



JULY 2016

In accordance with the Endangered Species Act, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) has been consulting with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) to assess effects of the Corps' water management operations in the southern part of the Everglades on the endangered Cape Sable seaside sparrow. During this consultation, the Service determined that current conditions within the sparrow's habitat threaten its survival. The Corps' responsibility is to manage its water management system in compliance with the Endangered Species Act, while the Service's responsibility is to protect and enhance species and their habitats, which includes the endangered Cape Sable seaside sparrow.

The Corps has been coordinating closely with the Service to determine what measures the Corps can take within its given authorities to improve the sparrow's habitat and ensure the Corps is able to operate its water management system in compliance with the Endangered Species Act, while also meeting the needs of the multiple congressionally-authorized purposes of the Central and Southern Florida (C&SF) project. The C&SF project purposes include providing flood control; water supply for municipal, industrial and agricultural purposes; prevention of saltwater intrusion; water supply for Everglades National Park; and preservation of fish and wildlife.

OPERATIONS BACKGROUND

The Everglades Restoration Transition Plan (ERTP) is the operational plan that establishes how federal water control structures are operated in the southern portion of the system to meet the Corps' responsibilities for flood control and to minimize adverse effects to threatened and endangered species. As part of this plan, certain structures will be operated during certain times of year in order to meet the Corps' project purposes in a manner that promotes conditions suitable for sparrow nesting in Everglades National Park.

ERTP provides greater flexibility to store and release water in Water Conservation Area -3A, and as a result increases operational flexibility in the system and improves conditions for multiple species inhabiting the area.

Moving more water through Everglades National Park into Florida Bay is part of the overall plan for restoring the Everglades. ERTP helps to improve conditions for the sparrow and other threatened species as restoration work progresses.

Ultimately, the completion of Everglades restoration projects, such as the Modified Water Deliveries and C-111 South Dade projects, will enable operations to be refined further as part of the Combined Operational Plan, which will provide the optimal balance between restoration and operational benefits for the southern Everglades.



BIOLOGICAL OPINION

The Biological Opinion is a regulatory document that states the opinion of the Service as to whether a federal action is likely to jeopardize the continued existence of listed species. The Service issued the new Biological Opinion for the Everglades Restoration Transition Plan on July 22, 2016.

The Biological Opinion recommends operational modifications and an expedited schedule for ongoing restoration initiatives in the southern Everglades to aid in improving suitable nesting habitat for the sparrow. The Corps will implement these actions within the Corps' authority and federal laws and regulations.

Despite these positive actions, much more work is needed to place this species on a positive trajectory toward recovery. Successful recovery of the sparrow requires continued collaborative efforts among federal, tribal and state partnering agencies.

Additional conservation actions by others identified in the Biological Opinion includes habitat management, research on population trends, improved information on genetics, captive breeding and translocation, and additional real estate and construction actions

The Corps will continue to work with the Service to identify other habitat improvement initiatives that can be enacted by partners and stakeholders to aid in this important effort.

