

# Everglades Collaborative Water Management Planning

January 2001-March 2005

**Location:** Florida

## Background

Congress authorized the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) in 2000. The plan represents the largest ecological restoration project in history. It is expected to cost over \$10.5B and take 30 years to complete. It will integrate how excess water is stored in south Florida so that it can be used to support restoration of the Everglades ecosystem. Yet moving forward required participating agencies to transform a 20-year history of mutual tensions and mistrust into effective working relationships.

In January 2001, the Army Corps of Engineers (the Corps) sought U.S. Institute assistance to help resolve conflicts between the Corps, Everglades National Park, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the South Florida Water Management District. The conflict centered on hydrologic modeling and its implications for flood protection and the effects of water management on the endangered Cape Sable Seaside Sparrow. The Corps had completed a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS), but it had been heavily criticized by other agencies and stakeholders. The Institute assessed the conflict and concluded that the agencies would need to build their capacity for collaborative problem solving for CERP to succeed.

Over the next 18 months, the U.S. Institute convened and facilitated negotiations among the agencies. The process was challenging and required multiple revisions to the preferred alternative, but in July 2002 the Corps issued a Record of Decision (ROD). The ROD put in place an Interim Operating Plan that temporarily addressed endangered species issues.

Encouraged by their success, the agencies asked the Institute to help them collaborate on a Combined Structural and Operational Plan (CSOP) for two projects fundamental to Everglades restoration. These two projects had been delayed for over 20 years.

Through March 2005, U.S. Institute contracted neutrals facilitated negotiations on collaborative CSOP planning and design of a parallel multi-stakeholder advisory process.



## Results and Accomplishments

The interagency group developed a dynamic plan to help restore water flow to Everglades National Park while protecting the Cape Sable Seaside Sparrow and safeguarding adjacent farmland from flooding. The plan can be adjusted in response to new information or unintended consequences.

The agencies reached agreement on a preferred alternative for the CSOP projects in early 2006. Progress on CERP projects will depend on broad cooperation. The Institute helped agency representatives build the trust and more effective working relationships they will need to make collaborative ecosystem restoration decisions into the future.

## Highlights/Follow-up

**Increased Collaborative Capacity.** Because of their increased collaborative abilities, participants felt that they had more tools to use in their interactions with public stakeholders. An agency representative said, "I think the collaborative process is a 'must.' If we think finding a resolution is difficult with 4 agencies, wait 'til we have it opened to other interested parties."

**Continuing Progress.** One of the most promising results of the process is that the agencies have continued to collaborate without U.S. Institute help. As one participant put it, "There are long-term benefits to each agency because skills learned from the neutrals can be used on all [CERP] projects."

## Credits

### Partners from National Roster of ECR Practitioners

Analee Mayes, Consensus Builders, Inc., facilitation  
Carlos Alvarez Esq., Alvarez Law Firm, facilitation

### U.S. Institute Project Lead

**Michael Eng**, Senior Program Manager  
Protected Areas and Resources  
Phone: (520) 901-8542; FAX: (520) 670-5530  
Email: [eng@ecr.gov](mailto:eng@ecr.gov); Website: [www.ecr.gov](http://www.ecr.gov)