

# MEMORANDUM



**To:** Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commissioners  
**From:** James Erskine, Everglades Coordinator, Office of Strategic Initiatives  
**Date:** October 8, 2020  
**Subject:** Staff Report – Everglades Restoration Update

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**Purpose:** Update Commissioners on Everglades restoration, current conditions for wildlife, and related projects.

**Why:** Commissioners have requested regular updates on this important fish and wildlife conservation issue.

**Top Points:**

- 1) Everglades restoration has experienced considerable progress due to increased funding and support.
- 2) Wildlife and managed areas in the Everglades have experienced high water conditions during the current 2020 wet season.
- 3) A multi-agency effort has begun to address core wildlife challenges associated with Everglades restoration, particularly high water conditions in the Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs).
- 4) FWC staff continues to work with stakeholders on issues surrounding the Cape Sable seaside sparrow.

**Affected Parties:**

Everglades restoration affects a large and diverse stakeholder group from the Everglades headwaters to Florida Keys. High water conditions primarily affect sportsmen that hunt, fish, and recreate in the Everglades. Also affected are Native American tribes that live in the Everglades, Everglades National Park and other federal properties, and water managers from the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) trying to balance water management, flood protection, and natural resource protection.

**Summary:**

The overarching goal of Everglades restoration is to restore the quality, quantity, timing, and distribution of water to the remaining natural system. With unprecedented state and federal funding support, and the completion of foundational projects like Modified Water Deliveries and the bridging of Tamiami Trail, considerable progress is being made. Staff will highlight progress and current projects in the context of the current wet season and ongoing stakeholder concerns, including the Miccosukee Tribe, with water flows affected by management of the endangered Cape Sable seaside sparrow.

The 2020 wet season started abruptly in May with above normal rainfall and the Everglades Complex of WMAs experienced high water conditions. On August 14, 2020, Executive Order 20-26 temporarily restricted public access to these WMAs.

**Staff Recommendation:**

This presentation is for informational purposes and any direction the Commission may want to provide.

**Staff Contact and/or Presenter:**

James Erskine, Everglades Coordinator