Approved Minutes
Working Group (WG) and Science Coordination Group (SCG)
ZOOM Meeting
June 23, 2020

1. Welcome and Introductions

James Erskine called the meeting to order at 9:02AM and welcomed Karen Bohnsack and Jennifer Reynolds, new WG members representing NOAA and the SFWMD, respectively. Adam Gelber welcomed Gene Duncan, Task Force member, who joined the meeting. Nick Aumen reminded everyone of the Greater Everglades Ecosystem Restoration (GEER) Conference scheduled for April 19-22, 2021. Members unable to use the ZOOM platform were provided call-in numbers. The meeting was also webcast and the video is available at: https://www.evergladesrestoration.gov/wgm/

2. Member Whip-Around

Members who joined via the ZOOM platform or called in via phone were asked to introduce themselves and provide brief introductory remarks.

**Working Group (WG) Members**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Member</th>
<th>Joined via ZOOM unless noted otherwise</th>
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<tr>
<td>James Erskine – Chair – FL Fish and Wildlife Conservation Comm.</td>
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<td>Nick Aumen – Vice Chair – U.S. Geological Survey</td>
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<td>Karen Bohnsack – NOAA, Florida Keys Nat’l Marine Sanctuary</td>
<td>√ Joined via phone</td>
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<td>Stephanie Bolden – NOAA, National Marine Fisheries Service</td>
<td>√ Joined via phone</td>
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<td>Amy Castaneda – Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida</td>
<td>√ Joined via webcast</td>
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<td>Kevin M. Cunniff – Seminole Tribe of Florida</td>
<td>√ Joined via phone</td>
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<td>Deb Drum – Palm Beach County</td>
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<td>Rebecca Elliott – FL Dept. of Agriculture and Consumer Services</td>
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<td>Cecelia Harper – U.S. Environmental Protection Agency</td>
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<td>Veronica Harrell-James – U.S. Attorney’s Office</td>
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<td>Lee Hefty – Miami Dade County</td>
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<td>COL Andrew Kelly – U.S. Army Corps of Engineers</td>
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<td>Marjorie Kirby – FL Dept. of Transportation</td>
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<td>John Maehl – Martin County Board of County Commissioners</td>
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<td>Roland Ottolini – Lee County Division of Natural Resources</td>
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<td>Pedro Ramos – NPS, ENP &amp; Dry Tortugas National Parks</td>
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<td>Leonard Rawlings – Bureau of Indian Affairs</td>
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<td>Jennifer Reynolds – South Florida Water Management District</td>
<td>Jennifer Leeds</td>
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<td>Edward Smith – Florida Department of Environmental Protection</td>
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<td>Joe Sullivan – U.S. Department of Transportation, FHWA</td>
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<td>Larry Williams – U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service</td>
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<td>Vacant – U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, NRCS</td>
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<td>Phil Everingham – Chair, BBRRCT, Special Advisory Group</td>
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<td>Adam Gelber – Office of Everglades Restoration Initiatives</td>
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**Science Coordination Group (SCG) Members**
Approval of the Meeting Minutes
Ed Smith made a motion to approve the minutes from the February 25th 2020 joint WG/SCG meeting which was seconded by Nick Aumen. There was no discussion and the minutes were approved without objection.

3. Office of Everglades Restoration Initiatives (OERI) Update

Adam Gelber announced the FY21 Cross Cut Budget has already been posted on www.Evergladesrestoration.gov. This document provides coordinated budget requests for the Everglades ecosystem restoration effort. The document is compiled annually by OERI with information provided by both federal and state agencies represented on the Task Force. OERI sent out a request for information for the Biennial Report which satisfies the requirements of the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) of 1996 to report biennially on Task Force activities and progress made toward restoration. The reporting period is from July 1, 2018 to June 30, 2020 and the first draft will go out to the members via e-mail subsequent to this meeting. The report will go to the Task Force for approval in the Fall. Work is underway on the System-wide Ecological Indicator Report, a digest of scientific findings on eleven system-wide ecological indicators that were selected to assess the progress of the Everglades restoration program from a system-wide perspective by showing how key ecological components respond comprehensively to implementation of projects. The Integrated Financial Plan (IFP) provides detailed information for federal, state, tribal and local restoration projects. Project sheets are due to OERI by June 30th. The Invasive Exotic Species work products being updated include the Strategic Action Framework (Framework) which describes the shared goals, objectives and strategies for successfully combating invasive exotic species and the Cross-Cut Budget, which complements the Framework and ensures we are working in a coordinated way.
4. **SCG Vice Chair Nomination and Election**

Bob Johnson reminded everyone that Susan Gray, prior SCG Chair, retired at the end of last year. He and Susan switched leadership positions and he is now the SCG Chair. Because they alternate leadership positions between the federal and state representatives, they need a state person on the SCG to serve as the Vice Chair. Lawrence Glenn from the SFWMD has volunteered to take on this role. Angie Dunn made a motion to nominate Lawrence as the next SCG Vice Chair which was seconded by Chad Kennedy. The SCG voted unanimously for Lawrence Glenn to serve as the SCG Vice Chair. The nomination will be taken to the Task Force for approval via e-mail.

5. **SFWMD Program and Project Update**

Megan Jacoby reviewed the current status of projects the SFWMD is working on with the USACE to include the C-44 Reservoir and STA; C-43 Reservoir; Central Everglades Planning Project (CEPP); Everglades Agricultural Area (EAA) Stormwater Treatment Area (STA) and the Biscayne Bay Coastal Wetlands (BBCW). The Project Management Plan for the Biscayne Bay Southeastern Everglades Restoration (BBSEER) is complete and the study will begin in July 2020. The state programs the SFWMD is working on were also reviewed and included performance of the STAs and Restoration Strategies.

6. **USACE Program and Project Update**

Howie Gonzales reviewed the program items to include the 2020 Report to Congress, contract renewal for the Committee on Independent Scientific Review of Everglades Restoration Progress (CISRERP) and the Integrated Delivery Schedule (IDS). The Report to Congress is required by WRDA 2000 and is submitted jointly by the Secretaries of the Army and Interior. This will be the fourth report and will focus on the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) progress made between July 1, 2015 through June 30, 2020. The draft report will be out for public review in mid-August and they will continue to work through their milestones to meet their December due date. WRDA 2000 also requires independent scientific review of the CERP. The administrative documents that include the Memorandum of Agreement and the Cooperative Agreement are being finalized in order to renew the CISRERP contract. In July, the USACE and the SFWMD will jointly update the IDS to reflect the FY21 budgets, progress and new studies. The USACE would like the Task Force to sponsor an IDS workshop in September. The goal is to bring the final IDS before the Task Force at its October 2020 meeting. Project updates were provided on the EAA Reservoir, CEPP, Loxahatchee River Watershed Restoration Project (LRWRP), Lake Okeechobee Watershed Restoration Project (LOWRP), the post authorization change reports (PACRs) for the Canal 111 (C-111) South Dade and the Caloosahatchee River (C-43) West Basin Storage Reservoir. The BBSEER study will be initiated in July 2020, the Combined Operational Plan for Modified Water Deliveries to Everglades National Park (ENP) and the Lake Okeechobee System Operating Manual (LOSOM) will be completed. COL Kelly made a motion for the Task Force to sponsor an IDS public workshop in September. The motion was seconded by Jennifer Leeds. None of the members were opposed and the motion passed. Adam Gelber noted they will be seeking the Task Force’s approval via e-mail.

Stacy Myers noted the Seminole Tribe continues to object to the LOWRP, the Tribe questions the benefits accrued versus the cost associated with this project. Specifically, the threat to life and property from flooding due to the proximity of this project to the Brighton reservation. They are also concerned
with the direct impacts to tribal cultural resources from the footprint of this project and plan to take whatever steps are necessary to stop this project.

7. Central and Southern Florida (C&SF) Flood Resiliency Proposed Study

Carolina Coelho Maran provided an overview on the proposed study that is critical for addressing increasing flood risks in the region. It has been 72 years since the C&SF project was authorized in the Flood Control Act of 1948. The C&SF project’s original purpose included flood control, water supply, navigation, prevention of saltwater intrusion, and protection of natural resources. The C&SF project was designed for a population of 2 million people and the population is now approaching 8.7 million with a projection to reach 11.4 million by 2045. It is imperative to account for climate change conditions such as sea level rise, higher groundwater and more extreme rainfall events. On March 12th 2020, the GB approved the SFWMD’s role as the non-federal sponsor and submitted the letter of endorsement. The initial Section 216 Feasibility Study request is for four years and costs $6 million. The SFWMD will be entering an interagency agreement with USGS to develop future climate data analysis that will help inform this study. The video developed by the SFWMD’s communication team explaining the functioning and major components of the C&SF project and highlighting the importance of this proposed study due to changing conditions was shown.

Jason Engle noted that pending receipt of the funding they will kick-off the study. It will involve comprehensive stakeholder participation in scoping and include coordination with additional studies such as the South Atlantic Coastal Study and the Miami Dade Back Bay Feasibility Study. This Section 216 Study will look at the entire system from the top down with a phased approach that will address the most critical parts of the system. The initial Appraisal Report has been approved by the USACE’s South Atlantic Division and funding for the 216 Study will be requested in a future USACE budget. Study will require a “New Start” designation.

8. Miami Dade Back Bay Coastal Storm Risk Management (CSRM) Feasibility Study

Susan Layton, from the USACE Norfolk District provided the update on the Miami-Dade Back Bay CSRM Feasibility Study that will investigate solutions to reduce damages and risks from impacts of coastal storms while considering the impacts of future sea level rise. The study will not address federally owned land such as Everglades National Park but will focus on the urban and coastal areas of Miami Dade County. Due to the geographic size, population and complexity of coastal flooding risks of the study area, the countywide comprehensive study was not considered appropriate for this effort. This study focuses on critical infrastructure on a county-wide basis and the most vulnerable areas to storm surge flooding. The study is 50% complete and the goal is to have a Chief’s Report in September 2021. The Feasibility Agreement was executed in October 2018 and the study was appropriated under the emergency supplemental of 2018 and is being completed at 100% federal expense. The cost share for construction will be 65% federal and 35% non-federal. An in-depth review of the Tentatively Selected Plan (TSP), Alternative 8, was provided. The plan is estimated to cost is $4.5 billion and can produce annual net benefits of over $1.6 billion per year. The draft Integrated Feasibility Report and Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement Study documents were recently released for a 45-day public and agency review. The TSP will be further optimized in the next phase of study to develop a final recommended plan.
Jim Murley noted that this study along with other studies are part of a comprehensive approach to resilience and sea level rise for Miami Dade County. The county in partnership with its municipalities produced a resilience strategy [https://resilient305.com/] in 2019 that looks across the county at places, people and pathways. Working with their partners on the southeast Florida Regional Climate Change Compact [https://southeastfloridaclimatecompact.org/] they are developing a sea-level rise strategy for the county which will incorporate the work the USACE does on storm surge. They will also look at how sea-level rise amplifies flooding from rain events and high tides as well as other projected consequences from sea-level rise. They are developing five major approaches for how Miami Dade County will need to adjust for sea level rise. Those approaches will be applied across a transect of the county from the coastal area all the way to the Everglades. Miami Dade County has a responsibility to look at the long-term ramifications of sea level rise on all the services and facilities the county runs so that they can plan and invest in anticipation of those changing conditions. One of the approaches embedded in the sea level rise strategy is an expansion of the Adaptation Action Areas, to address areas they know have challenges due to sea-level rise and coastal flooding issues. Miami Dade County will work in close cooperation with the work of the Task Force and Working Group as it develops the sea-level rise strategy.

9. Evaluating the Ability of Natural Features to Enhance Coastal Resilience in Southwest Florida

David Kidwell highlighted the suite of capabilities that NOAA brings to bear on sea level rise and coastal resilience issues that help to inform decision making on the ground. Those capabilities developed by NOAA and its partners include the sea level rise trends and scenarios, coastal inundation dashboard, digital coast platform, the sea level rise viewer and research. A modelling project entitled Assessing the Role of Natural and Nature Based Features in Enhancing Coastal Resilience of Urban and Natural Ecosystems in the 21st Century is being led by Peter Sheng with the Univ. of Florida in collaboration with a suite of partners. In 2017, the first phase of the project was used to develop a stakeholder driven webtool called ACUNE, that is already being used to provide localized flood level vulnerability information for their partners in Collier County. The tool highlighted gaps and information needs that are being addressed in the second phase of the project which started in 2019. The modelling was expanded to better understand the combined effects of precipitation and in-land flooding on coastal storm surge and flood impacts in the coastal environment. What was once a coastally focused project in Collier County has now been expanded to include inland watershed areas such as Picayune Strand, Fakahatchee Strand and Big Cypress National Preserve. This effort will build on work conducted over the last several decades and link in with other efforts such as the SFWMD’s Flood Protection Level of Service Program. It will all be integrated into a framework that will allow them to identify potential vulnerabilities and potential mitigation solutions as they map out the best path forward for southwest Florida. The work being done on this project links in with the restoration activities the WG is involved with in trying to examine coastal resilience from a more holistic perspective.

10. Understanding Algal Blooms in Florida – An Educational Video Series

Nick Aumen noted this product is as a result of a partnership between USGS’ Priority Ecosystems Sciences program and FAU’s Center for Environmental Studies (CES). In the past they have put on workshops on various topics such as climate change and this time they decided to produce an online educational series based on the recent algal blooms. The series is targeted to natural resource managers and decision makers but is available to everyone.
John Baldwin noted that following the harmful algal blooms of 2016 and 2018 and the confusion with what was occurring led them to create a series of online modules to assist in the understanding of the science and challenges related to algal blooms. It is intended to educate and improve communication among decision-makers. The information is available to those who need to know or simply want to learn more about algae. The video series is comprised of 5 short videos accompanied by a pdf guide for each video. A demo of one of the videos and a quick overview of the website was provided. The videos will be updated as new information becomes available. He encouraged everyone to learn more about algae by visiting [http://www.ces.fau.edu/usgs/understanding-algae/](http://www.ces.fau.edu/usgs/understanding-algae/)

11. RECOVER Restoration Science Update

Bob Johnson reminded everyone that Everglades restoration depends on sound science to evaluate ecosystem health and assess responses to restoration activities. Long term monitoring data describe how restoration projects change the hydrology, water quality, and ecology of the Everglades and ensures that intended results are achieved. The pace of restoration has significantly accelerated in the last few years but the funding for the programmatic level science through RECOVER has not kept up. They (Who?) are concerned they won’t have the tools to report on restoration benefits to the natural system. Programmatic funding has been reduced by 48%. From the initial list of 30 monitoring projects, six were discontinued, 16 were reduced by 25% and six were reduced by 50%. RECOVER? needs to make sure they can maintain a system-wide perspective to guide planning, design, construction and operations to maximize benefits to the natural and built systems. One part is an assessment of the funding and the other is to talk about staffing levels. Since 2000, many of their scientists have moved on and were not replaced due to funding. Several current senior staff are heading toward retirement and they need to replace vacant science positions and train new science leaders. This group has a key role in managing programs and assigning staff to ensure the monitoring and assessment meet the goals. Today’s agenda had a strong focus on the coastal ecosystem side and there is clear evidence that they are not doing a great job at understanding the science behind how projects will improve conditions in ecosystem and potential offset some of the adverse effects. How do we want to proceed? Bob suggested they set up a forum for RECOVER and the SCG to start working together and set up some workshops and as they reach some milestones on how to address these issues, they can report that back up to the WG/SCG and Task Force. They want to make sure they don’t have gaps where they can’t report out the success. He asked for suggestions on the path forward.

Kevin Cunniff suggested the additional workshopping should target both area universities and universities outside the state doing work in the Everglades. RECOVER should have a greater level of integration with some of the ongoing science in the Everglades. They should also recruit and groom graduate students who have an interest and the aptitude to be the next generation of scientists. This may also provide an opportunity to integrate funding streams in order to support the overall goals and objectives of RECOVER in support of CERP. The Seminole Tribe is interested in being an active participant in the RECOVER process. Lawrence Glenn said the SFWMD is also concerned with how to cover all the science that is needed for CERP and non-CERP projects. A workshop is a fantastic idea for them to sit down and figure out how they can leverage limited funds and staff.

Bob Progulske said the Regional Leadership Group of RECOVER will be meeting in the next month and may be able to facilitate a workshop. A lot of the same people on the Regional Executive Committee and the SCG and suggested the two groups coordinate better. Dave Rudnick added that RECOVER’s role
is to tie it all together, scientifically. The shortcomings with staffing and budget are real and have inhibited that functionality. It is critical that they succeed with having that system-wide perspective and they all need to invest in RECOVER.

12. WG/SCG Discussion Topics

Adam Gelber reminded the group that they were charged by the Task Force to come up with actionable items, on process, science, technical, policy or funding, for them. They have done that with RECOVER, system-wide ecological indicators and invasive exotic species. Project linkages include those items such as BBSEER, Back Bay Study, and the proposed 216 Study. They need to continue charging the Task Force to help them solve those difficult items. In addition, he noted there are local projects that contribute to Everglades restoration and he suggested there could be workshops or opportunities for local governments to meet and share what they are doing. He asked the members with specific comments to follow-up with him directly via e-mail.

Public Comment

Mike Elfenbein (resident) congratulated Lawrence Glenn who has been attentive to stakeholder concerns. Regarding David Kidwell’s presentation on natural features and coastal resilience, sounds good except most of those natural features are quickly disappearing due to invasive species especially in Everglades National Park along the mangroves where Brazilian pepper is overtaking the system. They need more funding for invasive plants and animals. It is clear they are losing the battle to invasive species despite their concerted efforts. He is concerned about scientists who often go to NGO’s who use that scientists’ knowledge to further bog down projects from moving forward. The Miccosukee Tribe sent a letter to the Council on Environmental Quality highlighting concerns related to the Cape Sable Seaside Sparrow and the inability to send water south. They need more green areas to combat sea-level rise and wondered if they would advocate for taking of urban lands on the coastal fringes to save our state.

Richard Martinez (Back Country Hunters and Anglers) echoed Mike’s concerns regarding invasive species particularly in Big Cypress National Preserve. He thanked the staff for all their hard work and added that it would be a shame to work so hard and spend so much money only to see what little is left erode away with the proliferation of invasive plants such as Brazilian pepper and climbing fern. They need to place more effort toward fire management, especially within the preserve and national park.

Nyla Pipes (One Florida Foundation) echoed the comments on invasive species and the Cape Sable Seaside Sparrow which has been an ongoing conversation for decades. They are reaching a point where they need to send that water south. They have invested billions of dollars and the Cape Sable Seaside Sparrow is part of the problems they face. She thanked them for the excellent work on the algal blooms video series. They must do a better job connecting science to the general population. That is the role that her foundation plays as an advocacy organization. She is a little concerned with this revisiting of the C&SF project in relationship to resilience. Anytime they take a major, well established flood control project and try to look at it for a different purpose they need to do more integration with the various programs that are ongoing. She encouraged the use of ZOOM even after COVID restrictions are lifted.

Doug Gaston (Audubon Florida) thanked the presenters for the excellent presentations especially the video on the C&SF project and for all the focus on the impacts of climate change. It is encouraging to
see so much progress and projects moving forward that are desperately needed. He congratulated Lawrence Glenn assuming a more leadership role and he believes he will do a great job. The USFWS rep talked about the conditions of the marsh on Lake Okeechobee and for two years in a row they have not had snail kite nests because of that. That highlights the challenges of balancing lake management and how interconnected all these things are. Intentionally lowering the lake for a year so that it could recover after several years of high lake levels was a good decision. The growth and abundance of SAV in the lake is dramatic and much needed. Among other things it gives the Corps the opportunity to manage the lake within the preferred ecological envelope. Anything this group can do to accelerate projects that were briefed today will be good for the lake and good for the Everglades.

Daniel Watson said he appreciated everyone’s hard work. There will never be historic water flows due to land no longer being available due to development. Historically they never held water back for the Cape Sable Seaside Sparrow (CSSS). He noted his concern about recreational access to areas that are often closed due to high water. Most of the animals in those areas adapt, however, when they change the water levels too swiftly it could be detrimental to the animals and plants in those areas. Invasive Species funding in the National Parks is underfunded and they could end up with areas full of invasive species like Brazilian pepper. He encouraged the group to continue using ZOOM even after the pandemic ends.

Newton Cook said it was a very good meeting. Lake Okeechobee is the key to Everglades restoration and it is important to get and keep the lake healthy. LOSOM is directed at keeping the lake healthy. Every year 500 tons of Phosphorus comes into Lake Okeechobee adding to a 50-year legacy and then they wonder why they have problems. Until they address the incoming flow of nutrients into Lake Okeechobee, they are not going to be successful in Everglades restoration. On the CSSS, until they allow water to flow under Tamiami Trail easily without any restrictions, Everglades restoration will never work.

Betty Osceola (member of the Miccosukey Tribe and of the Miccosukey Tribe’s Everglades Advisory Committee) said she agrees with the letter her Tribal Chairman sent with regards to the CSSS and its impediment to water flow. As they talk about sending water south, the CSSS needs to be a part of the conversation. No one wants to see the detriment of the Everglades occur because of continued single species management. They are never going to go back to historic water flows and Mother Nature will continue to dump rain with less landscape to deal with the water. The people that live in the Everglades need to be heard. She sees firsthand how these animals and plants are impacted by the decision humans make. Dealing with invasive species, whether it’s the python or Melaleuca, is a daunting task when there isn’t enough money and resources to address the problem. She enjoyed the presentations, especially the videos which are great learning tools for non-scientists such as herself.

Mike Melton (Miami Dade County resident) said he is a hunter and fisherman and spends a lot of his time in Big Cypress. He echoed the comments with regards to wanting to see increased funding for invasive exotic species and invasive plant management. There is a ton of Melaleuca and Brazilian pepper and other invasive plants that are choking out the Everglades. He hopes the Great American Outdoors Act money that makes its way to Florida will have some appropriation for invasive species management. NPS needs to have a better prescribed fire management plan in Big Cypress and ENP. On the CSSS, single species management is destructive to the Everglades north of Tamiami Trail.
Laura Reynolds (Town of Cutler Bay) said she was interested in how the BBSEER and the studies (216, Back Bay and South Atlantic Coastal) will all work together. She encouraged they have a more robust conversation where they can discuss that. With regards to the Back Bay Study, she pointed out that they should not rule out purchasing land outright and it would improve their options of where they can put water since just putting up seawalls will not help them for very long. In Miami Dade County there is so much development pressure that they need to make purchasing land that can be flooded a priority. She encouraged the Back Bay Study to enlarge the natural area footprint from just Cutler Bay to that entire edge to increase the benefits.

Brad Cornell (Audubon Western Everglades) supported Bob Johnson’s call for investment and support for staffing and funding of regional ecosystem monitoring. Whether you are interested in sea level rise, coastal resilience, invasive species, water quality or harmful algal blooms, they need this regional level of monitoring. He supported the project objectives of the ACUNE+. On coastal resilience there is this real strong connection to the upstream watershed health if they are trying to foster coastal resilience and look for how to adapt and mitigate the harm that is coming in the coming decades. The watershed connection to coastal resilience is important in these kinds of projects.

**Next Steps and Closing Comments**

James Erskine reminded everyone of FWC’s Commission meeting on July 22, 2020, information is available at [www.myfwc.gov](http://www.myfwc.gov)

Adam Gelber reminded everyone that the OERI follow up with the Task Force via e-mail on the IDS workshop and Lawrence Glenn serving as SCG Vice Chair. The next WG/SCG meeting is scheduled on Sept. 17, 2020 and the next Task Force meeting is scheduled for Oct. 22, 2020. OERI will continue to work throughout the summer to finish up the Task Force reports and assignments. In addition, the CISRERP report will be out in the Fall.

Meeting adjourned.

**Handouts:**

1. Administrative Items
   a. Agenda
   b. Minutes, February 2020 meeting
2. Membership Roster
3. OERI Update
4. SCG Vice Chair Nomination (no handout)
5. SFWMD Program and Project Update presentation
6. USACE Program and Project Update
7. Central and Southern Florida (C&SF) Flood Resiliency Proposed Study
8. Miami Dade Back Bay Coastal Storm Risk Management Feasibility Study
9. Evaluating the Ability of Natural Features to Enhance Coastal Resilience in Southwest Florida
10. Understanding Algal Blooms in Florida – An Educational Video Series
11. RECOVER Restoration Science Update
12. WG/SCG Discussion Topics