

## **A Vision Statement for the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan**

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the South Florida Water Management District

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The goals and purposes of the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) are based on a “vision” for the future quality of the natural and human systems in South Florida. Much of the strength and direction of CERP is framed by this vision. As we move forward into the more organizationally complex implementation phases of CERP, it is essential that every step and action that we take be viewed in the context of the Plan’s potential role in achieving the vision, and the opportunities that the implementers and the public have for maximizing their efforts towards this purpose. The CERP vision statement presented below improves on earlier statements by collecting and integrating the key ideas into a single document, and by providing a more focused and comprehensive expression of the vision. The following statement is presented in a two-part format, an overall statement of CERP vision followed by a set of guiding principles. In general, the vision statement describes CERP’s purpose, i.e., WHAT CERP is supposed to do, while the guiding principles provide a framework for HOW CERP will accomplish its goals.

### **CERP Vision Statement**

“The overarching objective of the Plan is the restoration, preservation, and protection of the South Florida ecosystem while providing for other water-related needs of the region, including water supply and flood protection” (WRDA 2000). Success for the natural system will be to recover and sustain those essential hydrological and biological characteristics that both defined the original pre-drainage greater Everglades and made it unique among the world’s wetlands. These defining characteristics include the great extent of naturally interconnected and interrelated wetlands, sheet flow, extremely low levels of nutrients in freshwater wetlands, high levels of estuarine productivity, and the great resilience of the plant community mosaics and abundance of many of the native wetland animals. Although the future Everglades ecosystem will be a “new” Everglades because it will be smaller than the pre-drainage system, restoration will have been successful if the new system responds to the recovery of these defining characteristics by functionally behaving as a wild Everglades system rather than as a set of managed, disconnected wetlands. Success for the human systems will be to maintain or improve current levels of water supply and flood protection in a rapidly growing human population in south Florida, consistent with the goals of the Plan for the natural system. The Plan’s greatest strength is that it integrates natural and human system objectives into a single design, and thereby re-couples an array of public interests into a common strategy for the future of south Florida.

## **CERP Guiding Principles**

- “Restoration is different from habitat creation, reclamation, and rehabilitation – it is a holistic process not achieved through isolated manipulation of individual elements...” National Research Council 1992.
- The strategy of CERP is to recover more natural, system-wide patterns of water, in terms of quantity, quality, timing and distribution, as a precursor to the overall goals and purposes of the Plan.
- All aspects of implementation of CERP will be an open, collaborative process incorporating interdisciplinary and interagency teams and comprehensive programs of public outreach and public involvement.
- Successful implementation of CERP will require the proper balance and adjustments among three core components of an implementation process: meeting plan budgets, schedules, and overall plan goals and objectives.
- Project Delivery Teams and RECOVER will actively coordinate in the formulation and evaluation of project designs, in order to identify the plans that can improve on the predicted performance of the version of the Plan approved in 1999. The success of CERP will depend on a thorough understanding of the relationships between the contribution of each project and the overall goals of the Plan.
- CERP implementation will include the application of a system-wide science strategy and adaptive management program, designed to maximize the effective use of existing knowledge and incorporate new scientific and technical information, as a basis for continually improving the design, operation and performance of the Plan.
- The evaluation, implementation and assessment of CERP projects and system responses must be viewed as an open-ended learning and planning process. Definitions of overall plan success will be refined through time as new knowledge provides improved understandings of natural and human systems in south Florida.
- CERP will be designed to maximize operational flexibility as an essential strategy for meeting the natural and human system performance goals of the Plan.