



DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
JACKSONVILLE DISTRICT CORPS OF ENGINEERS
701 San Marco Boulevard
JACKSONVILLE, FLORIDA 32207-8175

REPLY TO
ATTENTION OF

Planning and Policy Division
Environmental Branch

JUL 11 2016

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

Jacksonville District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) is beginning preparation of a National Environmental Policy Act assessment for the Western Everglades Restoration Project (WERP). The objectives of the WERP are to improve the quality, quantity, timing and distribution of water needed to restore and reconnect the western Everglades ecosystem.

The Everglades ecosystem, including Lake Okeechobee, encompasses a system of diverse wetland landscapes that are hydrologically and ecologically connected across more than 200 miles from north to south and across 18,000 square miles of southern Florida. In 2000, the U.S. Congress authorized the Federal government, in partnership with the State of Florida, to embark upon a multi-decade, multi-billion dollar Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) to further protect and restore the remaining Everglades ecosystem while providing for other water-related needs of the region. CERP involves modification of the existing network of drainage canals and levees that make up the Central and Southern Florida Flood Control Project.

Since 2000, much progress has been made. Construction has begun on the first generation of CERP project modifications already authorized by Congress. These include the Picayune Strand Restoration, the Indian River Lagoon South and Site 1 Impoundment projects. Congressional authorization has been received for the second generation of CERP projects, including Biscayne Bay Coastal Wetlands-Phase 1, the Broward County Water Preserve Areas, the Caloosahatchee River (C-43) West Basin Storage Reservoir, and the C-111 Spreader Canal Western Project which are already under construction or are operational, and the Broward County Water Preserve Areas which is currently 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 of CERP is to identify opportunities within the tributary areas of Water Conservation Area (WCA) 3A to restore natural areas within the Big Cypress Seminole Indian Reservation and adjacent portions of Big Cypress National Preserve (BCNP) and the Miccosukee Indian Reservation. Encompassing approximately 440,000 acres located primarily in eastern Hendry County, WCA 3A tributary areas include the C-139, Feeder Canal and L-28 Gap Basins as well as the C-139 Annex and L-28 Interceptor. These areas are collectively called the Western Basins as they are located along the western edge of the Everglades and were historic flow ways. Both water supply and water quality of storm water runoff are challenges facing the Western Basins.

The original CERP Project identified to restore and reconnect the western Everglades ecosystem was called the Big Cypress/L-28 Interceptor Modification. The purpose of this project, as defined within the CERP, is to reestablish sheetflow from the West Feeder Canal across the Big Cypress Seminole Indian Reservation and into BCNP, maintain flood protection on Seminole Tribal lands, and ensure that inflows to the North and West Feeder Canals meet applicable water quality standards. Project features considered under CERP include modification of levees and canals, water control structures, pumps, and stormwater treatment areas with a total storage capacity of 7,600 acre-feet located within and adjacent to the Miccosukee and Seminole Indian Reservations in Collier and Hendry Counties. This CERP component will serve as the starting point for the WERP (Figure 1) and will be refined through the planning process.

The Corps will hold a public meeting on August 16th from 6:30 to 9:00 p.m. at the John Boy Auditorium, 1200 South W.C. Owen Avenue, Clewiston, Florida 33440. The formal portion of the workshop will begin at 7:30 p.m. The WERP team will be available prior to and after the formal presentation to provide information and answer questions about the projects and development of a proposed plan.

We invite the participation of Federal and State agencies, Native American Tribes, local agencies, interested parties and individuals in providing comments and identifying any issues or concerns. Please share this notice with any interested party. Send any comments you may have to the attention of Melissa Nasuti (904-232-1368) at the letter head address or email melissa.a.nasuti@usace.army.mil no later than 30 days from the date of this letter. All individuals who respond with comments will be included in future mailings. Others may be added to the mailing list by making a written request (postcard) to the same address or by email.

Sincerely,



Gina Paduano Ralph, P.H.D.
Chief, Environmental Branch

Enclosure

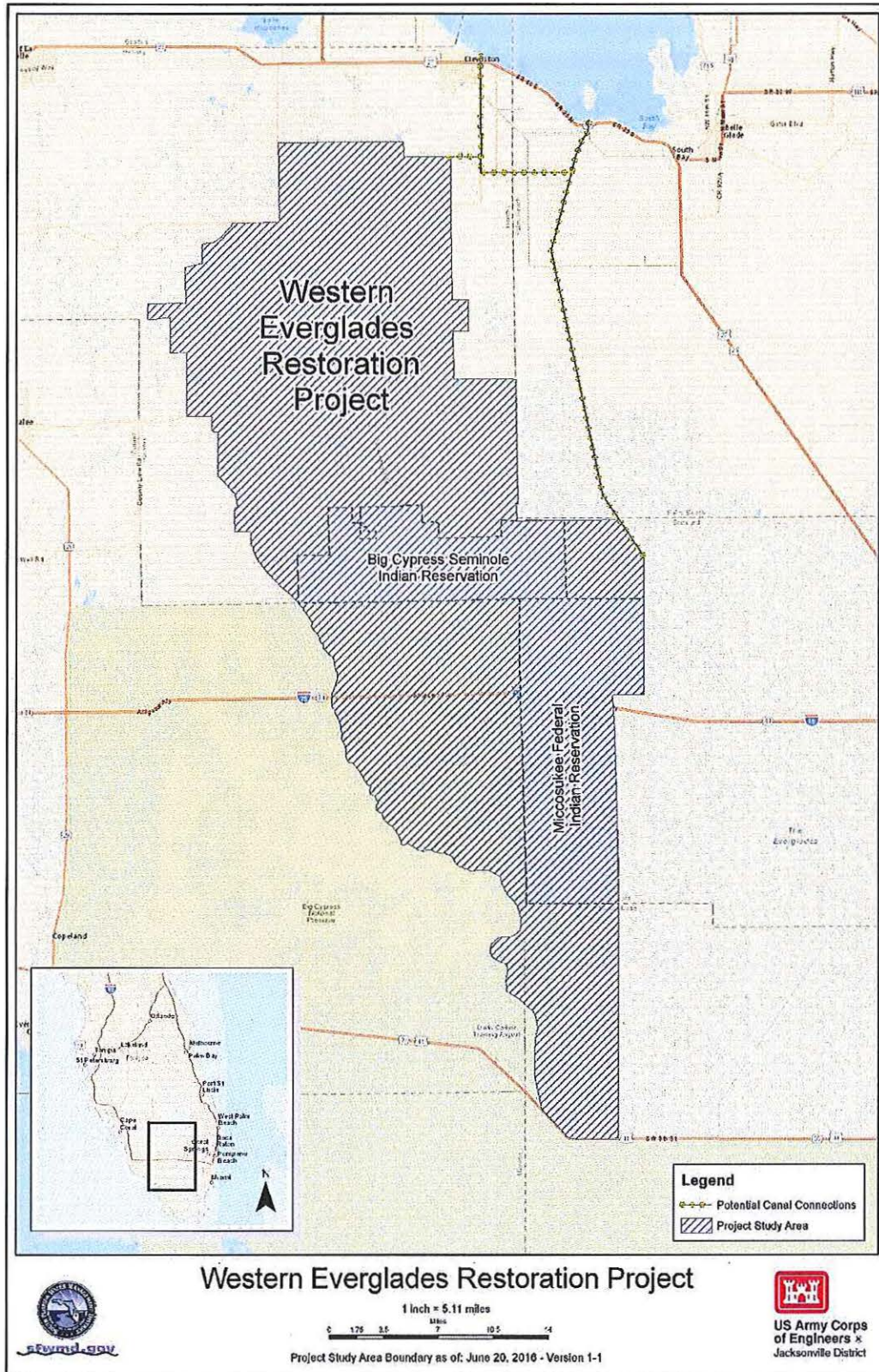


Figure 1. Western Everglades Restoration Project Preliminary Study Area