The Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) contains a bold outline for returning the Florida Everglades to its historic quantity, quality, timing and distribution. The Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) of 2000, the congressional legislation that approved CERP, states that the “overarching objective of the Plan is the restoration, preservation, and protection of the Everglades ecosystem while providing for other water-related needs of the region, including water supply and flood protection.”

The restored Everglades will not be exactly the same as the original. It will be, however, vastly superior to the current system. Although smaller than the pre-drainage system, it will be a successfully restored Everglades having recovered those hydrological and biological patterns that defined the original Everglades and that made it unique among the world’s wetlands systems.

**INDICATORS OF A RESTORED EVERGLADES ECOSYSTEM**

- Wetland functions that mimic pre-drainage conditions
- Significant increase in animal populations at all levels in the aquatic food chain
- Return of large nesting “rookeries” of wading birds
- Quality of water
- Improved health of Lake Okeechobee
- Improved freshet flow to bays and estuaries
- Improved health of seagrasses and other submerged aquatic vegetation
- Reduced frequency of water restrictions

**LAKE OKEECHOBEE WATERSHED (LOW) PROJECT OBJECTIVES**

Since 2000, considerable progress has been made implementing CERP. First and second generation CERP projects are authorized by Congress and are either operational, under construction, or being designed. The Central Everglades Planning Project is currently awaiting congressional authorization. All of these CERP projects contribute significant ecological benefits to the system and the specific regional habitats in which they are located.

One of the next steps for implementation is to identify opportunities to restore the quantity, quality, timing and distribution of flows into Lake Okeechobee. Lake Okeechobee is the heart of the South Florida ecosystem, it provides life-giving waters to the natural system, as well as provides water to support urban and agricultural development south Florida.

**LAKE OKEECHOBEE WATERSHED (LOW) PROJECT ACT AND CERP**

For Additional Information: http://bit.ly/LakeOWatershed
WHAT IS NEPA?
NEPA is a Federal law enacted in 1969. Under NEPA, Federal agencies are required to evaluate the potential environmental impacts that a future project or action may cause. These findings are captured in a detailed statement and are available for public review and comment before any decisions or actions are taken. Not all Federal actions require a full Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). Due to the size and scope of the Lake Okeechobee Watershed project, environmental documentation will be in the form of an EIS.

ENVIRONMENTAL FRAMEWORK FOR PROJECT DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION
COORDINATION with applicable environmental regulatory agencies

AVOIDANCE AND MINIMIZATION of environmental impacts to the maximum extent practicable

MITIGATION AND MONITORING where unavoidable impacts occur

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT IS KEY
Public input is vital to the success of a project. Inherent to NEPA, as well as the USACE planning process, are established opportunities for public input during project development. Examples include public workshops and meetings related to the scoping portion of the NEPA process, development of project alternatives, and release of draft reports (such as the EIS and the project implementation report).

PROJECT INFORMATION
Project information and dates of related public forums for the Lake Okeechobee Watershed Project, will be accessible via the project’s website.

For Additional Information: http://bit.ly/LakeOWatershed

LAKE OKEECHOBEE WATERSHED PROJECT

HUMAN & NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

EVALUATING POTENTIAL BENEFICIAL & ADVERSE IMPACTS

Some of the human and natural environmental considerations that will be evaluated as part of the Lake Okeechobee Watershed Project and included in the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) include:

NATIVE AMERICANS
Both the Seminole Tribe of Florida and the Miccosukee Tribe of Indians have historically utilized the Lake Okeechobee Watershed and continue to use and maintain a strong connection to the area. The Seminole Tribe of Florida has two Reservation Areas in the Lake Okeechobee Watershed. The Miccosukee Tribe Reservation is located centrally within the region. Traditional activities such as hunting, fishing, subsistence agriculture, and related customs and practices of living are exercised on these reservations and other leased and owned Tribal lands. Modern activities such as ranching, entrepreneurship, and various tourism related businesses are also undertaken throughout the region.

WILDLIFE AND THEIR HABITAT
The watershed, Lake Okeechobee, as well as the estuaries to the east and west, include a varied mix of habitat providing food, cover, nesting, and resting for a variety of fish and wildlife species—some are rich in wildlife diversity, whereas others have been fragmented and functionally degraded. Upland communities in the watershed include Florida scrub, hammocks, pine, dry prairie, and cypress wetlands. Wetland systems include lake, freshwater wetland, and swamps. Examples of upland habitat include seagrass meadows and mangroves providing valuable habitat for species of fish, oysters and sea turtles.

ENDANGERED SPECIES
The watershed includes more than 25 species of wildlife and 31 species of plants listed by federal and state agencies as endangered, threatened, and of special concern. Examples include the Florida panther, wood stork, Florida grasshopper sparrow, Everglades snail kite and Audubon's Crested Caracara.

WETLANDS
Historically, isolated wetlands covered a significant portion of the Lake Okeechobee Watershed. Capping warm water runoff and limiting water quality within the watershed, these wetlands were drained and converted for agricultural and urban uses, resulting in substantial reduction in the spatial extent of the wetlands in the watershed and in wetland functionality.

WATER QUALITY
Over the last 50 years, excessive nutrient enrichment of Lake Okeechobee has contributed to the proliferation of blue-green algae that can be harmful to fish, wildlife, and humans who use the water for drinking.

INVASIVE SPECIES
Many non-native and invasive species are flourishing in a variety of habitats and are negatively affecting the ecology throughout the watershed. Examples include Brazilian pepper, melaleuca, Australian pine, water hyacinth, water lettuce, and cogongrass.