

The U.S Army Corps of Engineers question and answer on the report:

Progress Toward Restoring the Everglades: The Second Biennial Review, 2008

Q. The National Academies of Science (NAS) says that Everglades restoration is running behind schedule. Is that the case, and if so, why?

A. Yes, restoration of the Everglades is running behind the schedule described in the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan, the "Yellow Book." There are a number of reasons for the delay, but the most significant is that the process for developing a Project Implementation Report (PIR) for each individual project is far more complicated and time consuming than was anticipated by the restoration partners. Before a project can be constructed, a Project Implementation Report must first be completed. Next Congressional authorization must be obtained, and finally, funding must be approved through an appropriation.

The Congressional authorization that approved the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) required that new regulations for developing PIRs be drafted and adopted. The new regulations, the "Programmatic Regulations," were developed by the Army Corps of Engineers, the State and the Department of the Interior. These requirements have added additional layers of complexity and time expenditures to development of PIRs.

Another reason for the delay is that the many agencies and stakeholders have differing views and goals regarding individual projects. Collaboration is important to maintaining a broad base of support for the CERP, but addressing all concerns in a way that satisfies most of the players can take a considerable amount of time.

One more reason for delay is that the Yellow Book included a schedule that assumed projects being authorized through passage of Water Resources Development Acts every other year. Since the time CERP was authorized in 2000 and 2007, no other WRDA bills, however. This did delay authorization of two CERP projects.

Q. The NAS Report says that the Everglades are continuing to decline while restoration projects are not yet built. Will you be able to restore the Everglades given your rate of progress?

A. We recognize the need to speed up our rate of progress and we are, along with our restoration partners, looking for key ways to work faster. Even before the NAS report was completed, the restoration partners agreed to review the Programmatic Regulations to look for ways to simplify and streamline the Project Implementation Report development process. We have already begun that review and have received agency and public input.

It is important to note, however, that we are at a point where significant progress is about to be made. Recently, PIRs were completed for three CERP projects and Congress authorized each of them. The projects are the Indian River Lagoon-South Restoration Project, the Picayune Strand Restoration Project and the Site 1 Reservoir. Work on Picayune Strand start in FY09. As soon as funds are made available for the other projects, work will begin on them.

Q. The NAS says that the schedule for Everglades restoration projects should be changed to ensure the most beneficial projects are completed quickly. Will you change the schedule for and order of the restoration projects?

- A. We have already completed a new schedule based on recommendations made in the NAS' first biennial review. The new schedule is called the Integrated Delivery Schedule (IDS). In the IDS we have expedited those projects that provide key benefits such as restoration of natural flows within the heart of the Everglades ecosystem. At the same time, we also considered which projects are dependent on others being built before they can function. For example, water storage facilities are needed to supply water before decompartmentalization (removal of barriers to sheet flow) can be implemented. Having water supply in place means that the northern portions of WCA 2 will not be over-drained as barriers to sheet flow are removed. We are looking forward to additional input from the scientists regarding which project features will provide the earliest benefits to areas of the ecosystem that are experiencing the greatest degree of stress.

Q. Is Everglades restoration getting more expensive?

- A. With every passing year, Everglades restoration gets more expensive because the costs of materials, particularly cement and petroleum-based materials, have increased dramatically in recent years. The cost of land also continues to rise. The higher cost of materials and real estate, when combined with a higher demand for construction services and labor, have made projects more expensive projects. Getting approval for higher cost projects is more difficult than getting approval for lower cost projects.

Q. The NAS Report says that climate change will have a big impact on the Everglades. What is being done to address this issue?

- A. We agree that CERP projects must take into account global climate change. Consideration of the effects of climate change was made as far back as 1998, when the Yellow Book was developed. At that time we factored in a possible sea level rise of 0.5'. We are in the process of reviewing and amending CERP guidelines (Guidance Memorandum #16 on climate change) to take into account the most recent and higher projections of sea level rise. Other factors, such as changes in precipitation and temperature also will be analyzed.

Furthermore, we agree that the potential effects of climate change will make restoration projects for the Everglades even more important because these projects can help to stave off negative effects and will increase the resilience of the ecosystem.

Q. The NAS says that Incremental Adaptive Restoration and Adaptive Management are important to Everglades restoration. Will you use both of these to help the Everglades?

- A. We agree that Adaptive Management and Incremental Adaptive Restoration (IAR) are important to Everglades Restoration. As the NAS says, we have moved a long way toward setting the foundation for adaptive management to be incorporated into Everglades restoration projects. Since the first biennial review was written, the concept of IAR has been applied to plans associated with projects including C-111 Spreader Canal, Biscayne Bay Coastal Wetlands and WCA 3A Decompartmentalization. We will continue to explore appropriate uses of IAR and other adaptive management approaches that will help to advance restoration efforts through early implementation and learning.