters. Among the many proposals of the report is one to create a new urban redevelopment initiative (Eastward Ho!) to reduce urban sprawl toward the Everglades in Broward, Dade, and Palm Beach counties.*

1996 HIGHLIGHTS

Introduction

With its basic organizational structure now in place, the Working Group during 1996 concentrated upon issue resolution with particular emphasis on the Restoration Plan, urban and agricultural issues, and expanding the scope of its outreach to include co-operation with state, local and tribal stakeholders. The Working Group's capabilities were greatly improved by passage of the 1996 WRDA significantly enhancing the Working Group's organizational authority and flexibility while the 1996 Farm Bill enabled the Working Group for the first time to prioritize projects to be funded through the Farm Bill. Commencement of the C-111, Kissimmee and Modified Water Delivery projects were encouraging evidence of the restoration effort's practical impacts.

Scientific Information Needs Report Published: In 1996 the Science Sub-Group completes and distributes its 400 page report, *South Florida Ecosystem*

Restoration: Scientific Information Needs. The report identifies information needs to achieve science objectives in regard to restoration goals for 10 geographic regions within South Florida and in regard to such issues as endangered species, mercury contamination, pesticides, et al. Critical issues and questions are discussed in relation to each region and issue, and bibliographies are available for each region and issue.

Environmental Resources Bibliography Published: Through the Everglades Partnership demonstration initiative, a 115 page bibliography is prepared listing the monographs (bound books and reports) related to ecosystem restoration available in the libraries of the branches of the State University System of Florida. Florida Gulf Coast University provides support and volunteers to complete the project.

Workshop Undertaken on South Florida Ecological Sustainability Criteria: In April, a two day workshop, initiated by the Everglades Partnership at the request of the Director of the South Florida Water Management District, is held to identify success criteria for ecological restoration in South Florida. Work teams identify potential criteria in the areas of Hydrology, the Landscape, Fish and Wildlife Resources, and Society. The Rosenstiel School of Marine and Atmospheric Science at the University of Miami convenes and hosts the meeting with support from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Everglades Partnership Exchange Network Proposed: A team of volunteers assembled through the Everglades Partnership initiative prepares a report identifying information and communication needs of the Task Force. The report proposes the creation of a joint web-site to which various agencies and non-profits will make contributions. It proposes the development of new information resources including a comprehensive calendar, newsletter exchange, information for kids, science reports, recent newspaper and magazine articles, chat rooms, et. al.

Farm Bill Passed: *In June, the Federal Agricultural Improvement and Reform Act of 1996 (The Farm Bill) is passed. The bill provides \$200 million to conduct restoration activities in the Everglades ecosystem including land acquisition, resource protection, and resource maintenance.*

Land Purchase Priorities List Approved: The Working Group develops a prioritized list of proposed properties to purchase with Farm Bill funds. The prioritization reflects Task Force objectives and priorities.

Conceptual Plan for the C&SF Restudy Completed: *In August, the Governor's Commission achieves consensus in completing a "Conceptual Plan" intended to serve as a framework and vision for Everglades and natural system restoration in South Florida. The report expresses concern that the Restudy process is "too linear and time consuming," and proposes accelerating implementation by utilizing "improved partnerships." Seven general process recommendations are offered, and a series of 40 preferred ecosystem options are set forth in relation to 11 sub-regions in South Florida. The Plan is transmitted to the Task Force and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for the C&SF Project Restudy.*

Integrated Financial Plan Completed: The first Integrated Financial Plan of the Working Group is completed and distributed in the summer. The plan includes summaries of projects important to restoration, funding estimates, appropriations to date, connections between projects, and milestones. The Task Force promises to update the plan annually.

Committee Productivity Report Prepared: Another Everglades Partnership initiative activity completed in 1996 is a study of committees associated with ecosystem restoration in South Florida. The report identifies 44 committees and provides information about them including their functions. It proposes a number of actions to improve productivity among committees including sunset provisions, mergers, maximizing communication among similar committees, and better meeting management practices.

Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) of 1996 Passed: *The WRDA of 1996 provides for the development of a comprehensive plan by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and its non-federal project sponsor in consultation with the Task Force considering the conceptual plan developed by the Governors Commission. \$75 million is authorized to be appropriated for critical restoration projects. The Corps of Engineers is mandated to take into account water quality. The Act establishes the Task Force in federal law and expands the Task Force to include non-federal members. The duties of the Task Force are set forth. The WRDA exempts the Task Force and any other advisory bodies it appoints from the constraining requirements of the Federal Advisory Committee Act. It also allows federal agency members to provide funds to other government agencies and non-profit groups to carry out Task Force initiatives consistent with the WRDA.*

Expansion of The Task Force: As a result of the WRDA of 1996, the Task Force is expanded to now include also two representatives from the State of Florida, one representative from the South Florida Water Management District, two representatives from local government in Florida, and one representative each from the Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida and the Seminole Tribe of Florida.

Preparation of Cross-Cut Budget: A cross-cut budget consists of a listing of all proposed projects by function and agency with annual cost forecasts followed by brief descriptions of each project provided by the agencies. The Office of the Executive Director completes a cross-cut budget in 1996 for inclusion in the President's budget request to Congress.

Concern About Support for and Implementation of Working Group Activities: As a result of increased demands and activities, the Working Group finds it more difficult to complete assignments on schedule. This issue is discussed, along with the importance of agency support, at the September meeting of the Working Group. The suggestion is made to involve interested non-profit groups in helping with appropriate tasks in light of the removal of FACA restrictions from the WRDA.

Social Science Steering Committee Appointed: To assure that relevant social science issues regarding ecosystem restoration are given appropriate consideration, the Working Group appoints a Social Science Steering Committee. The Committee is charged with organizing a conference to identify and prioritize social science research needs.

Strategic Review and Planning Workshop Held: In November, the Working Group holds a workshop to review its purpose, structure, organization, procedures and strategies as a result of the passage of the WRDA of 1996 and in anticipation of emerging challenges. Consequently, the Working Group revises its mission statement, prepares a charter, and decides to create local coordinating groups, Project Coordination Teams (PCTs), in seven sub-regions of South Florida. It is decided to continue to have two major standing sub-committees – one for science and one for public outreach – and to develop them by redesigning the existing committees. It is also agreed that specific issue teams be created, as needed, for limited periods. Any and all committees will be required to develop a directive that clarify their purpose, challenges, tasks, and intended outcomes or products.

1997 HIGHLIGHTS

Introduction

The major efforts of the Task force during the year were focused on identifying science needs and improving the Working Group's science infrastructure, on restructuring its outreach activities to include broader stakeholder participation, and creating a working Charter. As the year progressed, issues related to the disposal of Homestead Air Force Base, the management of exotic species, and the preparation of the Ecosystem Restoration Plan assumed growing importance. The Working Group found itself increasingly challenged to clarify its mission and its relevance to numerous ongoing projects within the restoration area and to discover funding sources for short- and long-term projects considered essential to its mission.

Guidelines for Working Group Meetings Established: In reviewing the implications of the WRDA of 1996, the Working Group reviews and revises its procedures. In July, it adopts new procedures including establishment of a 12 month calendar, selecting meeting dates in the first 10 days of each month if possible, and determining priorities each quarter or semi-annually.

Working Group Protocol Regarding Advisors and Advisory Committees: The WRDA of 1996 make it possible for the Task Force to appoint advisors and advisory groups without FACA restrictions. In October, the Working Group establishes guidelines for appointment. Among other things, the guidelines require any advisory group to comply with the public outreach requirements of the Task Force.

Governor's Commission Appointed as an Advisory Group: In August, the Task Force passes a resolution selecting the Governors Commission for a Sustainable South Florida as an advisory body pursuant to WRDA 1996.

Ranking of Critical Projects for the Restudy: The Working Group, utilizing a public process, develops a prioritized list of critical restoration projects to be transmitted to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. One of the high priority projects is a study of the carrying capacity of the Florida Keys.

Ecological and Precursor Success Criteria for South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Report Completed: In following up on the 1996 conference on "Success Indicators," the Science Coordinating Team (SCT) took the feed-back from participants and completed a list of success criteria. In a report, the SCT identifies criteria in 14 different areas such as Reduction of Phosphorous Loading, Improvement of Water Quality in Estuaries, Improvement in Coral Reef Conditions, et al. The report identifies "precursor" steps that would lead to improvement in ecologic restoration.

Increased Support for O.E.D. Requested: The budget request that the Task Force sends to Congress in 1997 for FY1999 includes an increase in support for the Office of the Executive Director to support the growth in demands on the office. Increased support is not provided. A similar request is made in 1998 for the FY2000 and is also declined.

Lake Belt Report Completed: A special issue advisory group is appointed in 1997 to review potential regulations regarding the mining industry in Southeast Florida between the urban coast and the Everglades. The group completes its report in June essentially supporting the Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS) being developed, but with a few minor exceptions. The report forms the basis for the subsequent state legislation that resolved the issue.

Public Outreach "Connecting Strategy" Prepared: In March, the Public Information and Education Committee (PIE) completes a plan to strengthen its focus. The plan, "Connecting Strategies," calls for maximizing public participation, using innovative methods, encouraging sharing of information among agency public affairs offices, and improving the public outreach capacity of agencies.

Public Affairs Procedures Updated: In May, the Working Group adopts a revised set of procedures for public involvement. These include providing two weeks minimum notice for meetings in the press and via internet, providing copies of materials being discussed to members of the public, assuring opportunities for public comment, and making available minutes of the meeting to the public.

Public Outreach Partnership Meetings Held: In May and July, one-day workshops are held for members of the Public Information and Education Committee and representatives from 30 non-profit and business groups. The participants explore mutual

interests and potential partnering opportunities in regard to informing and involving the public in regard to ecosystem restoration in South Florida. The following agreements are developed at these meetings: the need for a common message, a design to reach different audiences, the use of market research to identify learning interests and needs, the need for a coalition-type partnering agreement, and the importance of creating a coordinating group.

Review of Proposals to Convert Homestead Air Base: The Working Group is asked by the Chair of the Task Force to address possible approaches to deal with environmental concerns related to a proposal to convert the Homestead Air Reserve Air Base to a commercial airport. An issue team is created by the Working Group to explore environmental impacts, especially to the adjacent Biscayne and Everglades National Park(s). The Task Force provides a report to appropriate local government, state and federal authorities.

New Task Force Chair Selected: George Frampton, the founding Task Force Chair, steps down to accept another position. Patricia Beneke is appointed by Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt as the new Chair.

Science Coordinating Team (SCT) and Public Outreach Steering and Support Team (POSST) Designed: As a result of a Working Group Strategic Planning Workshop in late 1996, the Science Sub-Group and the Public Information and Education Committees redesigned themselves by developing new directives, working procedures, and titles. The major element of this reform, beyond the new designation as the SCT and POSST, is to include representatives from each of the new Project Coordination Teams as well as strengthening coordination between each other.

Establishment of a Home Web-Site: The Office of Executive Director establishes a web site to communicate information about the Task Force (www.sfrestore.org). The web site provides a calendar of meetings, lists of Task Force and Working Group members, copies of minutes of meetings and reports, and links to other related web sites.

Working Group Adopts Charter: In December, the Working Group adopts a Charter identifying its mission, tasks, and procedures. The Charter clarifies that the Working Group will seek to make decisions by consensus, or, when that is not possible, by a two-thirds majority vote. It also allows that the Executive Director of the Task Force, “may request the assistance of any member of the Working Group or the staff of such member.”

Sustainable Agriculture Issue Team Appointed: The Working Group appoints a Task Team recognizing that agriculture is a critical industry, from both environmental and economic perspectives, and the potential loss or conversion of farmlands to urban development will undermine the restoration of the South Florida ecosystem. The Task Team is asked to develop a Sustainable Agricultural Plan for the Working Groups Restoration and Sustainability Plan.

1998 HIGHLIGHTS

Introduction

Many things were done in 1998 to strengthen the capacity of the Working Group. A number of new issue groups were created. Plans were developed to promote public outreach, social science research, and the integration of strategic plans among federal, state, and local government. Three important documents were produced, and the web-site capacity of the Task Force was enhanced. This was also an important year of transition. The Corps of Engineers completed another phase in the development of the Restudy. The Governors Commission appointed by Governor Chiles finished its major assignment, and a new Governor, Jeb Bush, was elected.

Ad Hoc Group Created to Evaluate Exotic Species: An ad hoc issue group is created to evaluate existing problems of non-native invasive species in South Florida, to identify efforts already underway, and to explore opportunities for increased cooperation.

Local Government Representatives Added to Working Group: Consistent with the provisions of WRDA 1996, five local government representatives are added to the Working Group.

Integrated Strategic Plan Project Initiated: A project is begun to develop a coherent shared vision and strategies for advancing ecosystem restoration among federal, state, county, and local entities. A report, reflecting shared values and goals, will be reviewed at a summit conference and strategies will be developed to promote ongoing communication and cooperation.

A Workshop on Integrating Agricultural Science is Planned: A workshop, 'Integrating Agricultural Science into Multidisciplinary Ecological Solutions in South Florida,' is planned to increase communication between agricultural and ecological researchers in regard to ecosystem restoration in South Florida.

St. Lucie Issue Team Created: In response to algae growth and fish kills in the St. Lucie River estuary, an issue team is created to identify interim actions, within the existing authority and appropriations of agencies involved with ecosystem restoration, that can be currently implemented. Representatives from the National Marine Fisheries Service, the EPA, and the St. Lucie River Initiative and the Rivers Coalition are added to the team of SCT members.

Caloosahatchee Task Team Created: Like the St. Lucie team, the Caloosahatchee Team is organized to develop an action plan addressing water quality and quantity problems within the Caloosahatchee Estuary that can be implemented in the near term. Members from the Caloosahatchee Advisory Committee are included in the team.

Integrated Financial Plan Prepared: The Integrated Financial Plan, first completed in 1996, is revised. The newly created Project Coordinating teams play a prominent role in developing descriptions of projects within each region.

“Success In The Making” Document Completed: In April, a high quality 30 page document is completed and distributed. It provides a clear and well illustrated description of ecosystem restoration in South Florida. The report, entitled “Success in the Making,” is developed by an ad-hoc team of Working Group members and prepared by consultants and staff of the Denver Service Center of the Department of Interior. The report summarizes restoration according to three goals: getting the water right; restoring and enhancing the natural system; and transforming the built environment

Review and Workshop for PCT Leaders Undertaken: A facilitated workshop for PCT leaders is held to determine how to make PCTs as productive as possible. A review undertaken before the Workshop indicates that PCTs were more productive when they had concrete tasks to perform. As a result of the Workshop, the Office of Executive Director commits to providing administrative assistance to each team.

Major Goals for C&SF Restudy Proposed: Pursuant to its consultation duty under the WRDA of 1996, the Task Force recommends to the Secretary of the Army that the major goals of the C & SF restudy are as follows: to increase the total spatial extent of wetlands and other natural areas; to increase habitat heterogeneity and connectivity; to restore hydrological structure and function as well as water quality conditions; to improve water supply; to maintain or reestablish native animal and plant species; and to assure water delivery and quality protection for the Everglades and South Florida ecosystem, flood protection, and reduction of salinity intrusion to freshwater aquifers.

Public Outreach and Participation Strategy Designed: The major thrust of the POSST in 1998 involves developing a plan and strategies to promote public outreach and participation in relation to ecosystem restoration in South Florida. The plan includes five types of initiatives: improving standard public outreach and participation procedures, expanding public outreach and participation among Working Group agencies, strengthening capacity among member agencies, developing joint projects, and utilizing public/private partnership as appropriate.

Biennial Report Completed: The Biennial Report, intended especially for the U.S. Congress, the Florida Legislature, the Miccosukee and Seminole Tribal Councils, and the public, includes a discussion of WRDA, the scope and magnitude of restoration challenges, progress to date, conclusions and recommendations. The Working Group proposes special briefings for legislative and congressional staff and opportunities to receive feedback from them.

Cooperative Assistance Program Agreement Developed with C.E.S.: Building upon their previous collaborative efforts, an agreement is made for C.E.S. to provide assistance to the Task Force upon request. This makes it possible for the Task Force to

obtain assistance when resources from Working Group agencies are limited or not available. It also provides a vehicle to access resources from of the State University of Florida system and other appropriate institutions.

Social Science Workshop Held: In February, a conference is held to identify social science issues relating to ecosystem restoration in South Florida. Among the important proposals made are strengthening public participation, developing demographic and attitudinal data about subgroups in South Florida, and better understanding of the economic contributions of ecosystem restoration.

Read-Ahead Materials Available on Web Site: The Information Management Council, a special committee established by the Working Group, helps the Office of Executive Director to develop the capacity to post read-ahead information on their web site prior to each Working Group meeting. This makes it possible for the OED to discontinue the distribution of paper documents through the mail.

Concern About Aquifer Storage and Recovery (ASR): Questions concerning the extensive use of ASR technology, as proposed in the Restudy, are raised by the Working Group and Task Force. The Secretary of the Army is asked by the Task Force to have the Corps of Engineers address these questions in ongoing planning efforts.

1999 HIGHLIGHTS

Introduction

Progress to advance ecosystem restoration advanced at a steady pace in 1999. The Corps of Engineers submitted their Restudy report to Congress with support from the Task Force. A Restudy bill was also passed by the Florida Legislature and signed by the Governor. Agreement was reached to purchase the 60,000 acre Talisman property which is critical for water storage plans. The year was a time for building relationships with the administration of newly elected Governor Jeb Bush. A number of his appointees joined the Task Force and Working Group. New working relationships were also developed with the National Academy of Science and the Museum of Science and discovery of Ft. Lauderdale.

Restudy Report Submitted: *The U.S.Army Corps of Engineers submits its Restudy report of the C & SF Project to Congress. The report includes a Feasibility Study and a Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement.*

Restudy Legislation Passed: *The Florida legislature enacts legislation setting forth a process for state review and authorization of funds to match federal support of ecosystem restoration in South Florida.*

Governors Commission for the Everglades Formed: *Governor Jeb Bush appoints a Commission to evaluate and make recommendations on the funding and implementation of the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan.*

Florida Forever Legislation Enacted: *The Florida legislature enacts the Florida Forever Act to restore, bring under public protection or acquire environmentally sensitive lands to protect them from imminent development.*

Sustainable Agriculture Workshop Completed: A two-day workshop is held in April to increase communication among scientists engaged in agricultural research and those engaged in ecological research. The participants identify an array of areas to work together in the future. A panel of advisors prepares a report following the conference suggesting ways to promote sustainable agriculture.

Science Expo and Symposium Held: In May, a three day event is held to showcase major science efforts related to ecosystem restoration and to advance cooperation between scientists and managers. Participants in the Symposium identify principles and practices for effective communication and cooperation. The USGS takes the lead in organizing the event, which is highly rated by participants, with assistance from the C.E.S.

Land Acquisition Priorities Selected: The Working Group completes a priority list of 38 properties to acquire under a specific monetary appropriation for FY 1999 as requested by the Secretary of Interior. The list is sent to the Secretary of Interior without the inclusion of the controversial 8.5 square mile area in the East Everglades.

Partnership Agreement Established with the Museum of Science and Discovery: In May, a formal partnership agreement is signed by the Task Force and the Museum of Science and Discovery of Ft. Lauderdale. The agreement provides a framework for cooperation between the POSST and the Museum in advancing public outreach and education related to ecosystem restoration.

GAO Report Identifies two Critical Challenges: *The General Accounting Office (GAO) of the federal government publishes a report of its review of South Florida ecosystem restoration. The GAO recommends that the Task Force develop a strategic plan that will: 1) outline how the restoration of the South Florida ecosystem will occur, 2) identify the resources needed to achieve the restoration, 3) assign accountability for accomplishing actions, and 4) link the strategic goals to outcome-oriented annual goals. The GAO further recommends that the Task Force work with the organizations and entities participating in the restoration effort to develop and agree upon a decision-making process to resolve conflicts in order to accomplish the initiative in a timely and efficient manner*

Lake Okeechobee Action Plan Completed: The issue team formed by the Working Group to review critical issues related to Lake Okeechobee completes its report. The action plan contains five major recommendations: 1) construct regional reservoir-assisted stormwater treatment areas to reduce phosphorus loads, 2) intensify control of phosphorus sources, 3) control internal phosphorus loading, 4) conduct programs to control native and exotic plants, and 5) minimize the occurrence of damaging high water levels. Proposed legislation has been filed which includes many of the Lake Okeechobee Action Plan items.

Aquifer Storage and Recharge (ASR) Report Completed: The Working Group, believing that the Aquifer Storage and Recharge installations will augment urban and agricultural water supply as well as reduce salt water intrusion, completes a report that encourages the development of ACE pilot projects using ASR for the restoration plan.

Agreement Developed with the National Academy of Science: A long-standing request of the Science Coordinating Team for a peer review program is acted upon in 1999. An agreement is made with the National Academy of Science to establish a review group, the Committee on the Restoration of the Greater Everglades Ecosystem (CROGEE). A Science Coordinating Team liaison group is established to help brief and to assist the Committee.

Outcome Oriented Strategic Plan Initiated: The Working Group forms a work team to address the issues raised in the GAO report about strategic planning and conflict resolution. The team begins work in the Fall to complete an Outcome Oriented Strategic Plan to be made available to Congress in July 2000.

Applied Behavioral Science Action Plan Approved: In November, the Working Group approves an action plan developed as a result of the Social Science Workshop held in 1998. The plan seeks to assure that adequate attention is given to important Social Science issues that may influence the progress and outcome of ecosystem restoration. Issues involve social and economic analysis and public participation.

Lessons Learned Project Initiated: An agreement is made through the CES to develop a Lessons Learned project for the Task Force. The project is to provide an opportunity for the Working Group to review its development, draw lessons from experience, and to apply lessons to maximize future effectiveness.