



OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
**U.S. Department
of the Interior**

www.doi.gov

News Release

Federal Government and the State of Florida Announce Major Effort to Restore the River of Grass

10/27/2011

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WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. - Senior policy officials from the Department of the Army, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Department of the Interior, the Environmental Protection Agency and the State of Florida, including the South Florida Water Management District and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, convened at the South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force (Task Force) meeting today. They announced a fast-track planning effort for the next generation that will, when authorized by Congress, improve the Central and Southern Everglades by putting more fresh and clean water into the River of Grass.

The Army Corps of Engineers and the South Florida Water Management District announced the start of the Central Everglades planning process, which will incorporate updated science and maximize use of publicly owned lands to focus the next phase of Everglades Restoration on the Central and Southern Everglades. This planning process will build on three years of unprecedented restoration progress between the federal government and the State of Florida including groundbreakings for six Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan projects. This includes substantial construction progress on the first mile of bridging of Tamiami Trail.

The Central Everglades planning process will analyze alternatives that will reduce the discharge of water currently damaging the Caloosahatchee and St. Lucie estuaries and provide more natural flow and depths of clean new water through the Central Everglades and the Everglades National Park. This initiative will use a fast-tracked planning process, a pilot program that the Army Corps of Engineers is initiating elsewhere in the country, designed to yield restoration benefits at an efficient rate.

The planning effort responds directly to the 2008 and 2010 recommendations from the National Academy of Sciences and restoration scientists who recognize the need to address unnatural water levels in the water conservation areas and Everglades National Park as one of the biggest challenges facing restoration

managers.

The Task Force meeting highlighted the many critical restoration efforts happening throughout the ecosystem, and the opportunities for next steps in restoration. In particular, major initiatives along the Tamiami Trail, Northern Everglades, and other initiatives have shown that there are opportunities to increase the flow of clean water into the Central Everglades, using a variety of project elements. There is a need to move the water south and allow more flow in the Central Everglades and Everglades National Park which is extremely critical to the health of the entire Everglades ecosystem. In addition to this major planning effort, state and federal agencies are working on measures to ensure that existing waters flowing into the Everglades meet water quality standards.

Specifically the fast-track Central Everglades planning process will evaluate opportunities to use publicly owned lands to store and treat water in the Everglades Agricultural Area and move the water south to the Water Conservation Areas and Everglades National Park, to achieve a more natural hydrology. This approach will also tie together Decentralization and Seepage Management with the State's work north of the conservation areas and Interior's Tamiami Trail improvements.

"The Administration is committed to this ecosystem and these restoration efforts. We want to profit from best practices and good science. Together with our partners in the state, we can do it. We have a responsibility to the people of Florida and this country to protect this international treasure." said Jo-Ellen Darcy, Assistant Secretary of the Army, Civil Works.

"The Everglades is one of the world's largest ecosystem restoration projects, and this planning effort will provide a roadmap for the next decade on how we restore the River of Grass in perpetuity." said Ken Salazar, Secretary of the Interior.

"We are working to restore and protect not only a vital ecosystem, but also an important part of Florida's history and culture. An important part of our ongoing and future restoration efforts will be protecting water quality." said EPA Administrator Lisa P. Jackson. "The Everglades is an important environmental treasure, a major tourism attraction and an economic driver, this new process moves us closer to a lasting restoration."

"The Everglades are a treasured part of Florida's landscape and the Nation's natural heritage, and a vital economic engine for the State." said Nancy Sutley, Chair of the White House Council on Environmental Quality. "This announcement builds on the Obama Administration's unprecedented progress toward restoring the Everglades and recognizes that we cannot rest in our commitment to work in partnership with the State of Florida to bring this critical ecosystem back to health."

"The Central Everglades planning initiative provides Florida with an opportunity to build upon the significant investments we've already made toward protecting and preserving America's Everglades." said Rick Scott, Governor of Florida. "It also reaffirms the state's commitment to working collaboratively with our federal partners to pursue a solution that sustains both our economy and our natural resources."

The Central Everglades planning process is being presented to the Task Force for the purpose of increasing public participation and diverse stakeholder involvement. The South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force, which was established by Congress in 1996 to ensure consistent strategies among all the partners working towards Everglades' restoration, will appoint advisory boards to the Task Force to provide stakeholder input and public engagement.

For more information on the South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force, visit:

http://www.sfrestore.org/tf/documents/handouts_tf.html

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