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Landmark agreement bolsters Everglades restoration and state-federal partnership

Lead state and federal agencies today signed an interagency agreement critical to the success of Everglades restoration.

The Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works, Terrence (Rock) Salt, joined the district's Governing Board Chairman, Eric Buermann, to sign the agreement at the West Palm Beach headquarters of the South Florida Water Management District. Members of the public and multi-agency staff, including several partner agencies, celebrated the signing.

"This agreement paves the way for us to begin construction of important Everglades restoration projects. We're at a transition point – going from projects described on paper to projects built on the ground," Salt said. "We now have the agreements in place that will support Everglades' projects that were - only a decade ago - little more than hopes and dreams."

The Master Agreement, which applies to Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) projects, contains important provisions that determine how the Corps of Engineers and the South Florida Water Management District will address key issues related to project construction including cost-sharing, operations, maintenance, repair and oversight by agency technical staff.

The technical and legal complexities associated with restoration of the Everglades ecosystem made completing the Master Agreement a challenging effort that required several years to complete. Negotiations required the direct engagement of myriad agency experts at all levels.

"The Master Agreement is unique among Army Corps of Engineers partnerships because ten years ago Congress determined that the federal government and the South Florida Water Management District would be equal partners in Everglades restoration. Equal partners means joint decision making. We needed a whole new framework for establishing this stage of the 50-50 partnership," Salt said.

The signing of the CERP Master Agreement and the individual project partnership agreement for the Picayune Strand Restoration Project allows the Corps to move forward with construction of the Merritt Pump Station and restoration of thousands of acres of wetlands. The Corps plans to initiate construction on the pump station before the end of the year.

The Everglades restoration plan provides the framework for future restoration projects. At the federal level, the Army Corps of Engineers leads the implementation of CERP and other key projects such as the Kissimmee River restoration and Modified Water Deliveries to Everglades National Park. CERP is composed of 68 individual projects that "get the water right" to restore the massive Everglades ecosystem, a national treasure.

For more information, please call Nanciann Regalado at 904-232-3904 or (cell) 904-334-8954.

The Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan website is located at www.evergladesplan.org

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