



Memorandum

TO: Chris Stahl, Florida State Clearinghouse

THROUGH: Edward C. Smith, Director *Edward C. Smith*
Office of Ecosystem Projects

FROM: Inger Hansen, Kelsey White, and William C. Kennedy
Office of Ecosystem Projects

DATE: May 1, 2019

SUBJECT: Department of the Army, Jacksonville District Corps of Engineers —
Loxahatchee River Watershed Restoration Project (LRWRP) Integrated Draft
Project Implementation Report (PIR) and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)
in Palm Beach and Martin Counties, Florida.

SAI #: FL201903258563C

Summary:

On March 22, 2019 the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) released the Loxahatchee River Watershed Restoration Project (LRWRP) Integrated Draft Project Implementation Report (PIR) and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for public comment. The PIR identifies Alternative 5R as the National Ecosystem Restoration (NER) Plan and, therefore, the Tentatively Selected Plan (TSP), and this recommended plan must be finalized for Congressional funding approval so that the plan can be implemented by construction. The identified TSP consists of the following components:

- In the south and southeast: conveyance structures in the C-18 Canal, a pump station at the M-1 Canal, and earthwork to improve connectivity in the Grassy Waters Triangle.
- In the southwest and west: a 9,500 acre-foot aboveground storage reservoir with pump stations and inflow and discharge canals, four co-located aquifer storage and recovery (ASR) wells; new canals, structures, and a pump station to connect the M-O Canal to the reservoir and wetland restoration in Loxahatchee Slough.
- In the north: wetland restoration sites (Kitching Creek, Gulfstream East, Moonshine Creek, and Pal-Mar East) and a flow attenuation facility, including a pump station.

The purposes of the LRWRP are to restore and sustain the flow of freshwater to the federally designated “National Wild and Scenic” Northwest Fork of the Loxahatchee River (NWFLR); to increase connectivity of hydrology, flora, and fauna between natural areas; and to improve seasonal timing and distribution of water, restoring drained wetlands that form the historic headwaters for the river.

The TSP will restore 17,000 acres of wetlands and improve an additional 9,500 acres of natural areas that were part of the historical Greater Everglades system. Restoration of seasonal flows for the Loxahatchee River will reverse the trend of increasing salinity levels and help conserve the remaining riverine cypress habitat. In addition, the TSP will improve connectivity benefits over 78,000 acres of natural and restored habitat within the Greater Everglades ecosystem region.

Comments:

The Florida Department of Environmental Protection (the Department) supports the Corps and the South Florida Water Management District (District) in the selection of the TSP. Department staff actively participated in the planning and development of the TSP and find that it addresses the goals and objectives of the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP). Corps and District have jointly prepared the Draft PIR Report, which provides a comprehensive analysis of the environmental benefits and cost-effectiveness of the alternatives considered, while providing assurances that both Federal and State requirements and constraints have been considered in developing the TSP.

The Department and District developed a restoration vision and a detailed Restoration Plan for the Northwest Fork of the Loxahatchee River (published 2006; updated 2012). The TSP is consistent with the Department's restoration vision for the Loxahatchee River and will significantly improve both wet season and dry season target flows, which are critical for restoration of the freshwater riverine floodplain forest and reversing saltwater intrusion within the tidal floodplain. Based on the analysis presented in the Draft PIR, the TSP will deliver 98% of wet season restoration flow target and 91% of the dry season restoration flow target for the Northwest Fork of the Loxahatchee River; whereas, under existing conditions, the flow targets are 76% in the wet season and 65% in the dry season.

The Department acknowledges the development of the cost sharing language for the ASR wells; however, the ASR wells will need to be authorized by Underground Injection Control and National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permits. Please update the language in Section 7.4.1 to include the ASR NPDES permit requirements.

The Department is supportive of the Loxahatchee River Watershed Restoration Project and its associated TSP and looks forward to continuing our partnership with Corps and District. Should you have any questions regarding our comments, please contact Ed Cambeiro at (850) 245-3176.

Florida State Clearinghouse: Department of the Army, Jacksonville District Corps of Engineers
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Page 3 of 3

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