WESTERN EVERGLADES RESTORATION PROJECT (WERP)
NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT
PUBLIC SCOPING MEETING

Tuesday, August 16, 2016
John Boy Auditorium
1200 South WC Owen Avenue
Clewiston, Florida 33440

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

WESTERN EVERGLADES RESTORATION PROJECT
Presented by:
DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
JACKSONVILLE DISTRICT CORPS OF ENGINEERS
701 San Marco Blvd.
Jacksonville, Florida 32207-8175

Barnes Reporting
150 S. Main Street
Suite 2D
LaBelle, Florida 33935
863-675-7600
863-675-7601 Fax
### APPEARANCES

**PRESENTERS:**
- GINA RALPH, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
- MATT MORRISON, South Florida Water Management District
- KELLY KEEFE, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
- ANDY LOSCHIAVO, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

**PUBLIC COMMENTS:**
- Commissioner Janet Taylor
- Mali Gardner
- Mayor Phillip Roland
- Patty Whitehead
- Catherine Backos
- Pete Quasius
- Thomas Van Lent
- Paul McGehee
- Shannon Larsen
- Ramon Iglesias
- Vivian Haney
- Teddy Gardner
- Brad Cornell
- Nicole Williams
- Ramon Iglesias
PUBLIC COMMENT (Cont'd)

David A. Urich 60
Bobby C. Billy 62
Raoul Bataller 64
Dennis R. Duke 66
Rae Ann Wessel 68
Marisa Carrozzo 70
Cara Capp 71
Lynwood Bishop 73
Taylor Bishop 74
Commissioner Karson Turner 75
Rhonda Roff 77
Roger Plouffe 80
Jennifer Earnest 81
Georgina Granville 83
Rick Murphy 84

Concluding Remarks by Ms. Gina Ralph 87
MS. RALPH: Okay, everybody, if everybody can hold up your hand if you can hear me. Everybody. No, not yet. Okay. I feel like a teacher with the one, two, three. I'm asking for everybody's cooperation. We have a lot of folks here tonight and we want to make sure that everybody can hear. So if we can have everybody put your cell phones on vibrate, that would be most helpful.

Okay. So good evening, everybody. My name is Gina Ralph the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Jacksonville District. I will be presiding over tonight's public meeting for the Western Everglades Restoration Project.

For those of you who don't know me, I am the Chief of the Environmental branch for the Planning Division, again, with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in Jacksonville.

The Western Everglades Restoration Project is a new Everglades restoration planning effort that aims to improve the quality, quantity, timing and distribution of water needed to restore and reconnect the Western Everglades ecosystem. Tonight is the first of many meetings that will provide the opportunity for
public input into the development of this very important restoration project.

Tonight we are here to provide information and ask for your input on the National Environmental Policy Act for the project.

Before we begin, I would like to thank you all for taking time out of your busy schedule to get involved in this planning process and be with us here tonight. I would also like to recognize and thank some elected officials that are in attendance here tonight, so when I call your name, if you can just raise your hand.

We do have the Mayor of Clewiston, Mr. Phillip Roland. All right. Thank you. We have Hendry County Commissioner Karson Turner. We have Hendry County Commissioner Janet Taylor. We have Clewiston City Commissioner K. Peterson, and we have Clewiston City Commissioner Mali Gardner. Thank you all for attending this meeting again tonight.

This meeting is being held in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act for the sole purpose of listening to you. I would like to remind everybody of the importance of filling out these cards. These cards serve two
purposes. First, they let us know that you're interested in this project so we can keep you informed; and second, to provide me with a list of individuals who wish to speak tonight. If you did not fill out one of these cards and would like to speak tonight, I ask that you please head to the registration table and fill one out so that you can have an opportunity to be heard this evening.

So before we begin the presentation, I want to introduce you to some of the team members here that are with us tonight from the Army Corps of Engineers. First of all, we have Tim Brown, who is Project Manager. Kelly Keefe, she is our Planning Lead. Andy LoSchiavo, he's our Environmental Lead. Meredith Moreno, she is an archeologist. Amanda Lavigne, she is a hydraulic engineer. There she is. Katherine Rivers from real estate. We have Zulamet Vega-Liriano, a civil engineer. Kim Taplin, she's Program Supervisor. Jeff Couch, Ecosystem Branch Chief. Dave Apple, our Watershed Section Chief.

In the back when you came in, they're still outside at the registration table, Jenn Miller,
John Campbell and Erika Skolte. We have Kevin Wittman he is our Economics Branch Chief; and finally, last but not least, Luis Alejandro, Water Management.

Now, I'd like to turn and introduce our partners at the South Florida Water Management District. They are our cost-share partner in this important federal project. So Matt Morrison, he's the Federal Policy and Coordination Chief. Megan Jacoby, she's a Project Manager. Jenni Hisock, she's a Planning Lead. She's all the way in the back. Martha Nungesser, she's our environmental lead from the District. There she is over there. Armando Ramirez, he's our Tribal Liaison. Jon Madden, our Water Quality Lead. Larry Brion, he's a Lead Modeler. Larry, he's in the back over there; and Jennifer Leeds, she's the Federal Restoration Planning and Coordination Unit Leader.

Okay. In a few minutes I will turn over the floor to Matt Morrison, Kelly Keefe and Andy LoSchiavo, who will provide you with a brief overview of the project and the planning process. Once the presentations are complete, I
will open the meeting to public comment. We will receive comments through the end of the meeting.

So, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to introduce Matt Morrison from South Florida Water Management District.

MR. MORRISON: Thank you. I would like to welcome everybody tonight. I know everybody has very busy schedules and it's often difficult to get out and come to these --

AUDIENCE MEMBERS: We can't hear you.

MR. MORRISON: Is that any better?

AUDIENCE MEMBERS: No.

MR. MORRISON: Let me try a different mic. Is that better?

AUDIENCE MEMBERS: Yes.

MR. MORRISON: Okay, great. Let me run the machine here, Megan.

So I just wanted to welcome everybody, I know everybody has very busy schedules and it's often very difficult to get out and come to these kind of meetings, but on behalf of the South Florida Water Management District, the nonfederal -- federal sponsor in this Everglades Restoration, we welcome you and we really look
forward to your input tonight.

I wanted to start by just giving a quick overview on the overhead of really what we're trying to do in the comprehensive Everglades Restoration Program in general. There's three graphical representations of the South Florida peninsula, and on the left is one that depicts the historical flows before we all lived here, showing that when the rain fell, it hit north of Lake Okeechobee and meandered very slowly down into Lake Okeechobee, and as the water levels in the lake rose from that rainfall that's derived upstream of the lake, the lake kind of just overtipped its southern boundary and moved water down into Everglades National Park as we know it today, and Florida Bay.

Now, with that said, we all live, work, go to school and reside here, and in order for us to do that, we work in a very managed system today, and the graphic in the center there is a good representation of how we manage water in South Florida under the current flow regime. And we all acknowledge that there's a system that has been put in place over the last fifty to sixty years that provides a very good level
of service for flood control, so we can live, 
work and enjoy South Florida. 

But with that said, we also recognize that 
there are some unintended consequences 
associated with that system. So what happens 
today when it rains north of the lake, the water 
moves very quickly into Lake Okeechobee, which 
now has a dike around it where we manage water 
levels within the lake, and when we can, we move 
water out of the lake, down through storm water 
treatment areas to Everglades National Park and 
Florida Bay. But today, under the majority of 
the operating regimes, when we have very high 
lake levels, the lake comes up and we actually 
discharge that water in an undesirable fashion 
to the St. Lucie estuary to the east and the 
Caloosahatchee to the west, which is not the way 
the water used to go. 

So in CERP, the Comprehensive Everglades 
Restoration Program, we have a series of 
projects, and I'll take a little bit of time to 
talk through those, that gets us to a future 
flow regime. Obviously it's not going to get us 
back to where we were before we all came to 
South Florida, prehuman existence, but we do
have opportunities through this program with individual projects like the project that we're going to be talking about today, to couple together different components to improve the way that we manage water within the system and provide a better balance between the water supply that we drink, the water supply that we use for irrigation, the flood control that we rely on to live and work in South Florida and then try to reverse some of those unintended consequences associated with the network of canals that we put on the landscape.

And what I think is really important, we talked about the quality, the quantity, the timing and the distribution of flows. And the project that we're talking about tonight is going to focus on that quantity, quality, timing and distribution. But in addition to that, we're going to be looking at project features in the Western Everglades Restoration Project that will increase our operational flexibility of a system-wide network of canals, lakes and levee systems that we have in South Florida. And as we move forward and we develop this project plan, with the public input, we really want to
increase the regional operational flexibility of water management and provide some relief to those northern estuaries that often get overburdened with those undesirable regulatory releases, and then try to send more flow to the natural areas, including the Western Everglades area that we're going to be talking about tonight.

So from the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Program, we use an acronym that you often hear, it's called CERP, C-E-R-P, the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Program. That program is well documented in a volume of manuals, for lack of better words, that were finished back in 1999 that laid out a series of project components or project features that would kind of reverse some of those unintended consequences that I talked about from the drainage perspective; and that document included sixty-eight different components that were all over the South Florida jurisdiction that were put on the landscape to help us better manage water resources and provide a better balance between water supply, flood control and the environment.
And those types of features are listed here, and these are the types of features that we'll be looking at in this particular planning project to put on the landscape to improve the water quality and the hydrology in the Western Everglades. And they include things like aquifer storage and recovery; in a nutshell, that is a well that collects water when the canal networks are full and it's raining, it moves that water down into the upper part of the aquifer, stores it underground, and then when it gets dry, whether it's a dry season or whether it's a drought, it brings that water back up, puts it in the canal networks and moves it to the environmental areas for environmental restoration and environmental enhancement.

The same holds true for the surface water storage reservoirs. We'll be evaluating and looking at different combinations of storage features, whether they be shallow; four feet deep, or they be intermediate, eight feet deep, or whether they be deep, at like fifteen or eighteen feet, where we can build reservoirs and actually capture that water when we don't want it, when we're discharging it to tide, store it,
and then deliver it to the system when it needs it as we transition into the dry year like we do every single year.

And then storm water treatment areas, we recognize that through development activities; urban runoff, other land uses, there is a water quality component that is essential to Everglades restoration, and we'll be looking at storm water treatment areas in this planning area to capture and treat local runoff, as well as look at opportunities to bring lake water down into this area, treat it and deliver it to the natural system.

And then just a couple more I want to touch base on, seepage management and removing barriers to flow. Obviously if we build reservoirs that are above ground, we can't adversely affect adjacent landowners or adjacent agricultural operations or adjacent cities, we have to be able to manage that seepage and provide the same level of surface for flood control, so seepage management is a component of storage features and projects.

And then removing barriers to flow; we have canals that turn left, they turn right, they
move water here, they move water there. We're going to look at opportunities to remove some of those canal networks, for example, and reproduce some of the overlanding sheet flow that we historically knew before those canals were created.

And then with these projects and as these components get put it on-line over a series of years, it gives us a lot more operational flexibility in the surface water management system that we deal with today, and as a result of that, we have more knobs we can turn to control water for water supply, flood control and the environment, and that's where the revised operations come into play.

So as you start putting these features on the landscape, you have more operational flexibility within the system, so we acknowledge that it's not only just the physical structures out there, but it's also evaluating and looking at the way that we operate the facilities that exist and the new facilities that we'll be putting on the landscape as part of the project.

So without going into too much detail, when we talk about the Comprehensive Everglades
Restoration Plan or program, we've made a lot of progress, and I think it's important for people to recognize that. So what I have on the overhead are really a series of all the project plans that we've been developing for reversing those unintended consequences, and if I start at the top, I'll pick on the Kissimmee River restoration. The Army Corps, with the Water Management District, has actually taken the channel that was the former Kissimmee River and we backfilled it, and we purchased the land, which is the flood plane. And that project is actually nearing completion. So the once meandering river was channelized, that water short-circuited very quickly to the lake, we are nearing completion with the Kissimmee River restoration project which actually restores that meandering flow of water in the head waters of Lake Okeechobee.

A couple of other really big ones, the Indian River Lagoon South. That is a series of reservoirs and storm water treatment areas that we have under construction that will capture discharges from Lake Okeechobee that makes its way to the St. Lucie estuary. In addition to
that, we have the C-43 reservoir which is under construction. That's a similar type facility, 170,000 acre feet of storage on the Caloosahatchee River to capture some of the undesirable discharges that come from the lake into the Caloosahatchee estuaries.

And then we have a number of projects that we're currently planning, one which we're going to talk about tonight. The Central Everglades Planning Project that was recently completed, it's waiting for congressional authorization, so that's a really important next step. That is a project that opens up the central part of the greater Everglades system and provides the necessary water quality treatment and storage south of the lake to move an additional two hundred thousand acre feet of water south, above and beyond what we can currently do today.

And then I'll talk a little bit about the Lake Okeechobee Watershed Project before I jump to the Western, and the reason is that planning effort is happening simultaneously to this planning effort, and the Lake Okeechobee Watershed Project has a very similar team of Army Corps Jacksonville District staff and Water
Management District staff that are formulating for storage north of Lake Okeechobee, and as we move forward and look at opportunities here in the Western Everglades Restoration Project to put storage and treatment south of the lake, we'll be coordinating and communicating very closely with the same team of individuals that are doing the project plans for storage north of the lake, recognizing that it's a combination of features; it's the solution to the unintended consequences, not just one project is going to fix it.

So we're building storage on the estuaries, the northern estuaries. We're looking at storage north of the lake and we're going to be looking at storage south of the lake in this particular project. So there will be a lot of cross-communication between project teams to make sure that at the end of the day we maximize the efficiency and the benefits of those individual projects for the entire system.

So without going into too much detail, that's why we're here tonight. This project is really the next important project that we're moving toward and ultimately planning. We work
under the premise of our road map, it's known as the integrated delivery schedule, and that's the previous graphic that had the dots that showed the Kissimmee River restoration and some of the other projects that were on the landscape are documented in this integrated different delivery schedule, and they're in these different color codes that are throughout the actual road map.

And it's important to recognize the two we're watching now are the Lake Okeechobee Watershed and Aquifer Storage and Recovery Project that will provide storage north of the lake, and then the Big Cypress L-28 interceptor project, which is really the Western Everglades Restoration Project that we're here to talk about tonight. And those two projects, together with the other projects that have been planned and are currently either under design or construction, will really provide the next increment of treatment and storage on the landscape to improve the system-wide operational flexibility within the South Florida Water Management System.

So with that, that's just a brief overview of where we are in the Everglades restoration
program and why we're here tonight. So again, I would like to welcome each and every one of you and we look forward to working with you tonight.

MS. KEEFE: Hi, everyone. Good evening. Can everyone hear me okay? Okay. I see some nods. So we're really happy to see so many faces here. Thank you for taking time to come to the meeting, it's wonderful to see this much engagement and interest by the public, so you're welcome to be here and we're really happy to have you here.

My name is Kelly Keefe. I've been involved in ecosystem restoration projects for about twenty years, eight of those have been with the Army Corps. I'm very excited to be part of this project, the Western Everglades Restoration Project. I'll be the Planning Lead from the Army Corps, and so part of my role is to integrate all of these different points of view and try to pull them all together into one project that we can -- we can put forward for Congress to consider and authorize and then everybody can stand behind. So this is a -- this is a fun process that we're going through, and part of the fun for us is hearing everything
that you have to say.

So let me give you a little introduction to the project so you can get a sense of preliminarily the scale of the project, the preliminary scope of the project, kind of what we think generally it's going to include, and then we'll hear from you and we'll consider -- we'll continue our planning process to get down into a lot more detail over the coming months and the next year or two to really figure out in detail what will be in the project.

So there's our project area map, and before these presentations started I actually got several questions about whether or not we would have a connection to Lake Okeechobee, so I would like to clarify that yes, we are having potential canal connections to the lake, and you can see them on the slide there, they may be a little bit hard to see, but if you look closely, you can see there's some dotted lines that go up to the canals. So we are looking to relieve the lake of some of those high water levels that these days currently get discharged to the estuaries, we're hoping to pull them south and actually get good water quality, quantity,
timing and distribution, heading south the way
that it did naturally.

And the purpose of this project is to
improve that quantity, quality, timing and
distribution of the water that we need to
restore the system. And we're thinking of that
in terms of reconnecting the Western Everglades,
so that means reconnecting areas within this
project area, so areas that now may be
disjointed, where water doesn't have sheet flow
anymore or it's not flowing the way it did
naturally, maybe we can make them flow more
naturally and also reconnect this area with the
greater Everglades, so you have more of the
natural connection that it used to have with the
greater ecosystem; we'll be looking to restore
that as well.

So, as I said, it's preliminary at this
point. Some people in the room have been
telling us for years what they think should be
included in this project, and other people are
brand new to the project as it's getting
started. So this is right now just a
preliminary kind of conglomeration of what we've
heard so far, and we'll adjust these as we hear
more from you and from our team members.

So right now the objectives of the project are to restore and improve the seasonal hydroperiods and fresh water distribution to support that natural mosaic of uplands and lower wetlands that you would naturally have in the area. We want to restore that mixture as much as we can and make sure that the water is on the land when it should be, where it should be and for as long as it should be. And we also want to reestablish and improve that sheet flow, so for anybody who doesn't already know that vocabulary, sheet flow is when water is flowing across the land. And sometimes in the past with our projects we have tended to break up that sheet flow, and then we realized that it was really important to the ecosystem. So now we want to restore the sheet flow as much as we can and restore those patterns and the depth and also the duration that the water stays on the land in the study area so that we can reduce the loss of soil; as soil subsides or the soil either burns away or it kind of oxidizes away, we want to make that stop happening as much as we can, and also reduce the number of those
large, damaging peat fires that we have when the areas get too dry and they're naturally dried down and then you can have a spark and a big fire that wouldn't have naturally happened. We're going to try to reduce those with this project as well.

And we want to reduce the loss of water out of this system. Like Matt mentioned, we'll be looking at areas where we may have seepage loss or areas where we've tried to restore hydration and those areas aren't getting enough -- as much water as they should, or maybe they're losing some of that water, so we'll see if we can make those areas work better and improve the ground and surface water elevations as well.

So here's a little bit more information about our study area, and as you can see, we've got this white boundary going around the study area. That's not a hard limit on where we're looking, but really, that just gives you a sense of the area and the scale of the project. So right now with that line drawn around this area, that's about 920 square miles that we're looking at to find all the restoration opportunities that we can. So it's a large scale ecosystem
restoration project, we're going to do as much
good in the area as we can.

And you do see there the potential
connections to Lake Okeechobee, so we have a lot
to consider as we go through this planning
process.

This area was historically dominated by
wetlands and a mosaic of uplands and wetlands,
but the dominant landscape type was wetlands.
And currently we still have natural lands and
wetlands dominating the area, and we also have
agricultural and urban land uses and
infrastructure in the area.

So some of you -- maybe I can get people to
raise your hand. How many people have been
around since we originally formulated the yellow
book? I see Pete out there. So some of you may
remember this diagram, possibly. So this comes
right out of our yellow book, and for those of
you who weren't involved in that, the yellow
book is kind of our nickname for the plans,
that's we have that's called the Comprehensive
Everglades Restoration Program, or plan, and
that's the bigger CERP plan. And as you all
know and as Matt mentioned, that big CERP plan
contains a lot of projects that all work together, they're all kind of like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, and each time we do a project, it's like we're filling in another piece of that jigsaw puzzle. And so this is what was proposed to be in the L-28 area, this part of the jigsaw puzzle was this plan here. And this is conceptual, we're not bound to do this, but it's a good place for us to start talking. And so now our study area actually includes this area and expands upon it, so we're actually taking on more than this for this Western Everglades Restoration Project.

So we have some opportunities here to reconnect and restore those fragmented wetlands. And also, as Matt mentioned a few times, we want to improve the system-wide operational flexibility. And what that means, when we're talking about operations, we're basically talking about moving water and being able to move the water into the best place where it's needed the most at the right time. And so every time we put another piece into that jigsaw puzzle, we're more able to move that water where it needs to go and where it would go naturally.
So this project, by putting another piece in that puzzle, this project will give us that much more ability to avoid dumping water into the estuaries or avoid putting water in places where it wouldn't have gone naturally, and we can put it into places where it should go naturally.

And we also have the potential to help with water supply and flood control benefits, that's always important in Florida, and so it's part of what we're considering. And then we're going to coordinate with ongoing restoration activities, especially with this being such a large area, you can imagine there are a lot of people already doing work in this area, and we heard from some of them at an agency meeting earlier today, and if any of you know about any restoration work going on in this area already, feel free to include that in your public comments so that we're as aware as possible of the things that we can compliment and support and work together with.

So thank you all for your attention. I hope that was a good introduction to the project. Now Andy is going to tell you a little
MR. LOSCHIAVO: Thank you. My name is Andy Loschiavo. I am the restoration resources section chief here. I'm going to talk about the Natural Environmental Policy Act process, NEPA. No, it's not the filter in your vacuum cleaner, it's a more important act where we consider a lot of the environmental issues and socioeconomic issues and why we're here tonight; this is part of the NEPA process, the public scoping meeting, so we're going to go through this and sort of the things -- how this process works and the opportunities for you to provide input on this project.

NEPA is a federal law that mandates all federal actions to consider the environmental effects and socioeconomic effects of those actions, and it's mostly focused on major federal actions, and particularly focused on those where we might have significant environmental impacts. As part of the process it requires, as part of this process tonight, this is one part of it to consider -- solicit public comment, consider those comments and
address those as part of the project that we're putting forth. It's also a way where we're able to integrate our consultation with tribal governments, as well as our coordination and consultation with federal, state and local agencies. It's an important process to provide a mechanism where a lot of different agencies and issues that get brought up that overlap in this area, we can look at it all in one document, consider all those issues as we're looking to formulate the best restoration plan that can avoid, minimize and mitigate some of those environmental effects.

And this is a detailed diagram here of the process here is that what we're basically talking about here is ultimately as part of this process we prepared a detailed assessment to consider what those effects are, and measures to avoid, minimize and mitigate unavoidable effects. And there's different types of documents, but one that's most important with this project, because we believe that there's enough issues here already that's part of how we look at CERP projects, it's a large scale project, there's a lot of important resources
that we would prepare a more detailed environmental assessment as part of an environmental impact statement, and we consider a lot of those environmental issues and document them clearly and explain the analyses in that report. There's a draft report that goes out for public comment and a final that gets posted as well.

Now, Kelly mentioned the planning process, and there's also the NEPA process, we try to integrate those, we try to make sure that we make things as integrated as possible. As part of the Corps' six step planning process, the first step for any restoration project or any water resources project is what are those problems and opportunities that we're trying to address and focus in on, what are the goals and objectives. Some of you may have insights on that or some views; you can express that tonight as part of the open scoping process. It very much feeds into clearly stating what is the purpose of this federal project and why we need it. We're going to make sure that it's clearly stated ultimately in the documents so there's no confusion over what is the purpose and need for
the project.

In addition to planning process, we try to describe what the existing conditions are; what is the vegetation that's out there, the geology, the hydrology, the fish and wildlife that's out there. What's the recreation that people use these sites for? What are the communities that are in this area? We want to make sure we consider all those issues as part of the affected environment. And we also try to consider, ultimately, what if we didn't move forward with this project, what would happen, what is the future going to be like, and that's the no action alternative that we consider.

As part of the planning process, ultimately when you're considering these problems and opportunities, you develop alternative plans to address them; alternative restoration plans, they aren't just focused on that restoration action, they may look at opportunities for water supply or flood control that can be done along with this restoration plan, but also, if there's environmental issues or effects to resources, we want to consider measures to avoid, minimize and mitigate those. We want to hear some of those
concerns tonight as well as part of this process.

As part of the process to evaluate plans we developed what are called performance measures; we're trying to measure the benefits for restoration; how much wetlands do we restore, how much water are we able to move south, do we know how much fire risk we can reduce. Those are the performance measures that help evaluate the plan's effects, as well as we look at evaluation criteria to consider what the impacts might be to threatened endangered species, as well as trying to avoid sensitive cultural areas.

We then take that information, it gets compared in the document, that joint project implementation report, the NEPA report, and as a part of that we document what those environmental effects are, and ultimately we select a plan that's put forth, we tentatively select a plan with the draft environmental impact statement; basically describes this is what we think is the best plan that considers all the issues that got raised as part of this project. It also documents ultimately the
conclusions in the end with the final report and how those issues were addressed.

What's new with the planning process is some of the feedback back a couple years ago when they asked how was the Corps doing with the planning process, the comments were you're too slow, it costs a lot to get through the planning process, and so there's a whole effort to revamp the planning process, to speed it up, to try and minimize the cost of going through the planning process. So we're talking about three years to get the study done, no more than three million dollars to develop this, the project plan, and also improved integration within the Corps of Engineers, the Jacksonville District, representatives on the ground. We have a division level and ultimately at the national level and headquarters, better coordination between those groups to ultimately make sure we address issues fully, get support ultimately at headquarters for the plan.

The process is also focused on what are those key decisions we need to make as we talk about those six steps in the planning process, what are the key decisions that we need to make
and what are the few risks that we might run into, whether it's water quality or maybe it's seepage issues or flood control or threatened endangered species issues that we need to address, getting the right information at the right time to address those. And ultimately we're trying to document what these issues are at the beginning and get the right information at the right time so that we can move through the process as fast as we can, but appropriately address those issues.

And here's sort of a schedule. This whole process, again, takes about three years. As you can see up here, we're starting in the scoping process, that's where we're at, so the scoping letter went out on July 11th and we're having a scoping meeting tonight to hear comments from everyone who is in this room, and you can also send in writing the comments, or through e-mail; I will have some information at the end how you can do that. That information gets taken in by the project team to develop alternatives to basically come up with these are alternatives we're going to consider for restoration in the Western Everglades, and that's the first
decision milestone that we make.

When that process moves forward, we go through an evaluation process to identify what we think is the tentatively selected plan. It's not the recommended plan because we still have to hear from all the various agencies and public and tribal governments on what we think are some things that need to be considered with that plan and have they all been considered correctly. And that gets done as part of a draft environmental impact statement, a draft EIR goes out for public comment, so that's another opportunity for folks to weigh in on what we think -- what the agencies have come up as a restoration plan, but also to provide your input on that.

And we consider that, we consider what changes we need to make to avoid, minimize or mitigate some of those unavoidable impacts, and it gets put into ultimately a final plan that comes out and the decision for the final report model, we have a final Environmental Impact Statement, or EIS, they call it, gets released. And ultimately in the end there's a final record of decision of that on that project after a
final statement is reviewed.

Public participation is a big deal as part of the NEPA process and the federal planning process, there's many opportunities to do that with this project. One, we're trying to use existing forums that are out there, the South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force, there's a meeting that's being held here in this auditorium on August 23rd, and it's a good way to get your thoughts -- a more interactive way, talking through some of the technical information that we may need that can help improve the consideration of what are the best plans to evaluate. And we're also going to use our project delivery team meetings, they're going to be -- those meetings are going to be posted on the website; that, again, is going to be in the presentation, you can write this down. And those are held basically monthly, and there's opportunities for public comment as part of that process.

In addition, things are going to be brought up at the Water Resource Advisory Committee to the South Florida Water Management District, and as part of the governing board there's
opportunity for public comment there. And again, when we have a draft report comes out, we'll have another public meeting to hear input on those restoration plans. And so again, there's a number of ways to get your input this process.

There's public comment cards that we mentioned, we have some up front here that Gina is going to call off names for people to come up, and if you don't want to use that route, you can send comments through an e-mail that's up on the screen here, Western.Everglades@USAC.Army.mil, or you can write, the address is Melissa Nasuti, she's the environmental technical lead, she couldn't be here tonight, using this address here.

And again, the web address to keep up on the public comments when things are going to be addressed, when we address those comments they will be posted on this website, as well as project team meetings, upcoming events, use that website. And we are accepting comments up through August 24th, so you have another week after today to get your input in on this project.
MS. KEEFE: So some folks are trying to get to that web page tonight and weren't able to get through to it, for some reason. We know that it works. It's case sensitive. If you can't get through on that address, you can just go to Google and type in Western Everglades Restoration Project, and just Google it and it will lead you to our web page.

MR. DESCHIAVO: All right. Thank you.

MS. RALPH: Okay. Thank you to Matt and Kelly and Andy for the presentations tonight to give everybody an overview of the Western Everglades Restoration Project.

So now it's time for your say, it's time to hear from the public, so it's extremely important that everybody's voice is heard. As you can see, we have a very large number of participants here tonight, so therefore we are asking that you keep your comments to two minutes. On the very front table over here we have a green, yellow, red light. When it gets to the yellow light, start wrapping it up. When it gets to the red light, I'm unfortunately going to have to cut you off, because we do want to hear from everybody this evening.
There will be a transcript of this public meeting, it will be prepared, and as Andy said, we will be taking your comments through one of these avenues through August 24th. Does that mean that you can't send us a comment after August 24th? We are here to listen throughout the planning process, but we ask that you get your initial scoping comments in by the 24th of this month. Written comments may be submitted to the e-mail address and the mailing address shown above, as Andy pointed out.

So what's going to happen, the protocol for tonight is individuals who have signed up one of these comment cards -- and your opportunity still is out there if you want to sign up at the registration table -- you will be called to the microphone. So I'll call two names, the first one will come to the microphone and the other one will be standing, just waiting to make their comments. Please state your full name, and if applicable, what organization you may represent.

I ask that -- there are a variety of issues going on in the world today in the greater Everglades; I ask that you keep your comments focused tonight on the Western Everglades
Restoration Project as was described. If you have comments outside the scope of this meeting, we'd be happy to discuss them with you immediately after this meeting. There will be several representatives from the Army Corps of Engineers, South Florida Water Management District around the room and at these posters, so please keep your focus on the Western Everglades Restoration Project.

I do apologize if I mispronounce your name, so I'm going to try my best and hopefully I'll get it right, and before we do the first individual, we did have some other elected officials that joined us, and I would just like to briefly recognize the Fort Myers Mayor, Mr. Randy Henderson.

MR. HENDERSON: Thank you.


So the first speaker will be Commissioner Janet Taylor, followed by Mali Gardner.

MS. TAYLOR: Can you hear me now?

We appreciate the opportunity for members
of the Glades Community to have a seat at the table. Our community unite behind the idea that the Army Corps must be guided by science and complete the projects that are approved and technically proven to bring relief to Lake Okeechobee and St. Lucie and the Caloosahatchee estuaries. We support finishing the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan, which was started nearly two decades ago and includes the Western Everglades Restoration Project. Combined, these projects will achieve the original stated goal of restoring the Everglades. Unfortunately, activists have threatened progress through attempts to force the sale of land south of the lake. Our communities are not for sale, and we encourage the Army Corps to continue serving as a partner in advocating for the completion of CERP, and we look forward to the day when frequent discharges become a thing of the past.

Thank you all for coming to us tonight.

MS. GARDNER: Good evening. Thank you. I really have one point, and I want to get clarification, and I think it was on your slide, that there was five hundred and eighty-nine thousand acres in this project. Is that the
total project area?

MS. KEEFE: That's the total area that we have preliminarily outlined, that number of acres is about nine hundred and twenty --

MS. GARDNER: And how many acres of that is owned already by the state or federal government?

MS. RALPH: I think that's a question that we can look into, I'm not sure that we are prepared --

MS. GARDNER: I'd like to look into that, because I saw that target area and I was concerned that the amount of acreage they were talking about. And I agree with Commissioner Taylor that I believe, you know, the project, CERP project should be completed and funded. Particularly my concern is Herbert Hoover dike, and that's the safety issue that that project needs to be done, but I'm concerned 578,000 acres that I saw on the little map tonight, how much of that is already owned by state and federal, so I really would appreciate that information.

Thank you.

MS. RALPH: Thank you. Okay, so next up we
have Mayor Phillip Roland, followed by Patty Whitehead.

MAYOR ROLAND: Phillip Roland, Mayor of Clewiston. I'm not going to talk about Western right this second. The Kissimmee Valley covers 5500 square miles, and you all dump water into Lake Okeechobee, which is 700 square miles, and that's the reason that the mayor from Fort Myers is here, and people from Stuart are here, is because of the green algae. I saw algae the first time when I was thirty years old, after I come out of the service, after at the Kissimmee was straightened in 1960. First time I saw green algae, and it was right out in the middle of the lake. And until you -- until you control the water, the ninety-five percent of the water that comes into Lake Okeechobee, you cannot control what's in the south. And I think your plan, the Western, is right, but you're going to fill it up in one year, and then where do you go from there? If you don't store water north of the lake -- and let's talk about shared adversity. Let Orlando and everything south of there share in the adversity, the Fort Myers, Stuart, us and everybody else in the south
shares. Thank you.

MS. RALPH: Okay. We have Patty Whitehead, followed by Catherine Backos.

MS. WHITEHEAD: Hi, good evening. I'm representing the Responsible Growth Management Coalition out of Lee County and the Cypress Cove Conservancy out of Collier County, and I want to preface my main remarks about this project with something that I think we can all agree on, I think it's foundational to our understanding of the Everglades. The presence of humans in south and central Florida has displaced and in some cases permanently destroyed the rich, unique and highly biodiverse and irreplaceable natural values of the Everglades. So that takes in all impacts, not just southern impacts, but central impacts.

So my main question is for the agencies that are here, how will this project interface with another NEPA planning process currently underway also in the Western Everglades called the Eastern Collier County Habitat Conservation Plan, which sounds nice and environmentally friendly, but is in fact a plan to urbanize Eastern Collier County to the tune of 45,000
acres of residential, commercial, high density intensity. Also, to be served by hundreds of miles of new roads, many of them multilane highways. How will panthers and other large mammals that require large swaths of natural native lands that are interconnected that in most cases need to be uplands, but can be seasonally restricted wetlands. How will these animals breathe, feed, find mates, be restricted from impacts, not only from humans, but from their own species. As we know, male panthers have panther on panther impacts, they fight each other for territory.

Is this project aimed to serve that other project? Is the water for the humans, or, you know, you're going to be sheet flowing new water through the Western Everglades, this is the place where panthers rely on now for their survival. So many questions to be answered, and I hope that there's going to be an interface between this NEPA planning process and that one, it raises so many questions.

Thank you.

MS. RALPH: Thank you. All right.

Catherine Backos.
MS. BACKOS: I don't know if I can reach this. Can everybody hear me? My name is Catherine Backos, I'm a realtor from the Naples area, Fort Myers, Lee County, and I have to say that the efforts made here are -- how shall I put it -- sorely needed in our area. We pride ourselves on having some of the finest beaches in Florida, and yet the estuaries are polluted, our river is polluted, our beaches are polluted. This has had a serious impact on our industry, and I realize that the man-made creation of damming up the lake and having the water -- straightening the Kissimmee not only impacted the people in Clewiston and in our areas, the question is how much money is needed to really arrive at a program, and do we have help from the federal government, and is the state bought into actually doing something to keep the environment of Florida healthy.

And if we can get answers to that and a time line and a budget and who is going to put what money in, I know we all voted for Amendment One, but we haven't really seen much result from that.

So I think those are the answers I'm
seeking on behalf of people in our area and on behalf of everybody in this room.

Thank you.

MS. RALPH: Thank you. All right. Next up I have Anna Littles, followed by Leslie Alderman.

MR. ALDERMAN: Man. I don't have a (inaudible).

MS. RALPH: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Alderman. Anna Littles here. Anna does not want to speak. Okay, thank you. I apologize for this one. Pete Quasius.

MR. QUASIOUS: Spot on. I'm Pete Quasius. I'm the advocacy director for Audubon of the Western Everglades. We all know we need to move water south. We need to move clean water south. We need to move lots of water south. I'm pleased to see that we've expanded the conceptual scope of this project to include the connections with the lake. I think we also need to expand the opportunity to move more water into the Big Cypress. Nobody wants to have water, polluted water, in their streets, on their farm fields, on their beaches and their homes, but the answer is to find ways to convey
clean water south, huge quantities of clean water south.

250,000 acres of storage is six inches off the lake. We all know how fast the lake can rise if we have a big storm. We need to provide the opportunity to treat, clean and move water to appropriate places that allows us all to have the prosperity of our economy and continued quality of life.

So I look forward with this process. I'll see you here on the 23rd.

MS. RALPH: Thank you. Okay. Our next two speakers are Thomas Van Lent, followed by Paul McGehee.

MR. VAN LENT: My name is Tom Van Lent. I'm here representing the Everglades Foundation. Our main purpose in tonight here is to listen and to learn, understand what the scope of the project is. We understand that you're going through a scoping process to define what that is, and we also know you're on a very compressed, streamlined planning timeline; therefore, I urge you to focus as quickly as possible and tell the public what you're planning.
The scope here ranged from all possible projects in CERP are on the table to the very limited description from the Yellow Book about what the L-28 and what's kind of in between sort of is left up -- is what is left to be decided. So please focus and let us know as soon as possible what your plans are, what is possible.

Now, the Everglades Foundation clearly believes that the Yellow Book efforts certainly do need to be addressed, there's two major problems in this basin that we see inside the basin design. One is the heavy nutrient pollution coming off the L-28 I and into water conservation area 3-A accounts for about a third of the total pollutant load to the Everglades and has a general negative effect, but specifically it has a huge detrimental effect to the Miccosukee tribal homeland. You're depriving them of the use of their homeland, and that is unconscionable, and that problem does in fact need to be addressed.

Secondly, the L-28 interceptor has a massive hydrologic disruption to the whole northeast Big Cypress, and that is the very heart of your -- your project, that does need to
be addressed.

While we welcome any opportunity to do more with this project, we would like to see what's on the table. We don't think the project can be successful unless those two problems, at least, are addressed and solved. So thank you.

MS. RALPH: Thank you.

MR. MCGEHEE: Hi. I'm Paul McGehee, I'm here for Glades Electric Cooperative, and my questions have already been somewhat answered, but I would stress that as the plans move forward in any of the planning phases, that as we have electrical infrastructure extensively through that area, which our members are invested in, that we would be brought into the planning sessions and anything that may have to be rerouted or moved or retired, that the members of Glades Electric Cooperative are not going to be on the hook financially for those costs, but I want to know which agency plans to actually pay those expenses.

So please keep us in the loop early. There may be two different plans that just the cost of mitigating those infrastructure costs may swing the choice between any of those plans, so just
please keep us in the loop early.

Thank you.

MS. RALPH: Thank you. Okay. Next up I have Shannon Larsen, followed by Denzil Alleyne.

MS. LARSEN: First of all, I have a little giggle in me, um, talked about when Lake Okeechobee tripped over or tipped over its boundaries. Lake Okeechobee doesn't have a boundary, lakes don't have a boundary, rivers don't have a boundary. We created it when we moved into their boundary.

When and where the water needs to be. I really do hope that the Army Corps and water management district really will pay intention to that, because you haven't been very good about that yet, in all the years you've been managing. I'm glad to see that you're thinking continuity rather than fragmentation, it's been fragmented too long.

And in closing, I just have a few suggestions. That you dig grade to type S to an elevation of eight feet, so more water -- excuse me -- may be diverted towards Big Cypress. Right now it's being diverted to the water conservation 3-A. That's Big Cypress Preserve's
water, let's get it back to them. Fill in L-28 so water can overflow towards the west of Big Cypress. Take measures to improve water quality from L-28 interceptor because the north feeder is providing dirty water and that needs to be taken care of.

We need to allow releases through S-344, and I would like you to use something I noticed in your plan you have 2 SPA pictures, and I would like -- and over 7,000 acres of land for those two SPA. If you use something like the managed aquatic plant system, you'd only be using about thirty-four acres per system, and I encourage you to start looking into different ways other than the SPA. There are things less land, disturbing less of the environment, and actually do a better job.

And we need to get rid of the legacy phosphate in Okeechobee or nothing is going to work. Thank you.

MS. RALPH: Thank you, Miss Larsen. Denzil Alleyne. No, he does not wish to speak any longer? Okay. Next we have Mary Ann Martin, followed by Vivian Haney.

Sir, can you just state your name so we
can clarify?

MR. IGLESIAS: Yeah, because I'm not Mary Ann Martin. I'm Ramon Iglesias from Mary Ann Martin's Marina.

You know, I've heard a lot about the Everglades today, but we've got to remember that Lake Okeechobee is the liquid heart of the Everglades, and my question is when we were in drought conditions will the aquifers have enough water to replenish the sheet flow that you were talking about, or is your intention to drain that lake that we survive off, that we need? Could you answer that question?

MS. RALPH: Is our intention to drain Lake Okeechobee? That is not our intention.

MR. IGLESIAS: Are the aquifers --

MS. RALPH: Aquifers?

MR. IGLESIAS: Okay.

MS. RALPH: Okay.

MR. IGLESIAS: When we're in a drought, will the aquifers be able to replenish the sheet flow that you were talking about going into the Everglades?

MS. RALPH: Well, what we have, as part of our process is what we call (inaudible), in
which we ensure that there is adequate water as there was in 2000, before this CERP was formulated, so there is a system of checks and balances to ensure that we are meeting those demands.

MR. IGLESIAS: Okay. So when we get into drought conditions and you need that sheet flow and you're running out of water from the aquifers, are you going to pull the water out of Lake Okeechobee?

MS. RALPH: I'm not sure I'm prepared to answer that question, but we will take all of your comments as part of our scoping period, and if one of your concerns is taking too much water from Lake Okeechobee, please put that in your comments.

MR. IGLESIAS: Okay. Since I've got thirty-eight seconds on the clock, I'm going to talk about the Kissimmee. Can you tell me that with the straightening of the Kissimmee and putting it back to the way it was, how much tax dollars were spent, or will be spent when it's all final?

MS. RALPH: I wish I could tell you that, but I can't, but we can certainly find out for
you.

MR. IGLESIAS: Okay. Thank you.

MS. RALPH: Thank you. Miss Haney.

MS. HANEY: Hi. Okay. Hi. My name is Vivian Haney and I'm the reigning Miss Sugar here in Clewiston, and I am very proud to represent the sugar industry at this time.

The board of the sugar industry represents 32 billion dollars a year and over twelve thousand dollars job to our economy. It is important to everyone to understand that taking more farm land out of production will destroy jobs and destroy future communities without solving the problems of large Lake Okeechobee discharges.

We support moving forward with the science-based comprehensive Everglades restoration plan that will benefit all our waterways and communities, not just the coastal estuaries. Thank you for protecting the (inaudible).

MS. RALPH: Thank you. All right. We have Teddy Gardner, followed by Brad Cornell.

MR. GARDNER: I am not Mary Ann Martin, but I will refer to her comment. I've heard a lot
of good information here this evening, but I haven't heard one that I consider to be critical before you start on any project: What's the acceptance criteria? What are you looking for? How much sheet flow in each area? How are you going to maintain it? As Ramon points out, during a drought period, how will you maintain the required sheet flows, or are there periods when you need no sheet flow? I'd like to see that acceptance criteria that you're working to in order to size everything you're doing.

That's it.

MS. RALPH: Thank you for your comment.

MR. CORNELL: Good evening. I'm Brad Cornell, and I'm here on behalf of Audubon of the Western Everglades and Audubon Florida. Really appreciate the opportunity to have public this comment and to hear from all of our — our citizen friends and colleagues and other organizations.

We certainly welcome the focus that this is bringing to opportunities to restore the overdrank Big Cypress swamp and its watershed, this is a great thing, and overdue.

Audubon is especially looking forward to
learning more about the specifics of the planning effort. I know this is a scoping process, so that's kind of part of the public tonight, but we're looking for more details, obviously. We're going to participate.

In particular, we do recommend the scope of the study be expanded to include more of the Big Cypress Preserve. This is to allow us to consider more opportunities to rehydrate and restore the overdrainage that comes from L-28, Tamiami Trail and other canals throughout the system. To us this seems like really low (inaudible) and it seems really relatively low cost, so we recommend that solution.

Thank you.

MS. RALPH: Thank you. Next up we have Ted Fisherman, followed by Nicole Williams.

MR. FISHERMAN: No questions.

MS. RALPH: Okay. Thank you, sir. Nicole Williams, followed by David Urich.

MS. WILLIAMS: Hello. My name is Nicole Williams. I represent Florida Environmental Coalition and EPAC, the Environmental Peace and Education Center.

I'm definitely behind the plan as far as we
do need to move water south. In your plan that I heard you present this evening, I did not hear very much in the way of what type of research you plan to do with the water and the environmental impact that moving dirty water into the area will have. Overflow, sheet flow that is not treated. I always (inaudible) the DEP for the water quality mayhem up in Tallahassee, if you, you know, allow me to say that. What they deemed was that if you weigh 177 pounds, a human being, and you only eat 22 ounces of fish from Lake Okeechobee a month, you more than likely will not get cancer, but only on those two criteria did they use their Monte Carlo method to figure out that they would higher the amount of pollution allowed into the water. We were all worried that the only research they did was the uptake of pollution in the fish in the water. There was absolutely zero study done on the uptake of hogs, deer, turkey and everything else that a lot of people, Glades County Hunt Club, a lot of other people here, we live off the land. Several of my own family members living off the land, working for Lykes Brothers, died of cancer. A lot of my own
family has died of cancer because of water quality issues coming from north of the lake and out of the lake, both in Lee County and in the Everglades.

So my question and my plea to you, to add into what you're doing, is definitely become part of the water quality demand to make sure -- right now the water quality is entering at 1700 parts per billion of pollution coming into the Everglades; that's supposedly legal. Allowable amount allowed to flow into the Everglades is ten parts per billion and we are off by some ten parts per billion to 1700 parts per billion.

I'm really happy to see that you guys are including the plans much further north of Lake Okeechobee, because obviously we need to clean the water coming into the lake before any water would be clean to the Caloosahatchee or to the St. Lucy.

MS. RALPH: Thank you, Ms. Williams.

MS. WILLIAMS: Thank you.

MS. RALPH: Okay. Mr. Urich, followed by Mr. Ramon Iglesias.

MR. IGLESIAS: I've already spoken.

MS. RALPH: Okay. Thank you. Followed by
John Heim.

MR. URICH: I'm Dave Urich, and I'm speaking also for RGMC, but as well as the Southwest Florida Clean Water Movement. I made the chart, I'll just leave it there and I'll be available to discuss it afterwards, but this chart shows one of the things -- my wife says I shouldn't tell people my age, but I am two months short of being 83, and believe me, I think it's wonderful what we've heard what people are planning. I'm fully supportive of it. I won't be here.

What I want to know is what we're going to do in the next two years, which I hope I'm here, because what's happening, every time I look at the charts on what's happening and the gates the flow ways and what's happening in the water conservation area, I don't like the WCA, I prefer to say the words, I'm sorry, I'm not an alphabet soup person. But we have the water conservation areas are loaded with water. Water in those conservation areas is much better than the water that's in Lake O. It may not quite meet Nicole's standards -- and she and I are friends, by the way, and we don't always agree,
but we are trying to see something happen.

And to me we have a plug at the bottom of this whole area, and I've prepared a sheet and I have a few copies here, and if anyone gives me their e-mail address, I'll be happy to send it to you electronically. But the fact is that as the water comes down, the water conservation areas are full, and they have to close the gates at the bottom. And that's not because of the sparrow, it's because the whole area is full. Sparrow is part of the issue, but we need the study.

I will be here on the 23rd, I've asked attendance on the 23rd. I understand my time is up. I was hoping for three minutes, but I'll take it. Thank you.

MS. RALPH: Thank you. We have John Heim. I may be mispronouncing it.

MR. HEIM: I'm good.

MS. RALPH: You're good. Okay, thank you, sir. I have Bobby Billy, followed by Sandra Hare.

MS. HARE: I'm good.

MS. RALPH: Sandra is good?

MS. HARE: Pass.
MS. RALPH: Okay, thank you. So Raoul Bataller will be up after Mr. Billy.

MR. BILLY: Thank you. Miccosukee is my nation, we still holding our regional rights of this land. Seminole Tribe break from us in 1959, Miccosukee Tribe break from us for 1962, and we independent, we still holding in the belief the way that God has gave us.

I'm glad you're waking up. It's about time you're waking up. It's pollution been making by the people living here. Early 1800s, it wasn't like that, not like this at all. The way God had gave us living, his creation, respect it, which means respect yourself. If you don't respect the nature, you're not respecting yourself. You waking up, but it's too late.

What we need is clean water. And cover up those ditches, because whole State of Florida, entire wetland, almost ninety percent State of Florida, when they create the canals, which leads drain to Florida, develop. That'a a mistake that the Army Corps and Water Management did, almost end to clean water. The garbage and poison we talking about.

We need to respect our future generation.
Our young people, we need to respect our young people. What we going to give to next twenty years or ten years, because lot of farmers moving in, the sugars, development, cities, encroachment, natural area disappeared. We are responsible, taking the weight of future of our people generation and natural generation because you don't have no voice with just animals, fish, deer, bear, all of those things do have a right to live, drink the water, eat the food, raise the family like we do. We do need to respect that.

So y'all need to cover up those ditches, simple as that, because that's causing the problems. Just like you cutting up your body of the body and then they bleed, that's what's happening. The way the creator has gave us, blood vein feeds our body, all over our body, but when they cut it, it bleed out. So that's what's happening.

So if you want to the live in God's creation of the earth, cover those ditches up as fast as you can, protect the nature and your future of life. Thank you.

MR. BATALLER: Your basic job with the Army
is to read the land and deploy your assets in the best way that uses all the advantages of the land, and that's your business. And that's pretty much simplified, but if I was in private business doing this instead of a military man, I would say what's the problem, because if I'm going to be responsible for the consequences, I want to have some control over every single source of the problem.

I don't see how this, which is really you're working the land for about half the area, actually goes to the problem. You haven't quantified anything. What happens when increase in population comes in? What happens when all the stuff from -- from effluent, all the industrial stuff goes right onto the ground, and in this sand, which is nothing like the mountains of Colorado or the granite state of -- or the rocks of Connecticut, this stuff goes right into the ground water and is transmitted around. What allowance have you got for quantification of the problem as it evolves over the years? How about in the next fifty years? All this work has no time line, apparently.

We're going to have extra population, we're
going to have bigger problems, but you're making no effort. It's as if you're deploying soldiers in a field without any regard. In this thing you have biological considerations and chemicals. That's a big part of moving water around, you have to know what's in it. We learned that this year, and this year all the plans before got put into history because all of a sudden we had a science project the size of Lake Okeechobee that you could see from space, it was so colorful. We cannot have that any longer.

And this is not just about the Everglades, we also learned that the estuaries, both of them, are every bit as important and valuable as the Everglades. We have had a problem here with communication (inaudible). I run a newspaper, I started here twenty years ago. I have been involved in every aspect of these people's life. But I came from Connecticut, where Paul Tooter Jones also came from.

I'm out of time.

And I think that the entire kind of Woodstock atmosphere out there on the tolerance and craziness, green was imported directly here
and we have had the effects of that intolerance and the pile on one company and one town for twenty years. That's why these people got into church two weeks ago and said they don't care about us. We have a problem here where the public relations thing that was set in motion because erroneously United States Sugar was picked as the only evil in this thing, and now that they've cleaned up for 21 consecutive years, the problem is still here. That erroneous judgement has got to be put aside.

MS. RALPH: Sir, thank you for your comments tonight. Next up I have Dennis Duke, followed by Rae Ann Wessel, followed by Marissa Carrozzo.

MR. DUKE: Good evening. I'm Dennis Duke with the United States Department of the Interior. I'm here on behalf to basically inform you that obviously the Department is keenly interested in this effort. Glad to see and applaud the efforts of the Army and the South Florida Water Management District in moving forward with this effort.

We're keenly interested because of the fact not only hopefully to estuary by allowing us to
send -- the opportunity to send more water to
the south to better improve the management of
water levels in Lake Okeechobee, improve water
conditions, both inflow and outflow, quality and
timing and distribution of water to the two
Native American tribes that have reservations in
this area, and get all the way down in the water
conservation areas, improve the water there as
well as the Big Cypress National Preserve and
the Everglades National Park.

As you're aware, the South Florida
Ecosystem Restoration Task Force has been
hosting collaborative workshops on identifying
the data and information that's available in
this area, and we're pleased and thankful that
you've chosen to move this study up on the
integrated delivery schedule and perform it now
rather than later, and we look forward to
working with you on that.

Mentioned earlier, we are hosting -- the
task force is hosting a workshop next week, next
Tuesday, the 23rd, it'll be in this room from
10:00 A.M. to 4:00 P.M., and at that point
you're all invited. It will be a different
format; we'll have tables, you will be asked to
sit at the table with representatives from the Corps, Water Management District, Interior and other agencies to give us your ideas directly, okay, to look at maps, tell us where you think the problems are, what do you think needs to be done about it, and we'll then take -- collect those maps up, that information up, consolidate it and send it to the Army Corps of Engineers for their consideration in furtherance of this effort. It is a very open and collaborative process, different than here. We will not be taking public comments, per se, because you will be there giving us your comments firsthand, so we invite you all to come next week and join us.

Thank you.

MS. WESSEL: Good evening. Rae Ann Wessel, Sanibel Captiva Conservation Foundation. Thank you for having this meeting this evening, allowing us to have an initial look at the proposal. I think you're hearing very clearly that we need some clarification about the details of the proposal. To the extent that what the magnitude of the problem is, I haven't been able to really get my arms around that, what the target goals and performance measures
are, both for flow volumes that are trying to be rectified, equalized, the timing and the seasonality of those flows, what targets we have for water quality; clearly there are significant challenges that were identified in the formation of the project, but we don't really have an idea about what it is we're dealing with, and I think that needs to be very clearly articulated up front.

What volume of water is coming from the lake and what percent -- for the project, and what percent of the project water need is that supplying? What is the capacity of this discharge from the lake to the -- to the project connection? In terms of operational flexibility, I'm curious as to what the specific operational flexibility options are. I'd like to know about east-west connectivity for equalizing flows; as we know, rainfall can be very, very spatially diverse.

Zooming out a little bit, how do the lands north and east of the project boundary influence the in-flow to the project? And finally, what is the flow south out of -- flow capacity south out of the lake?
Thank you.

MS. RALPH: After Marissa we have Cara Capp.

MS. CARROZZO: Good evening. My name is Marissa Carrozzo. I'm here on behalf of the Conservancy of Southwest Florida.

Thank you for the opportunity to be here tonight to provide comments. Like others here tonight, I need clarity to better understand more of the details of this project, better understand the performance measures and the criteria that will be used to evaluate this project and the project alternatives as we move forward.

We'd like to better understand how this project will -- how much storage this project will provide, how many acres of wetlands are going to be restored with the project, how water quality will be integrated and what is the intended flows throughout.

And we understand that this is, you know, part -- this is the initial scoping meeting; however, to better provide more detailed comments we would like to understand the project better, so we look forward to our many
engagements when specifics of this project are further explored.

Thank you.

MS. RALPH: Thank you. Okay. After Cara Capp, we will have Lynwood Bishop, followed by Taylor Bishop.


We are certainly excited and supportive of this project moving forward, as we are with all CERP projects, we look forward to seeing each of them completed in different phases, especially the expedited time frame, which gives us not only a more narrow window for progress, but also the type of frequency in these meetings that allows people to be fully engaged. We saw that happen in (inaudible) and we look forward to that happening again.

I know that there was a lot of support for focusing on the Western region in the IBS process, so this is certainly a project area where there's a lot of interest and a lot of people are looking to see restoration progress, certainly me among them. We know that this project can bring important benefits to two
national parks, Big Cypress and Everglades National Park.

In terms of something that was mentioned previously earlier, relieving the high lake levels through canal connections, and thereby relieving the estuaries and getting water to the park, I would ask in the early phases that the agencies, sooner than later, spell out some goals and measureables so we have some understanding of volume, what kind of percentage of benefit we could see in terms of relieving the estuary discharges and if we're going to get that water down to Everglades National Park, how much that flow would benefit the ecosystem.

I heard a question earlier as well, and I want to reiterate an understanding of how much land for this project is already owned and if buying more land is an opportunity or if it's a constraint moving forward. I think that would be important information as we gather next week for the workshop to give people an idea of what we're working with.

So again, just look forward to supporting this process, continuing to come to these meetings, make sure we maximize the ecosystem
benefits as outlined.

Thank you.

MS. RALPH: Thank you. Mr. Bishop.

MR. BISHOP: My name is Lynwood Bishop. I'm a sixth generation Floridian. I've lived in this area all my life. I currently live in West Palm Beach.

And it seems to me that we have spent so much time, effort and money trying to accommodate the situation and all this water, you don't know where to put it, you're working on all these other projects without focusing on what you should be, and that is to hold the water to the north where it's coming from, clean it up up there, let it settle into the lake in a natural flow. And we also need to do the same thing on the estuaries, both in Martin County and over in Lee County. These people, for instance, Martin County, over seventy percent of the water that goes into the St. Lucie River is coming from their own county, their own agriculture, all the cesspools, everything else around there, and you're wanting this area to pay the price for it. I think enough is enough.

It's got to come to the point of where the
people that are polluting this area and bringing it down here need to start paying, and that starts with Disney World and coming south.

MS. RALPH: I have Taylor Bishop, followed by Karson Turner.

MR. BISHOP: Taylor Bishop. I didn't have any prepared remarks, but I'm the 7th generation.

I just wanted to talk about a few things. How many acres of farm land will you be taking out of the production within the Western Everglades Restoration Project? When you do that, you're going to affect jobs in the Glades communities, which is then going to indirectly affect not just farmers, but everybody else down here. What are then going to be the costs to these communities, the indirect costs to those people losing jobs?

If you're going to put a flowway over the town, then hey, where we going to move everybody and, you know, how much are you going to pay them to move? You know, I just -- some of it's just a little frustrating to me here.

I didn't have enough time to plan any more remarks, I apologize, I was listening to what
you guys had to say. I think everybody else in this room will be interested to hear what those plans are, and thank you for your time.

MS. RALPH: Thank you, sir. So after Karson Turner we have Rhonda Roff and Roger Plouffe.

MR. TURNER: Karson Turner, Commissioner for Hendry County.

I just want to point out to y'all -- first off, thank you for having the meeting here tonight, I appreciate you starting this thing off here in Hendry County. We want to make you cognizant of the fact that we would love to host this as many times as we can. We feel that this is the definition of ground zero for this discussion. It's an easy commute for both of the coastal communities, come on over, our TDC dollars love to see you, try to make it a two day event, it will help us out.

The other thing is when you -- please, please be mindful. When you draw a circle around anything like this, it's not ironic that I'm following the young man who just spoke, that's the first thing that rings to our ears is that there's land being taken off of the rolls,
it's taking direct and indirect jobs out of existence, and we're already behind the
eight-ball as it relates to that. So please be cognizant of that thought process every time
you're doing that.

Another thing, too, I've heard this time and time again today about dirty water. Dirty water, you know, and I take offense anytime I hear, you know, Ag being blamed for that. I think we're the best conservationists as it comes to preservation of the way of life of Florida. I would encourage you all as quickly as you could to get the maps from South Florida Water Management District, that's what the parts per billion are looking like actually in the WCA, or excuse me, Water Conservation Area, I ate alphabet soup as well, Everglades National Park, and, you know, the Loxahatchee Wildlife National Refuge, you know, so on and so forth.

And then I also think you need it as plain as the nose on your face; in my case it's a very large nose, but, you know, as you look at what's coming in to the top end of the lake and what's coming out the bottom end, and then some of the best management practices. I know you told us
the folks on the Western basin here, but I really think that we need to try to tie that into the discussion as much as we can, because I think it is going to show time and time again that Ag is doing a great job, and, you know, we're putting our best foot forward and trying to help be a part of the solution.

Thank you very much for being here tonight.

MS. RALPH: Okay. I have Roger Plouffe and then Janet Plouffe. I have Roger Plouffe first, followed by Janet Plouffe.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I thought you said Rhonda.

MS. RALPH: I am so sorry, I did say Rhonda next. Rhonda, I apologize.

MS. ROFF: Remember when we were all in grade school and we wanted the teacher to forget that we were there before we had to get up and speak in front of a group, and now we're all clamoring for the microphone. What changed? I'm on the clock. Sorry. Okay.

I'm Rhonda Roff. I'm a property owner in Hendry County. One of my residences is on the Big Cypress Seminole Indian Reservation, and I
represent Sierra Club, Caloosa Group, tonight representing the Sierra Club Florida.

I think that the folks in this town know that environmental issues are human race issues at the very heart of them, and that there's nothing about Sierra Club that is ever going to be willing to risk human health.

And Janet, we would really love the opportunity to talk with you and the Glades Lives Matter about that, because it is so critical. We want to see this dike fixed. We want human lives to be spared from any kind of catastrophe that may happen as a result of this dike breaching, especially given what we know are the predictions for the increasingly severe fluctuations of drought and flood cycles within the context of climate change.

So I'm assuming that even though this is on a really tight schedule, that this all is happening after the dike gets fixed. Maybe, maybe not. Hopefully it is.

And then what I would like to know, because mostly I have questions, I really don't understand the project too much, I think it's a great idea, but I don't understand it. So the
questions here are at what lake level will this project be implemented? What kind of land and how much Ag land specifically will be taken out of service, and how will the legacy (inaudible) be dealt with in the land that is rehydrated as a result.

In light of the proposed human health criteria, what water quality standards will be employed and at what locations will they be monitored and enforced, particularly if the Seminole Tribe does not prevail in the lawsuit regarding the water quality standards.

Sierra Club opposes ASR everywhere. It does nothing for water quality, we oppose it flat out.

You just -- we'll have more questions and we'll submit them before the 24th.

Thank you very much.

MS. RALPH: Thank you. I just remind everybody that there will be representatives from the Corps of Engineers and South Florida Water Management district located here after the meeting if you have additional questions.

But now Roger Plouffe, followed by Janet Plouffe.
MR. PLOUFFE: Hi. I'm Roger Plouffe. I'm not representing anybody but myself. Pretty much everything that I had noted has been said already. I mean we have a lot of very sincere, intelligent people here at the meeting. The bottom line is I go back to what Billy said; what are we going to do for our future generations? Our future generations currently are built around agricultural and financial gain from agricultural. When I look at your Western Everglades Restoration Project, which you ask we limit our comments to, I see two natural barriers to sheet flow, so I don't understand. You're going to have to bridge I-75 and you're also going to have to bridge US 41 somehow to bring sheet flow into this area.

Secondly, the financial impact that we're leaving. You move water south -- the gentleman here before me already had brought up a very important issue, and that is population is not going to stop growing. I was growing up in Broward County when there was building moratoriums because they couldn't get enough water down there; now they've built all the way to 27 in Broward County. It's not going to take
much to cross the road.

Water is essential. Population is going to grow, and as much as we want the Everglades restored to the pristine conditions they once were, it's not going to happen. It may happen in small part, but we're going to have continued population growth, we're going to need water for people.

Again, to the financial here, Ag land, this is our livelihood, this is our blood.

Thank you.

MS. RALPH: Thank you. Janet Plouffe is not going to speak, so next I have Hugh Connolly, followed by Jennifer Earnest. Hugh Connolly. Calling once. Okay, then Jennifer Earnest, please, and following Jennifer Earnest will be Georgiana Granville.

MS. EARNEST: Good evening. I am in a very distinctive position in that I am a 22 year resident of Stuart; however, I was born and raised in the Glades. I'm the vice-president of the H.E. Hill Foundation, and I have the extreme privilege of working with and for some of the hardest working people out there, the American farmer, farm workers, straight from the fields
and tractor drivers and mechanics.

I'm disappointed that there's not specifics on who owns the land that you've drawn the big circle around. I also have the distinct privilege of being engaged to a charter fisherman in the Stuart area. There's no one more affected by clean water -- impacted -- than myself for farmers and myself for the fishermen of the land.

I'm disappointed that here we are, looking at another project and we have so many projects that aren't completed. I'm also disappointed that we've heard very loudly environmental, environmental, environmental, but tonight I would like to say that I implore you to consider the human impact of what these things do; the jobs affected, the food production taken out.

Why isn't the dike finished? All the plans in the works haven't been finished; however, we're throwing money at a whole new phase and a whole new development.

It's time to implement and store water to the north. Why would we drain water that's polluted all the way through our aquafilters? Why would we put that into our Everglades? We
need to identify areas to the north before we start these areas and putting the water draining through.

We should implement septic inspections. How hard is that? If septics aren't the problem, then what is the problem with inspecting them? It's cheap, there's no focus groups, it is affirmed.

And we oppose anything in this area, our area of farmers, that would take a job away or food out of the mouths of the people here who are good, hard-working Glades people that can't afford to lose a job.

So it's obvious there's no one cause and no one solution to the entire mess. However; starting the cycle over is not the route to take.

MS. RALPH: Georgina.

MS. GRANVILLE: Good evening, everyone. My name is Georgina Granville, I'm the daughter of (inaudible) Granville. I grew up here in the Harlem community, I'm 37 -- I'm 38; just had a birthday August 1st, but I know everyone here has the same sentiment, there is a lot of concern that we have within this whole
community, not just the Harlem community, but this whole community, and so I just ask and I plead with you, take these concerns into consideration when you start making plans, because every plan and everything that you do has impacts. It is the second, third, fourth impact.

I come from New York, I'm in the Army and I live in New York, but I came home because I thought this was important. And there's a lot of people, you know, that grew up here that are not here, so I'm going to have to speak for them. It's very important that you please take into consideration all our concerns here, because there are more people that want to be here, but they're concerned what they are going to be presenting to you falls on deaf ears. But I told them I would come here and speak for them.

Thank you very much for what you're trying to do for our environment and thank you all for coming tonight. God Bless you.

MS. RALPH: Okay. And our final speaker of tonight is Mr. Rick Murphy.

MR. MURPHY: Thank you. First, thanks for
letting me speak tonight. I've been around, born and raised here, and I was around back in late '80s, the '87 to '90, whenever the swim plan was first introduced to us. Some of the folks are still here, some of us are gone. Lake O Lake and other folks fought it tooth and nail. And we've seen a lot of changes, I think we've seen also a lot of good things happen. I think our farmers have done a great job of restoring the water.

When you talk about the impact, the impact is also not only here in the Glades as far as maybe contributing to the factor of population, we don't have much here. I think what you have to look at, consider, if you think about it, is the big impact, which is north of us. When Disney came in, that was a big impact. Whenever they decided just recently to expand Disney again, I think they need to look at the impact of that, that's going to have a major impact.

You also have the west coast of Florida, Manatee County, Pasco, Hernando County, all those counties are going gangbusters, gangbusters as far as development. All that is going to impact the plan of where the water's
going to go.

I do believe that some of the rain could come from south, the original plan back in I-75 was to create bridges to create more flow, the culverts aren't really enough, never has been, never will be.

I also believe that if we continue with population, we're going to have this problem, we're never going to really solve the problem, all we've got to do is try to make it better. I don't think we'll ever get it back to the quantity it used to be, the quality may get there, everybody working together, but I think all together we need to really look at the big picture here, because Florida is going to grow, there's a lot of impacts. I don't think it's just right here in the lake, okay, I think if you take away the land and the some of the livelihood of these people, it's a major impact.

I think we can look a little further north and try to solve the problem up north and divert that water first. I think we're doing a good job of taking care of our water.

Thank you.

MS. RALPH: Okay. So once again I would
like to thank you all for taking time out tonight, I know everybody is very busy, but thank you for coming to our meeting, thank you for providing your comments. I encourage you to provide any additional comments in one of these venues. There will be some folks here to answer any additional questions.

    Thank you.

    (Meeting concluded.)
CERTIFICATE

STATE OF FLORIDA }  
COUNTY OF HENDRY  

I, Elizabeth Barnes, Registered Professional 
Reporter and Notary Public in and for the State of 
Florida, do hereby certify that I was authorized to 
and did stenographically report the foregoing 
proceedings in shorthand, which were thereafter 
reduced to typewritten form by me or under my 
direction and supervision, and that the foregoing 
transcript is a true and accurate record, to the best 
of my understanding and ability. 

I FURTHER CERTIFY that I am neither counsel for, 
related to, nor employed by any of the parties to the 
action in which this proceeding was taken; and, 
further, that I am not a relative or employee of any 
attorney or counsel employed by the parties hereto, 
nor financially interested, or otherwise, in the 
outcome of this action; and that I have no contract 
with the parties, attorneys, or persons with an 
interest in the action. 
This ________ day of __________________, ______. 

_____________________________________

Elizabeth Barnes