

**ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT
ON IMPROVING THE REGULATORY PROCESS
IN SOUTHWEST FLORIDA,
LEE and COLLIER COUNTIES, FLORIDA**

JULY 2000

PREPARED BY
U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS
JACKSONVILLE DISTRICT
(LEAD AGENCY)

U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
U.S. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
(COOPERATING AGENCIES)

The Jacksonville District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) prepared this Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to improve review of future applications to fill wetlands. A landowner who desires to fill wetlands on his/her property must apply to the Corps for a Department of the Army Permit (Permit) under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act. The Corps initiated the EIS out of concern whether the incremental (permit-by-permit) reviews were adequately addressing cumulative and secondary effects of the wetland fill in the rapidly growing Southwest Florida area. The northwest corner of the EIS study area is roughly defined by the cities of Ft Myers/Sanibel, the northeast by Lehigh Acres/Immokalee, the southwest by Naples and the southeast by Everglades City. The area contains a number of important resources including protected species, wetlands, marine and estuarine resources, habitat preserves, sanctuaries, other public and private conservation lands, and other important ecological resources. The environmental and cumulative effects of a project for which a permit is sought are currently analyzed on a case-by-case basis by the project manager. Each Corps project manager (the person reviewing the permit application) currently makes his or her own determination of what resources may be affected by the project, determines what criteria to apply, and what weight to apply to each criteria. To improve this procedure, the Corps proposes to use a set of standardized Permit Review Criteria with the determination of criteria to be based upon a Natural Resources Overlay Map that identifies the locations where a project has a probability to adversely affect one or more natural resources. Just as some areas have greater or lesser degrees of environmental importance, so does the review of applications require greater or lesser degrees of rigor. Neither the map nor the criteria establish the location of fill, quantity of fill, or any constraint on any piece of property. That decision can only be made after review of an application. The standardized maps and criteria are expected to more clearly identify natural resource concerns and thereby improve the Corps reviews. The Permit Review Criteria and Natural Resources Overlay map were developed based on five predictions of future landscapes (called Ensembles). The EIS discloses the potential effects on natural resources and other issues of these Ensembles. Each Ensemble predicted different locations of wetland fill, conversion of upland plant cover, and other permit review criteria, based on the expected actions or suggestions for actions that could or should be taken by the Corps (for wetland fill) and by landowners or City, County, State or Federal Agencies. During preparation of the EIS, the Corps initiated and hosted a group of community and agency representatives, the Alternatives Development Group, whose membership represented a range of views and expertise in the community. The Alternatives Development Group prepared documents that the Corps used to prepare the Ensembles, but had no part in preparation of the proposed action or environmental analysis.

For more information, feel free to contact Bob Barron, Regulatory Division, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, P.O. Box 4970, Jacksonville, Florida 32232-0019, telephone (904) 232-2203. Previously released documents are available at <http://www.saj.usace.army.mil/permit/swfeis/contents.htm>



**US Army Corps
of Engineers®**
Jacksonville District

