

**Draft Meeting Summary
SOUTH FLORIDA ECOSYSTEM RESTORATION
JOINT WORKING GROUP (WG) AND SCIENCE COORDINATION GROUP (SCG) MEETING**

Virtual ZOOM, July 7, 2022

Full video recording of the meeting is available at: [JULY 7, 2022 – WORKING GROUP/SCIENCE COORDINATION GROUP MEETING – EVERGLADES RESTORATION INITIATIVES](#)

1. Welcome and Introductions

James Erskine called the meeting to order at 9:35 a.m. and provided some administrative announcements. He thanked everyone for attending and reminded everyone the meeting was being recorded and webcast live at www.Evergladesrestoration.gov. He welcomed Lawrence Glenn and Angie Dunn who are now the Chair and Vice Chair of the SCG after having served in an interim capacity. James Erskine recognized Sandy Soto, Office of Everglades Restoration Initiatives (OERI), for the administrative announcements related to the Zoom platform.

2. Whip-around

Members were asked to provide brief introductory remarks. Larry Williams introduced Bonnie Irving, new SCG member, representing the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Working Group (WG) Members

Alternate

James Erskine – Chair – FL Fish and Wildlife Conservation Comm.	√	
Nick Aumen – Vice Chair – U.S. Geological Survey	√	
Becky Allenbach – U.S. Environmental Protection Agency	√	
Karen Bohnsack – NOAA, Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary	√	
Stephania Bolden – NOAA, National Marine Fisheries Service	-	
COL James Booth – U.S. Army Corps of Engineers	√	
Wes Brooks – Florida Department of Environmental Protection	√	
Amy Castaneda – Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida	-	
Kevin M. Cunniff – Seminole Tribe of Florida	√	
Deb Drum – Palm Beach County	-	
Rebecca Elliott – FL Dept. of Agriculture and Consumer Services	√	
Veronica Harrell-James – U.S. Attorney’s Office	√	
Vacant - Miami Dade County	-	
John Maehl – Martin County Board of County Commissioners	-	
Roland Ottolini – Lee County Division of Natural Resources	-	
Pedro Ramos – NPS, ENP & Dry Tortugas National Parks	-	Melodie Naja
Leonard Rawlings – Bureau of Indian Affairs	-	
Jennifer Reynolds – South Florida Water Management District	-	
Edward Smith – Florida Department of Environmental Protection	-	
Joe Sullivan – U.S. Department of Transportation, FHWA	√	
Jason Watts – FL Dept. of Transportation	-	
Larry Williams – U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	√	
Vacant – U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, NRCS	-	

Phil Everingham – Chair, BBRRCT, Special Advisory Group (non-voting)	-
Adam Gelber – Office of Everglades Restoration Initiatives	√
Science Coordination Group (SCG) Members	
Lawrence Glenn – SCG Chair – South Florida Water Management District	√
Angie Dunn – SCG Vice Chair - U.S. Army Corps of Engineers	√
John Baldwin – Florida Atlantic University	-
Joan Browder – NOAA, Southeast Fisheries Science Center	√
Amy Castaneda – Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida	-
Jennifer Hecker – Coastal & Heartland National Estuary Partnership	√
Bonnie Irving – U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	√
Chris Kelble – NOAA, AOML	√
Chad Kennedy – FL Dept. of Environmental Protection	-
Gil McRae – FL Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission	√
Holly Milbrandt – City of Sanibel Natural Resources Department	√
Stacy Myers – Seminole Tribe of Florida	√
Mark Rains – Florida Department of Environmental Protection	√
Stephanie Romañach – United States Geological Survey	√
Dan Scheidt – U.S. Environmental Protection Agency	√
Erik Stabenau – National Park Service	-
Jason Strenth – U.S. Department of Agriculture – NRCS	√
Vacant, Special Advisor – National Park Service	-
Vacant – FL Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services	-
Vacant – U.S. Department of Agriculture – ARS	-

3. Approval of Meeting Summary

The summary from the September 2021 meeting was presented. Nick Aumen made a motion to approve, and motion was seconded by Lawrence Glenn. No one was opposed and the meeting summary was approved.

4. Office of Everglades Restoration Initiatives (OERI) Update

Adam Gelber reminded everyone that a series of invasive species meetings will take place over the summer as they move forward on the Water Resources Delivery Act (WRDA) 2020 directive to develop a priority list of invasive species as directed by the Task Force. The next joint WG/SCG meeting is scheduled for Sept. 1st and the next Task Force meeting is scheduled for Oct. 19th in Wash., DC. All funding information has been received by OERI for the Cross-Cut Budget which will be posted on the www.Evergladesrestoration.gov website. OERI is working on the Biennial Report which is scheduled for approval by the Task Force at its next meeting. It will be simultaneously sent to OMB and DOI for clearance. The Integrated Financial Plan (IFP) project sheets are due to OERI later this month and the goal is to have the IFP completed and posted on the website in September.

5. SFWMD Program and Project Update

Mindy Parrott focused her presentation on the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) and Restoration Strategies projects. For the CERP & Restoration Strategies, they have a substantial budget for this year and next. They are working hard and currently have projects in all different stages. They have several projects in design, several of which are moving toward construction, and projects in construction that are moving toward completion. She highlighted the IRL-S C-44 Reservoir and STA, IRL-S

C-23 to C-44 Interconnect, C-43 West Basin Storage Reservoir, the Caloosahatchee Reservoir Water Quality Component, CEPP EAA: A-2 Reservoir & STA, CEPP North, 8.5 SMA Limited Curtain Wall, and Biscayne Bay Coastal Wetlands Phase 1. She also reviewed the Restoration Strategies program. On the Lake Okeechobee Watershed Restoration Project (LOWRP) the SFWMD and State are moving forward with Aquifer Storage and Recovery (ASR), with a careful step by step implementation and guided by the Science Plan to address ASR uncertainties. The 2022 ASR Science Plan is a living document that guides the ASR Program. They recently had an ASR Peer Review Technical Panel workshop on June 15, 2022, and the materials are available at: www.sfwmd.gov/asr. The revised Draft Science Plan is due Aug 30th with public review scheduled in mid-September. The Final 2022 ASR Science Plan is expected in November.

6. USACE Program and Project Update

Eva Velez stated the Corps is committed to continuing their consultation with the Tribe as well as integrating Indigenous Traditional Ecological Knowledge (ITEK) into their program. Their budget is very healthy and robust like the State of Florida's. For FY22 they have ~\$350 million in construction and are well positioned to execute funding as they head into the last stretch of the fiscal year. The FY23 President's Budget has \$407 million for construction. A total of \$1.097 billion was allocated to South Florida Ecosystem Restoration projects in the Infrastructure Investments and Jobs Act (IIJA 2022). In FY22 they received funding for the C&SF Resilience Study, a separate study not part of South Florida Ecosystem Restoration, but very much related to the work they do. The Study will determine how the most urgent areas of the C&SF system can be made more resilient to climate change and sea level rise. She provided an overview of the program structure explaining that five projects were allocated funds in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA 2022):

1. Gen 1 - Indian River Lagoon – South (IRL-S) (C-23 and C-24 North Reservoir)
2. Gen 2 - Broward County WPA (C-11 Impoundment)
3. Central Everglades Planning Project (CEPP) South Phase (356 Pump Station)
4. Western Everglades (complete study)
5. Biscayne Bay and Southeastern Everglades Ecosystem Restoration (BBSEER) (complete study)

Program Level Activities include the 2022 IDS update with public engagement being done the same way it was done last year. For FY23, the REstoration COordination and VERification (RECOVER) team will be working on the Systemwide Evaluation and Assessment, Systemwide Review and Integration, and Adaptive Management, all of which will support the projects. The third program level activity is the Second Periodic CERP Update (SPCU), intended to provide the basis for evaluating whether the goals and purposes of the CERP are being achieved. It is a technical analysis and does not result in a decision document. The SPCU ensures that new information is regularly considered and incorporated and will update the total quantity of water expected to be generated by implementation of the CERP, including the quantity generated for the environment and the quantity generated for water supply. To conduct the SPCU, the model will be updated from the South Florida Water Management Model (SFWMM) to the Regional Simulation Model (RSM). When the CERP was authorized, it was recognized that it had a very long-term implementation timeline and they needed to allow for new understanding, new models, and new tools. The Interagency Modelling Center will update the RSM to model all the CERP components by next Spring.

Four planning studies [BBSEER project, the IRL-S, LOWRP, and the Western Everglades Restoration Project (WERP)] were reviewed. For the IRL-S, the Director of Civil Works signed the report on June 30th in time to be considered for WRDA 2022. The purpose of that Director's Report was to increase the total project cost from ~\$2 billion to ~\$5 billion. The IRL-S is really a program because it has so many different

features associated with storage and treatment as well as wetland restoration of the IRL area. Quite a bit of the increase in cost is related to their improved understanding of the cost to construct and design updates and refinement that have occurred since that project was originally authorized in 2004. Seven projects (C-111 South Dade, Picayune Strand Restoration, IRL-S, Biscayne Bay Coastal Wetlands, CEPP, Broward County Water Preserve Areas, and LOWRP) that are either under design or construction were reviewed. Four projects [Kissimmee River Restoration, IRL-S, Lake Okeechobee System Operating Manual (LOSOM), and Combined Operational Plan (COP)] in operations were also reviewed. For LOSOM, they will be releasing the draft Environmental Impact Statement and Water Control Plan at the end of July and the public commenting period will start in August.

Kevin Cunniff (Seminole Tribe) added that the new SWF module within RECOVER will holistically take in the entirety of the watershed and will overlap with the current Greater Everglades module and the Southern Coastal Systems module in a way that, he thought, would provide great benefit for the overall RECOVER goals and objectives. He announced that the Seminole Tribe recently hired Dr. Jed Redwine to provide greater resources to RECOVER. Jed Redwine would not only support the RECOVER effort but will serve as an alternate at future meetings. He asked whether RECOVER would have more staff and funding given its responsibilities and aggressive work plan. Eva replied that the Corps has increased staff and resources for RECOVER over the last several years. The RECOVER team does need additional resources from other agencies.

Wes Brooks (FDEP) noted the SCG has been talking about making sure they have the resources necessary to support RECOVER. They need to make sure the science and information they are using to support decision making is on par. If they need to have additional conversations among the members in the future to ensure everyone is providing what's necessary to achieve the RECOVER mission, then they should do that.

7. Western Everglades Restoration Plan (WERP) Update

Steve Baisden noted the WERP study was suspended pending approval of the exception to the 3x3x3 SMART Planning Policy for additional time and money. The project was provided additional funding and 23 months to complete the feasibility study. The goals of WERP are to improve the quantity, quality, timing, and distribution of water in the western Everglades to re-establish ecological connectivity, reduce the severity and frequency of wildfires, and restore low nutrient conditions. The WERP is a component of the CERP, which was authorized under the WRDA 2000. The study area covers approximately 1,200 square miles and includes the Miccosukee Tribe's Reservation as well as the Seminole Tribe of Florida's Big Cypress Reservation within the footprint. The tentatively selected plan (TSP), Alternative Hr: Hybrid revised, includes a blend of features to meet their objectives which include: two STAs, backfilling canals, degrading levees, culvert and control structures, tree island and wetland vegetation restoration, and weirs. The TSP will be presented to the SFWMD Governing Board on July 14th and then presented to the Vertical Team on August 4th. The Draft report will be released in September 2022 and the agency decision milestone will be in January 2023. The final report milestone is August 2023, followed by a Chief's Report in December 2023 and ultimately inclusion in WRDA 2024.

8. Restoration Coordination and Verification (RECOVER) Reporting Integration

Amanda Kahn noted she is a liaison to RECOVER and part of her role is to coordinate and facilitate the communication among the SFWMD's Applied Sciences staff, the CERP Project Managers, and the RECOVER Executive Committee. Phyllis Klarman and Gina Ralph are the Project Managers at the SFWMD and USACE. RECOVER ensures that CERP implementation is guided by the best available science. She highlighted how the RECOVER Adaptive Assessment and Monitoring (AA&M) and the Monitoring and

Assessment Plan (MAP) inform ecosystem restoration. She reviewed the history, current state, and future of AA&M and the MAP as well as highlighting a plethora of MAP data applications. The scope of AA&M is essentially captured under the MAP and preliminary investigations began in the early 2000s and most monitoring programs began between 2004 and 2006. It was conceived as a primary tool by which the RECOVER program assesses the performance of the ecosystem as a response to the CERP implementation. The scientific and technical information generated was organized to provide a process for RECOVER to not only evaluate the CERP, but to produce assessment reports to interpret these responses. The MAP 2004 and 2006 reports covered the monitoring and supporting research and assessment strategy. The MAP 2009 underwent an update based on the information gained from the previous years. However, since 2012 to the present, due to budget constraints, there has been an overall reduction in the MAP monitoring efforts. This includes eliminations of entire monitoring projects or system regions or parts of regions. Unfortunately, due to budget constraints they have lost information for indicators for the performance measures for project planning alternative evaluation as well as the SFER Stoplight reporting and performance assessment of CERP. When budget cuts occurred in the past, other partner agencies were able to pick up some of the work.

The Corps currently manages 18 agreements and the SFWMD manages 12 agreements. While this looks like an expansive effort of monitoring it is at a reduced level relative to 2009. It does not encompass all the indicator monitoring at the spatial and/or temporal scale or indicator level as initially planned in the MAP 2004, 2006 and 2009. The MAP data provides information used at the CERP programmatic level, project-specific level, and in various reports such as the SFWMD's South Florida Environmental Report, the Task Force's Biennial Report and System-wide Ecological Indicator Report, and the South Florida Wading Bird Report. The MAP data informs water control planning development such as the COP and the LOSOM and at even a smaller scale. Information collected through the MAP efforts are also used to inform weekly water management decisions through either ecological condition updates as well as periodic scientist calls for both Lake Okeechobee and the Water Conservation Areas.

The AA&M path forward for FY23 will begin a multi-year effort to conduct the MAP synthesis and evaluation. Based on this effort they will be developing a report and a revised MAP based upon the new information they've collected. Leading to this effort are updates to the Regional Conceptual Models (Southern Coastal System, Northern Estuaries, Everglades Tree Islands, Ridge & Slough, Big Cypress, and Lake Okeechobee) and Indicator Hypotheses Clusters (seagrass, oysters, benthic fauna, fish, avian, macroinvertebrates, vegetation/habitat mosaic, and alligators). The new Southwest Florida module that encompasses the Picayune Strand and the WERP footprints, as well as overlaps with the greater Everglades and southern coastal systems modules, will help them develop a MAP component that addresses this new region. They need to improve the knowledge of what other monitoring agencies and institutes outside of the SFWMD and Corps are funding that would help support these RECOVER efforts. RECOVER would like to work with the WG and SCG to help them compile this information.

Lawrence Glenn highlighted the significance of RECOVER in being the science arm of the CERP. These data are very important in their planning efforts and in evaluating the success of a project. A great presentation to show that although RECOVER is meant to be a system-wide evaluation it is also used at the project level as well. They are being very careful in not having duplicity of effort and leveraging data where data are available for the many different efforts that are moving forward. RECOVER requests help from all the agencies in providing scientists to join the RECOVER group to help collect these very significantly important data.

Nick Aumen (USGS) added that the Everglades Depth Estimation Network (EDEN) is co-funded by RECOVER and by his program, the Greater Everglades Priority Ecosystem Sciences Program. While RECOVER largely funds the working of new stage gauges, his funding is really dedicated towards research and development of EDEN and developing new applications. For example, the newest effort underway is development of flow vectors in EDEN. He noted that his predecessor, Ronnie Best picked up crocodilian monitoring years ago and they are still paying about \$50,000 a year. They would love to see that taken back at some point by RECOVER, if that's possible. As a little bit of other history, when the CERP started, they funded RECOVER at \$10 million a year for 10 years, for a total of \$100 million. That was a much higher level of funding for a much smaller restoration portfolio that existed. The projects in the ground now and the ones they are implementing are much larger and more intensive. That should justify some increase in RECOVER funding.

Melody Naja (NPS) said they are facing the same problem with budget cuts and had the same level of CERP funding since 2008. They picked up several RECOVER monitoring efforts within the South Florida Natural Resources Center and are bringing a biostatistician on board to help them assess the monitoring they are conducting. They are looking forward to coordinating with RECOVER to avoid duplication and streamline efforts.

James Erskine (FWC) noted that Gil McRae is heavily engaged in RECOVER with the seagrass and oyster work. He appreciated the multiple levels in which this data is being used down to the weekly ecological and water management reports. FWC's land managers and wildlife biologists believe that bringing biologically based information into water management is important for conservation and important to get the gains on a year-to-year basis that will give them those interdecadal type of conservation goals.

9. Integrated Delivery Schedule (IDS)

Eva Velez (USCAE) announced that the purpose of her IDS briefing was to kick-off the annual update. The IDS is their road map, their strategic plan, and a living document that integrates the State and Federal work for the Everglades restoration program. The 2021 IDS can be found on their website at www.saj.usace.army.mil/IDS/. The IDS is in the form of a large double-sided placemat and one can really understand the full breadth of the program from this one document. The IDS 101 and Stakeholder Listening Session will be on Aug 5th and will enable members of the team, meaning the larger collective Everglades Restoration team, learn how to read it. The IDS, 68 CERP Components Overview, and Listening Session with Stakeholders will be on Aug 19th. Task Force consultation on the IDS will occur at the next Task Force meeting. The Corps and SFWMD are currently doing a line-by-line review of each of those projects that are shown on the front page. They will update the top line with the latest budget information for FY23. The back page of the IDS on science will also be updated and they will talk about the module in the southwest area. Eva formally requested a TF Sponsored workshop and reminded everyone that the Corps received blanket approval for IDS workshops the prior year.

James Erskine (FWC) said that was correct and appreciated the formal request. The Working Group letter dated Nov. 17, 2021, does include support for future IDS workshops.

Public Comment

Thomas Oates (resident) noted his concerns related to WERP Alternative Hr. The 52,000-acre Reservation has a large cattle and agricultural operation that mechanically drains into the L-28 canal and he is concerned the mechanical drainage on the Reservation will end up dumping at the location of the proposed plug. He hopes this will be addressed in the future.

Rhonda Ross (Sierra Club, Calusa Group) said she was grateful for all the detailed presentations. She asked about the projections for seagrass restoration. Many Sierra Club members are concerned about water quality on the coast and the impact on the seagrasses. Manatees are suffering as they slowly starve to death. They see unrestrained development and suburban sprawl in Collier County and expansion of the sugarcane agriculture into western Hendry County and into Charlotte County. She questioned whether members of the WG and SCG were working with the counties, planners, and legislators adding that Everglades restoration would be a lot less expensive if they could eliminate some of the sources of the problem. She also asked about the projections for water quality restoration so that seagrasses will regrow.

Newton Cook (resident) said he appreciated the work that went into the presentations and agreed that the Seminole Tribe is 100% correct, the tree islands are suffering. He was out in WCA 3A recently and the water was sky high. He was sitting in the canal fishing and the canal was going north not south. If they keep killing these tree islands, they are not going to have anything left out there. He continues to oppose LOSOM because it is going to destroy Lake Okeechobee. Keeping water over 15 ½ feet in Lake Okeechobee will kill off the vegetation and if there is no vegetation in the lake, the water going in every direction is going to be dirty.

Nyla Pipes (One Florida Foundation) followed up on Newton Cook's comments about keeping Lake Okeechobee too high. It is frustrating to have worked so hard for all those years to bring people's attention to storage north of the lake and then face a slowdown with the LOWRP. The LOWRP is going to give them the flexibility they need as LOSOM goes forward. She encouraged them to work hard in getting the Chief's Report done and LOWRP into WRDA this year. She also followed up on Wes Brooks' comments regarding the IRL-South, and how thrilled One Florida Foundation is to see that continued movement. She applauded everyone that has been working hard at keeping IRL-South at the top of the IDS and working to finally implement it.

Mike Elfenbein (resident) thanked Stacy Myers and Kevin Cunniff for their comments. He looks forward to working with the Corps and the partners in the coming months to maybe figure out a way to alleviate the destruction of some of those grand cypress strands and domes that exist in the system. He is very proud of a project they have been working on for Lake Okeechobee that helps to resolve some of the constant problems they keep talking about at every single meeting, which is nutrient pollution. The project on the lake sponsored by FWC and FDEP shows promise for reducing the nutrients that are stuck inside of their water bodies, specifically Lake Okeechobee. He offered to show the members the work they are doing and how they are working hard to provide solutions to some of the biggest problems they are facing.

Kellie Ralston (Bonefish and Tarpon Trust) said Bonefish and Tarpon Trust is excited about the state and federal financial commitments to Everglades restoration and the progress they have been seeing over the last several years. She expressed concern about the timing of the LOWRP Chief's Report and making sure it gets into WRDA 2022. On the IDS, she said it is an invaluable document. She encouraged them, as they go through the RECOVER MAP update, to put thoughtful numbers and priorities on paper, whether they're currently achievable or not. It helps those on the outside to ask for additional funding where it's needed.

Diana Umpierre (Sierra Club) thanked them for providing a virtual meeting as an option and recommended they allow participants to see the participant list. She hopes the state agencies and the Corps take the remarks by the Seminole Tribe representatives to heart. She is grateful they have been

honest about their concerns on the Everglades Agricultural Area (EAA) Reservoir. She expressed frustration in finding reports and pointed out that the CERP Programmatic Regulations made it clear that there are certain things that are supposed to be publicly available such as RECOVER Reports, the EAA Reservoir Validation Report, and the CERP Interim Guidance. She closed by saying that she hopes there will be even more funding for RECOVER.

Jed Redwine (Seminole Tribe) said he will serve as an alternate at future meetings but was there supporting Kevin Cunniff and Stacy Myers. He said that while he thinks it's very important to celebrate progress with the CERP projects going forward, it is important that they are realistic and clear that the science process underpinning the CERP has not been supported. While they are moving forward with more projects, they are not making meaningful progress on enhancing the scientific underpinnings of the CERP. It's very important that their progress in the CERP be supported with systematic planning at the local, regional, and watershed levels to reach harmony. Failure to do so will be revealed with water quality challenges. It's very important that they get the projects right as they're being implemented.

10. Florida's Coral Reef Coordination Team

Wes Brooks (FDEP) explained how everything they do with Everglades restoration is tied to the historic flow, current flow, and the CERP flow. Too often because of the sheer difficulty in conceiving a project as large as the CERP, the water does not stop when it hits salt water. They have evidence that there were historic freshwater seasonal pulses that were distributed, far and wide across the coral reef ecosystem. Today our reefs are suffering from similar issues as our wetland systems, in terms of freshwater quality, quantity, timing, and distribution. The Florida Reef Tract runs all the way from the Dry Tortugas, 360 miles north, to the mouth of the St. Lucie River. As they look to restore some of those more natural hydrological connections for the Everglades they should be looking to see what can be done to restore water quality on Florida's coral reefs as well. The real impetus for this was the Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease (SCTLD) that took place beginning in 2014. Although they had been experiencing a slow decline of Florida's coral reef over many decades, what they saw beginning in 2014 was a full-fledged marine pandemic. SCTLD impacts almost half of the stony corals on the reef tract, and when it hits it's almost 100% fatal. Most of the impacted species have declined in population between 90-98%. This is probably the worst disease event Florida's coral reef has experienced in modern times. Conservation of the reef requires an active strategy centered on restoring populations and restoring ecosystem structure and function. They have made a lot of strides in the past couple years with partners across the state and are so far advanced that they are now able to launch a landscape-scale ecosystem restoration effort. Like Everglades restoration, they have a big, overlapping series of jurisdictions and management responsibilities. It is critical that they better coordinate these efforts and make sure they are achieving effective outcomes. The Everglades system and the coral reef system provide hundreds of millions of dollars, if not billions of dollars, in resilience benefits per year to the built environment in southeast Florida. They also provide important resilience benefits to each other.

The agencies (DEP, FWC, NPS, FWS, NOAA, and EPA) involved on the reef system are all the same experienced partners that are working together on this WG. It is their position that a coordination team housed under the WG could provide an ideal venue to formalize coordination of management and restoration activities across the entire span of the reef landscape. The reef tract will continue to be impacted by anthropogenic disturbance but also by the decisions the TF makes on Everglades restoration. He reviewed the draft team charter and noted the mission of this team is to regionally integrate and coordinate management and restoration related activities to conserve and restore Florida's coral reef and associated resources to protect, sustain, and enhance the South Florida

Ecosystem's ecological and aesthetic character, function, and resilience. The team will produce the following deliverables:

1. A collaborative framework for water quality monitoring along Florida's coral reef;
2. Recommendations for ecological indicators and RECOVER performance measures specific to Florida's coral reef and associated resources to be considered by the SCG; and
3. Any other items as requested by the WG or SCG or as deemed necessary or beneficial by the team.

The team will be chaired by an active member of the WG, meetings will be open and transparent, and team will have a sunset provision for when the WG no longer finds utility in it. Responsibilities include serving as the principal advisory body to the WG and SCG for issues impacting Florida's coral reef and associated resources.

James Erskine (FWC) conducted a whip-around of the members on the draft Florida's Coral Reef Coordination Team Charter.

Gil McRae (FWC) added that this draft proposal is a product of many months of discussion involving FWC, DEP, NOAA, and several other partners. In his opinion, this proposal is long overdue. The FWC has one of the longest time series of coral monitoring data in the world. For over 30 years they've watched their coral reef community transition from what used to be a healthy vibrant reef dominated by stony corals including the large framework corals to what is now a community dominated by soft corals and macroalgae. The SCTL event unfortunately targeted those large boulder and brain corals that form the structure of the reef. In the past they were concerned about the coral community transitioning too quickly into a different type of community and now they are concerned about losing the framework of the reef itself. They will have two large scale restoration activities concurrently within the South Florida Ecosystem and it just makes sense to have them connected as much as possible.

Angie Dunn (USACE) agreed they should allow some flexibility to each of the agencies as to what members they may nominate to be a part of this team. From the Corps perspective, their team working on coral mitigation and coral impacts for their coastal and navigation projects are separate from their Everglades restoration team. So having that flexibility for each of the agencies to pull in these experts that can help would be great.

Karen Bohnsack (NOAA) said she was very supportive of this effort to better integrate what they are working on. South Florida's coral reef is a part of the South Florida Ecosystem and she thinks this team will emphasize that connectivity between the land and these offshore resources and vice versa. With regards to membership, NOAA has a lot of different hands in the "coral management cookie jar." She respectfully requested consideration of an additional NOAA representative on the team to make sure that they are accounting for that. But if they have only one NOAA seat, then she asks they allow the agency more leeway to find a NOAA representative who's better able to represent the entirety of the Florida reef track not just the two-thirds that are currently encompassed in the FKNMS.

Becky Allenbach (EPA) agreed with the need to have some flexibility within their agencies on who they name to the team. She also hopes that they can use this team to compare some of the projects that they are sponsoring because she is seeing a bit of duplication in some efforts.

Melody Naja (NPS) said they are supportive of the information sharing and coordinating features of this effort. They understand the importance of coral reef restoration and the connection and interdependence on ecosystem restoration. This effort is another driver to get the water right.

Chris Kelble (NOAA) said many stakeholders tend to blame the water quality in the Keys with whatever is going on in the Everglades, whether that is borne out by the science or not. This team will be critical in being able to address those questions with one voice. Coral reef restoration and Everglades restoration are linked and can move forward in tandem to be mutually beneficial. He agreed that they have many different parts of NOAA involved in coral work in south Florida and that it would be tough for one representative to be able to encompass it all.

Larry Williams said FWS fully supports establishing this team. He also suggested the agencies have flexibility in who they appoint.

James Erskine said that as a group, they know more about these two restoration projects collectively, compared to the public. Divers tend to be divers and hunters tend to be hunters. Building communication and coordination between these groups would have a benefit to stakeholders of the South Florida Restoration Program.

Joan Browder said she wanted to be one more voice from NOAA in support of forming this team. She also suggested there should be two people representing NOAA because NOAA is a conglomerate of multiple agencies that help to coordinate their work.

James Erskine said they will incorporate these edits to the charter and asked that any additional written comments be provided by August 4th. The final draft charter will be brought back to the September WG/SCG meeting for approval.

11. WRDA 2020 - Invasive Species Risk Assessment Prioritization and Management

Carrie Beeler noted that she, along with Allyn Childress, from OERI, will be working on this assignment. The WRDA 2020 amended the duties of the Task Force to include invasive species and that process will build on the Strategic Action Framework effort which was updated in 2020. Part 1 of the WRDA 2020 directs the Task Force to develop and update, as appropriate, a priority list of invasive species that: reflects an assessment of ecological risk that the listed invasive species represent; includes populations of invasive plants and animals that: (a) are significantly impacting the structure and function of ecological communities, native species, or habitat within the South Florida Ecosystem; or (b) demonstrate a strong potential to reduce, obscure, or otherwise alter key indicators used to measure Everglades restoration progress. Part 2 of the WRDA states that the priority list of invasive species shall be used by the Task Force and agencies and entities represented on the Task Force to focus cooperative and collaborative efforts: to guide applied research; to develop innovative strategies and tools to facilitate improved management, control, or eradication of listed species; to implement specific management, control, or eradication activities at the appropriate periodicity and intensity necessary to reduce or neutralize the impacts of listed invasive species, including the use of qualified skilled volunteers when appropriate; and to develop innovative strategies and tools to prevent future introductions of nonnative species.

At its May 3, 2022, meeting, the Task Force directed the WG, SCG, and OERI to implement the direction in the WRDA 2020 and develop a priority list of species using the described requirements. The proposed

process includes convening a group of experts to identify existing priority lists, discuss the value/utility of the WRDA priority list for member agencies, develop summary matrices that satisfies the first part of the WRDA 2020, develop supporting documents, and determine future steps/role of the team. Anticipated products include a summary matrix for plants and animals showing how each species was assessed or screened, an explanation of the impacts, and how those impacts were determined. Supporting documents would include the purpose, description of how the summary matrix was developed, description of each assessment tool used, conversation about impacts and how they were determined, recommendations, and appendices. She reviewed the WG/SCG agency appointees and the other experts such as from Southwest Florida Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area (SWFL CISMA) and the Everglades Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area (ECISMA) that would participate.

Nick Aumen (USGS) conducted a whip-around of the members on the proposed path forward.

James Erskine (FWC) said they are very supportive of this effort. They have two high-level section leaders (Kristin Sommers and Matt Phillips) that are appointed to this team. Kristin and Matt can pull from all FWC's staff resources, including their Everglades subject matter experts on this as they move forward, so FWC will be fully engaged. The state is doing a lot of work, not just with pythons, but with several plants and animals that may already be listed. This will provide a lot of information on whether there is anything missing and how they can bridge the gaps that do exist between both state and federal lands.

Lawrence Glenn (SFWMD) reported that LeRoy Rogers, who works in the SFWMD's land management group and does a lot with invasive plant species on lands they own across the 16 counties, will bring a lot of knowledge to this group. They don't do as much with animals as the other agencies, and they defer to FWC and FWS for that. The SFWMD is happy to provide their support through LeRoy Rogers.

Angie Dunn (USACE) said the Corps has a great invasive species team at the Jacksonville District that she knows will be participating in this group.

Melodie Naja (NPS) said that Brian Falk, who recently left SFNRC for another position at the Washington level, will still be involved in this effort. He has great experience with invasive plant and animal species.

COL Booth said Jessica Spencer will represent the Corps on this effort.

Chris Kelble (NOAA) said they are supportive of this effort.

Gil McRae (FWC) agreed with James Erskine's comments that they support the effort and have good folks ready to go on the team.

Joan Browder (NOAA) said she wished she could recommend Tom Jackson, who was their invasive species expert and passionate about this topic, but he is now retired. She asked if the priority list would include species that have not yet been released into the environment. In talking with Tom Jackson, she got the impression from talking with him that that was where some of the biggest gains could be made. She urged them to include those species that are not yet here and lay a framework for keeping them out.

Wes Brooks (FDEP), in response to Joan, pointed out that the language specifically says that the priority list needs to reflect an assessment of ecological risk and that's broken up into two parts: invasive plant and animals that are significantly impacting the structure and function of ecological communities, native species, or habitat within the ecosystem; and invasive plants and animals that demonstrate a strong potential to reduce, obscure, or otherwise alter key indicators used to measure restoration progress. Those species would not need to be present in the ecosystem currently.

Kevin Cunniff (Seminole Tribe) said he was thankful for the opportunity to take part in today's presentations and obviously for having the opportunity to speak on some of the very pertinent matters to the Seminole Tribe of Florida.

Holly Millbrandt (City of Sanibel) said they were very supportive of this effort. The City of Sanibel has maintained a list of their 8 worst invasive plants. They are actively involved with the SW CISMA and FISK. This could benefit folks at the local government level and it would be good for them to be aware of what's out there and what's on the horizon on both the ecosystem scale and local government or county scale.

Stephanie Romañach (USGS) fully supported Nick being the appointee from USGS as well as Wes Daniel who is another expert and runs a great invasive program. USGS does have several invasive species experts and either Nick or Wes can reach those experts. USGS has been doing some work over the last decade on climate and how to prepare for invasive invasions and she suggested they reach out to these other experts at USGS. Nick clarified he was not an invasive species expert but could serve as a link to other folks at USGS who really know their stuff.

Karen Bohnsack (NOAA) noted that Kelly O'Donnell with NOAA Fisheries is appointed to this group and is an expert on lionfish. She too can serve as a liaison with others at NOAA who might have some input into what this group's doing otherwise. She is very supportive of this effort. Regarding the Part 1 products, she believes the summary matrix will be a useful product that could concisely help document not only the impacts but how those impacts are determined. This could be a living document with reproducible results or new species added with the same type of backup.

Larry Williams (FWS) said he liked the proposed process and cautioned them to not let the process, or the products, become too onerous. They have had their best successes when they have been forward looking. Watching for those species that have the potential to impact is probably the best use of their resources. As an example, the Burmese pythons was first documented in the Everglades landscape in the 1980s. He just recently heard that the total number of Burmese pythons removed from Key Largo is now at 120. In the past 5 years the number of pythons reported on Key Largo has tripled and they will see that in other places too. There was some research done looking at the stomach contents of those that have been collected from Key Largo, and 43% of those pythons had some sort of endangered animal in the stomach. Pythons are having an impact on listed animals, and they should keep that in mind throughout this process and try to come up with innovative strategies and tools that are forward looking.

James Erskine noted there was support among the members on the proposed process. The kick-off meeting is scheduled for July 11, 2022, and a series of meetings will be held throughout the summer.

Public Comment

Kellie Ralston (Bonefish and Tarpon Trust) said that the Trust supports the Coral Reef Coordination Team and looks forward to that being an official part of the WG.

Next Steps and Closing Comments

James Erskine reminded everyone that:

- The next joint WG/SCG meeting will be on September 1st at the SFWMD HQ in West Palm Beach, FL.
- The Task Force will meet on October 19th in Washington, DC.
- Comments are due on August 4th on the draft Florida's Coral Reef Coordination Team Charter.
- OERI will work with the USACE to schedule the Task Force Sponsored IDS workshop.

James along with the co-chairs thanked the members, presenters, and the public for attending as well as the OERI staff, who does the heavy lifting. Meeting adjourned at 2:25PM.

Note: This is a summary of the major highlights for the July 7th Joint WG/SCG meeting. The most accurate source and official record for the meeting referenced herein is the actual digital recording of the meeting which is readily available and posted for viewing on the OERI website at www.evergladesrestoration.gov.

Handouts/Presentations

1. Agenda
2. Membership Rosters
3. Meeting Summary, September 2021
4. OERI Update
5. SFWMD Program and Project Update
6. USACE Program and Project Update
7. Western Everglades Restoration Plan Update
8. RECOVER Update
9. Integrated Delivery Schedule Update
 - a. Presentation
 - b. 2021 IDS Placemat
 - c. IDS Workshops Blanket Approval
10. Florida's Coral Reef Coordination Team
 - a. Presentation
 - b. Draft Charter
11. WRDA 2020 – Invasive Species Presentation