

# MEMORANDUM



**To:** Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commissioners  
**From:** Tom Champeau, Director, Freshwater Fisheries Management  
**Date:** April 25, 2018  
**Subject:** Overview of the Kissimmee-Okeechobee-Everglades System

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**Purpose:**

Provide an overview of the Kissimmee-Okeechobee-Everglades System; describe how the FWC works with stakeholders and partners to manage fish and wildlife resources and optimize recreational opportunities; provide an update on restoration programs and identify topics for consideration at future Commission meetings.

**Summary:**

Staff will provide an overview of how the greater Everglades system functioned historically versus today's compartmentalized system, the importance of water quality, quantity, timing and distribution, and the FWC's role in the management of fish and wildlife resources and their public benefits. Mr. Ernie Marks, Executive Director with the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) will provide a presentation on restoring the South Florida ecosystem, current Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) projects, implementation challenges, and expanding opportunities for recreational use. Following the overview presentation, Mr. Marks and Lt. Col. Jennifer Reynolds (U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; USACE) will join Gil McRae, James Erskine, and Tom Champeau in a panel discussion with the Commissioners.

The South Florida ecosystem is comprised of the Kissimmee Chain of Lakes, Kissimmee River, Lake Okeechobee, Everglades Agriculture Area, Water Conservation Areas 1, 2, and 3, Big Cypress Swamp, Everglades National Park, and Florida Bay. The entire system includes numerous wildlife management areas, national wildlife refuges, and national monuments and parks. Management of these resources is complex and requires an adaptive approach to address the issues that are related to altered systems, urbanization, flood control, water supplies, and aquatic plant management. The FWC implements many projects and programs throughout this wide-ranging system to restore and enhance fish and wildlife habitat and to provide recreational opportunities for the public. Projects are conducted with the assistance of agency partners and include stakeholder input to identify public use of the resources and a better understanding of issues and concerns. These resources provide exceptional recreational opportunities for many user groups to enjoy and significant economic benefits to the many communities that surround them. Increasing the FWC's public engagement with stakeholders has provided the FWC with a better understanding of the public's expectations and desires, and allowed for a collaborative approach in the management of the resources that the FWC holds in public trust.

**Staff Recommendation:**

This presentation is for informational purposes and staff welcome comments and suggestions.

**Staff Contact and/or Presenter:**

Tom Champeau, Director, Division of Freshwater Fisheries Management.