

RECORD OF DECISION

CENTRAL AND SOUTHERN FLORIDA PROJECT CENTRAL EVERGLADES PLANNING PROJECT, SOUTH FLORIDA

The Final Integrated Project Implementation Report and Environmental Impact Statement (PIR/EIS), dated July 2014 and revised December 2014, and the report of the Chief of Engineers, dated December 23, 2014, address ecosystem restoration in south Florida. Based on these reports, the reviews of other Federal, State, and local agencies, input from the public, and the review by my staff, I find the plan recommended by the Chief of Engineers to be technically feasible, environmentally justified, cost effective, in accordance with environmental statutes, and in the public interest.

The PIR/EIS, incorporated herein by reference, evaluated various alternatives to improve the quantity, quality, timing and distribution of water flows to the Northern Estuaries, Central Everglades Water Conservation Area (WCA) 3, Everglades National Park (ENP), and Florida Bay while increasing water supply for municipal and agricultural users. The recommended plan, Alternative 4R2, is the National Ecosystem Restoration (NER) plan, and includes:

- Construction of a 14,000-acre Flow Equalization Basin (FEB) and associated distribution features, operationally integrated with A-1 FEB and existing facilities.
- Backfill of 13.5 miles of the Miami Canal and removal of 2.98 miles of the southern L-4 levee to convert the L-4 canal into a spreader canal. Spoil mounds along the Miami Canal will be used as a backfill source. Spoil mounds will be maintained and constructed tree islands will be added in areas with historic ridges.
 - Construction of a new Blue Shanty levee that will divide WCA 3B into two units.
 - Installation of culverts to connect WCA 3A and WCA 3B.
 - Removal of approximately 5.5 miles of the L-67 Extension Levee and approximately 6 miles of the Old Tamiami Trail to increase the outlet capability of the S-333 structure at the terminus of the L-67A.
 - Construction of a 4.2 mile partial depth seepage barrier south of Tamiami Trail along L-31N.
 - Modification of the S-356 pump station to increase capacity to 1,000 cubic feet per second.
 - Construction of parking, trailheads, shelters, and fishing platforms for recreation.
 - Implementation of the Adaptive Management and Monitoring Plan dated July 2014 (Annex D of the PIR/EIS).

In addition to the “no action” plan, four alternatives are identified and evaluated in the PIR/EIS. The alternatives included different combinations of storage and treatment, distribution and conveyance, and seepage management components. The alternatives

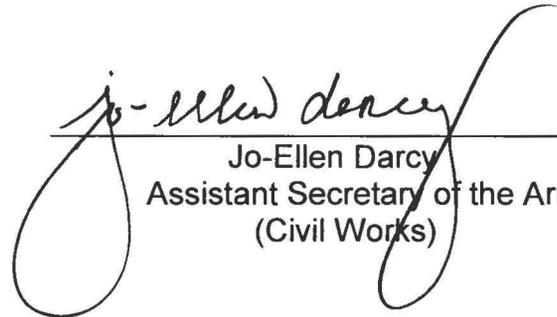
were evaluated using hydrologic simulation model outputs. The recommended plan would increase freshwater flows to the central portion of the Everglades and Florida Bay by approximately 210,000 acre-feet per year, which will restore approximately two-thirds of the additional estimated flow recommended by the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) and thereby restore and/or improve habitat in Lake Okeechobee, St. Lucie Estuary, Caloosahatchee Estuary, WCA3A, ENP, Everglades ridge-and-slough landscape, and Florida Bay. The recommended plan is identified as the environmentally preferable alternative.

The recommended plan is a conceptual plan that included guidelines for future coordination requirements and programmatic consultations as methods of ensuring the project is avoiding and minimizing impacts to resources to the extent practicable and complying with all applicable environmental laws and regulations. Because of the complexity of the recommended plan, the detailed designs are likely to be developed and implemented in phases. In the programmatic Biological Opinion, dated April 19, 2014, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service provided a preliminary determination that the recommended plan was not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of nor modify designated critical habitat for species listed under the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (ESA), as amended. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) initiated consultation under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) of 1966, as amended, with the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), the Seminole Tribal Historic Preservation Office, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation and interested parties. Considering the conceptual level of detail in the PIR/EIS, the Corps determined the level of consultation conducted to date was adequate for compliance with Section 106 of the NHPA. More detailed designs are necessary to complete consultations and consultations would therefore continue and be concluded during the Pre-Construction Engineering Design (PED) phase. Florida SHPO concurred with this approach in a letter dated October 13, 2013. The Seminole Tribe concurred with this approach with the commitment that the Corps applies the "Burial Resources Agreement" to the treatment of burial resources for the implementation of the recommended plan. Therefore during the PED phase, the Corps will develop the detailed designs using appropriate level of National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analysis. If applicable, further consultations will be conducted for compliance with Section 7 of ESA and Section 106 of NHPA. No construction will occur until all legal requirements have been met, including appropriate NEPA analysis and consultation under Section 7 of ESA and Section 106 of NHPA. The Corps shall apply the "Burial Resources Agreement" to the treatment of burial resources for the implementation of the recommended plan.

The Draft PIR/EIS was published on August 30, 2013 and the Final PIR/EIS was published on August 8, 2014. All public and agency comments received have been considered and, where appropriate, clarifications were incorporated into the Final PIR/EIS. All revisions are noted in the errata sheet of the revised Final PIR/EIS. None of the comments received identified any reasonable alternatives, or major substantive changes, to the project or changed the analysis of project impacts.

Technical, environmental, economic, and risk criteria used in the formulation of alternative plans are those specified in the Water Resources Council's 1983 Economic and Environmental Principles and Guidelines for Water and Related Land Resources Implementation Studies. All applicable laws, Executive Orders, regulations and local government plans are considered in the evaluation of alternatives and the selection of the recommended plan. Based on review of these evaluations, I find that the recommended plan reasonably maximizes the benefits compared to the costs and any adverse effects. This Record of Decision completes this phase of the National Environmental Policy Act process.

aug. 31, 2015
Date


Jo-Ellen Darcy
Assistant Secretary of the Army
(Civil Works)