

Agenda Item 17
Status of Everglades Issues
June 19, 2014

Update on Efforts to Prevent Future High Water Levels in the Central Everglades that Adversely Impact
Wildlife and Habitats

- The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) approved a position paper on Hydrologic Requirements for the Everglades and Francis S. Taylor Wildlife Management Area (EWMA) dated November 20, 2013. The position paper provides biologically based guidance for managing water levels in the Everglades to ensure restoration of fish and wildlife populations, habitats, and diversity so that the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan goals can be fully realized. An important aspect of our position on these hydrologic requirements is the need to prevent extreme high water levels resulting from prolonged rainfall, hurricanes, or tropical storms to persist for more than 60 days.
- An interagency meeting was held on January 29, 2014 with Commissioner Bergeron, Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), Florida Department of Environmental Protection, South Florida Water Management District, U.S. Department of Interior, Everglades National Park, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida to discuss prolonged high water levels in the EWMA resulting from record rainfall during 2013. A list of action items was developed to prevent future high water conditions from further impacting wildlife and habitats.
- Currently, the USACE is proposing field tests and a three-tiered incremental operating approach to revise the Water Conservation Area/Everglades National Park/South Dade Conveyance System Water Control Plan. The completion of the three incremental steps is integral for the future implementation of Central Everglades Planning Project (CEPP).
 - Increment 1 includes field testing of pump station S-356 and water control structure S-357N with the monitoring well G-3273 constraint raised and the L-29 canal elevation remaining at 7.5 ft NGVD.
 - Increment 2 includes field test of the pump station S-356 with the monitoring well G-3273 constraint raised and the L-29 canal elevation raised.
 - Increment 3 is to revise the Water Control Plan. The incremental operating approach will commence with Increment 1 in May/June of 2014 and has an estimated completion date of 2018 (completion of Increment 3).
- While the FWC is fully supportive of the proposed incremental operational plan, the onset of the 2014 wet season may lead to prolonged high water conditions which could further impact wildlife and habitats within the EWMA. FWC asserts that water levels in the Water Conservation Areas (WCAs) should not exceed two feet in depth at the height of the wet season with water recession and ascension rates not exceeding 0.25 feet per week. Documented loss of Everglades wildlife and habitats occurs when water levels exceed two feet for more than 60 days. Considering the extended timeframes of the proposed incremental operating approach and the potential for high water conditions, the FWC has requested that the USACE prepare a High

Water Action Plan NEPA document. The High Water Action Plan should include relaxing the operational criteria for the monitoring well G-3273 and raising the L-29 canal elevation for a period up to 60 days to facilitate moving water through the system. The FWC requested that the NEPA document be submitted prior to the 2014 wet season and FWC staff will provide input as needed.

- A second inter-agency meeting is scheduled for early June for follow-up on progress made toward development of a High Water Action Plan.
- In addition to development of a high water action plan, FWC staff remains engaged in the development of an operational water management plan for the Everglades that restores the area's wildlife and habitats. This effort is focuses on CEPP. The USACE Civil Works Review Board (Board) decided at the end of April 2014 to defer the approval of the Project Implementation Report (PIR) on CEPP. The decision to defer approval of the CEPP report was made to enable USACE to complete a full review of the document to ensure it complies with all applicable federal laws, regulations and policies. This review must be completed for any national project report brought before the Board for consideration, and is a critical step before a project report can be released for state agency review. Failure to do so could result in significant delays if problems or issues are identified later on that could have been discovered prior to releasing the report.
- The USACE is in the process of finalizing the CEPP PIR and publishing it for a 30-day review period. Following the 30-day review period, the USACE must address any comments received.
 - FWC provided comments on the Draft CEPP PIR and associated Environmental Impact Statement on October 1, 2013. Staff anticipates providing comments on the final CEPP Report this summer. CEPP has a 19 year construction schedule based on \$50 million/year federal and \$50 million/year non-federal authorization and appropriations.