

## **22A – PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT**

Public information, outreach and involvement will be an integral part of the IRLN FS. The Public Outreach Plan (POP) is a guide for these activities to be conducted during development of the Feasibility Study. Implementation of the Feasibility Study has the potential to affect many lives in the east part of central Florida. On the other hand, each individual project has the potential to affect a smaller segment of the east central Florida population. Because the restoration could affect so many people either directly or indirectly and on both the program and project (study) levels, public outreach is an integral component of the implementation. Not only is public outreach responsible government, but it helps ensure studies are completed on time and within budget. Public outreach helps identify and resolve small issues at the onset of a study, which, if overlooked, can become larger, more serious issues later.

### **What Public Outreach Is and Is Not**

Public outreach is a process by which interested and affected individuals, organizations, agencies and governmental entities are informed of a study and its goals, and have the opportunity to participate in the decision-making process. Public outreach supports the exchange of ideas and information among individuals and groups, which is critical to resolving the challenges involved in implementing the restoration. Outreach also creates and builds partnerships, involves the community, helps form mutual understanding, engenders trust, reduces conflict, and ultimately leads to a more complete study. Public outreach is composed of two primary types of activities: information and involvement.

Public outreach is not simply holding hearings at predetermined times, as required by law. Rather, public outreach entails scheduling and conducting meetings in locations and at times that are convenient for the public and ensuring that all interested parties and the public at large have an opportunity to participate. It is an inclusive and interactive process that first makes the public part of determining which outreach activities are needed and when they are needed. It is also a process by which the public has a role in helping to mold the study plan.

### **Why Public Outreach is Important**

There are many reasons outreach is considered critical to central Florida ecosystem restoration. These include:

- The high level of public, political, and media interest in the Indian River Lagoon North restoration, water resources and restoration of the central Florida ecosystem, which translates into a need for information.
- The need for concerned communities (including stakeholder groups, state and federal agencies, Tribes, and the general public) to learn about and better understand each other's views and concerns in order to build agreement on solutions.

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- A need to reach communities that have been under-represented in decision-making processes in the past and to provide under-served communities with information concerning aspects of the study which may interest or affect them.
- A need for agencies to develop plans and strategies that effectively address the expressed or unexpressed issues and concerns of the public, including targeted stakeholder groups.
- Finally, the law requires public involvement and environmental education.

### **Public Outreach Goals**

Public outreach for this study includes the following goals:

- **Increase public awareness** of the significance of the IRLN FS.
- **Inform** the public of the study goals, objectives, progress, issues and findings.
- **Involve** stakeholders, agencies, Tribes and other interested groups and individuals as the Feasibility Study is developed, to ensure that public values regarding the study are fully considered.
- **Reduce conflict** among interested and affected parties by building agreement on solutions to emerging issues.
- **Improve** the substantive quality of study-level decisions as a result of public participation.
- **Develop and utilize innovative techniques** to inform and engage traditionally under-represented communities and socially and economically disadvantaged individuals, including those with limited English language proficiency.
- **Increase public trust** in the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the St. Johns River Water Management District.

### **Information**

Public information is meant to raise the awareness of the public-at-large. The strategies and mechanisms for doing so generally involve mass communication tools such as newspapers and electronic media, including television, radio, and the Internet.

Though agencies often refer to the public-at-large as the “general public,” in reality, the “public” is far from homogenous. The general public is actually made up of a number of differing “publics.” The challenge of any outreach program to be truly successful is recognizing the differences between these publics, their levels of knowledge, interest and preferred means of receiving information. Thus, public information strategies generally begin with identification of broad audience types and progresses through recognition of smaller groups of more specialized interest. Next, appropriate messages and tools are developed for each.

Public information products usually contain general descriptions about the study.

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They tend to present non-technical, brief messages consisting of the study purpose, problems, opportunities, potential solutions and benefits. Both study updates and notices of upcoming events are two typical messages carried in public information products.

### **Public, Stakeholder and Agency Involvement**

Outreach efforts must go far beyond simply informing the public. Outreach efforts must actually seek to engage or involve interested people in implementation processes.

The typical process for engaging the public during plan development and implementation is through public hearings, meetings or workshops. For these events, mechanisms used for public notice are those that will be received by the widest audience. Generally, mass communication tools are used: newspapers, television, radio and Internet. The USACE and the SJRWMD will also typically distribute written notices to its mailing list of interested individuals and groups such as elected officials, community-based organizations, non-profits, business organizations, etc.

Some members of the public have a far greater level of interest in IRLN restoration than others. These are persons who want to have an actual voice in the process. These individuals are often associated with “interest groups” such as community or civic associations. Others are associated with groups that have an even higher level of interest because they are more directly impacted by activities and policy decisions. These “stakeholder” groups include the agriculture, aquaculture, and citrus industries; water utilities; local governments; Tribes; environmental organizations; recreational user groups and others. A variety of public agencies have been heavily involved in IRLN studies and are also very likely to want to participate in implementation processes.

Some people will have a far greater level of interest in the IRLN FS, e.g. those interested in restoration and improved water quality in the marine environment of the Lagoon. Care will be taken to ensure those individuals and groups most interested in this study will be informed and engaged in the Feasibility Study development process.

Much of the outreach work that is conducted for interest groups, stakeholders and other public entities revolves around “issue identification and management.” Issue identification and management is a proactive strategy in which organizations identify emerging issues and/or trends. It involves 1) identifying issues, 2) analyzing those issues, 3) setting priorities, 4) selecting program strategy options, 5) implementing a program of action and communication, and 6) evaluating effectiveness. Issue management involves developing and establishing relationships with publics. On the study level, this process can help identify issues of a very localized, but important nature.

### **Identify Target Audiences**

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East central Florida is a heterogeneous society. As project implementation proceeds, it is critical that all interest groups are actively and appropriately involved. This will require identification of specific target audiences and utilization of innovative means of soliciting input and participation.

Identification of target audiences requires agencies to recognize the diversity of east central Florida's cultures and proactively engage these cultures and language groups in its programs. It is also crucial that these groups are given the opportunity to engage in ways that take into consideration their interests and their ethnic and cultural differences and preferences. A "cookie-cutter" or "one size fits all" approach to public outreach results in some parties being overlooked or unintentionally omitted.

To determine a specific target audience, the following factors will be used:

- Self identification (those who have made their interest known),
- Proximity (those who live near or frequent a proposed feature),
- Mandate (organizations or groups that have related missions),
- Use (people who may gain or lose some use),
- Economics (those who gain or lose something in the process).

During the study, the following interest and stakeholder groups may be identified:

- Agricultural organizations
- Business organizations
- Civic associations and public interest groups
- Environmental organizations and agencies
- Federal elected officials and agencies
- State and local elected officials and agencies
- Tribal governments and organizations
- News media, including print, electronic and Internet media
- Recreationalists
- Socially and economically disadvantaged individuals and groups, including business associations and trade organizations
- Utility groups

The participation of other groups and individuals may require cultivation. For those groups, more innovative efforts may be made to search out and elicit input and participation. These groups, listed alphabetically, may include:

- Cultural organizations
- Educational institutions
- Grassroots/community-based organizations
- Homeowner associations and resident organizations

- Not-for-profit community and educational groups

One key mechanism for identifying new interested parties and groups is to conduct interviews with key community leaders and activists. These people can also be asked to provide input on the most effective means of engaging traditionally under-represented groups.

### **Outreach to Minority and Socially and Economically Disadvantaged Communities**

East central Florida's population is extremely diverse, yet during the early stages of the Restudy, it became apparent that outreach efforts, with the exception of public hearings, tended to focus on the same set of "traditional" stakeholders and interest groups – agricultural interests, environmentalists, and water suppliers. The result was that important segments of east central Florida's population were being unintentionally omitted from the planning process. Recognizing that Lagoon restoration affects a broader segment of the population than represented by the well-established stakeholder groups, the USACE and the SJRWMD will set out to engage populations that have been historically under-represented in restoration study outreach. Specific efforts to engage Black American and Hispanic American communities will be initiated. These efforts will be carried through the IRLN FS.

With WRDA 2000, outreach to socially and economically disadvantaged people, including those with limited English proficiency became a Congressional mandate, reinforcing an already strongly embraced goal of the outreach program.

### **Partnering with Others**

Over the past twenty-five years, interest in restoring the Indian River Lagoon has increased tremendously. Not only are individuals and organizations interested in learning more about the restoration, but they are also interested in helping others to learn about the plan to restore the Indian River Lagoon North. Many organizations have expressed an interest in collaborating in outreach on both the program- and project- or study-level. These groups include environmentalists, water suppliers, agriculturalists, recreationalists, educational institutes, community-based organizations and non-profits, agencies and local governments, and many others.

The USACE and the SJRWMD have a responsibility to evaluate and appropriately utilize these opportunities to collaborate with others. Each should fill a slightly different niche(s) – reaching different target audiences in different times and in different ways or in different locations. In effect, partnering with other groups, especially non-traditional groups, offers the opportunity to extend message delivery far beyond what the USACE and the SJRWMD are now accomplishing.

## **Public Outreach Plan**

The primary objectives of the Public Outreach Plan are:

- Educate and inform the public, citizens and stakeholders throughout the course of the study about the IRLN FS goals, objectives, status and findings,
- Provide opportunities for interaction between the public and those persons involved in the formulation of the IRLN FS,
- Obtain information and input from the public,
- Provide effective transfer to the public of the study decisions and procedures and monitoring results,
- Utilize innovative efforts to engage and educate minority, disadvantaged and other traditionally non-vocal communities and,
- “Get the word out” so that public meetings, workshops and other public forums in which the IRLN FS will be presented or discussed are attended by the general public, including minority, disadvantaged and other traditionally non-vocal communities, rather than only the usual stakeholders and activists.

The POP will guide the conduct of the public information, outreach and involvement effort. The POP will consist of the following components: media program, meetings, stakeholder relations, and public information/education/awareness campaign. The POP will coordinate with other public information efforts of related, on-going projects, studies and programs for the Indian River Lagoon North, which will provide synergy and avoid unnecessary duplication of information, meetings, etc. Such on-going efforts include, but are not limited to, the Indian River Lagoon projects described at <http://sjr.state.fl.us/programs/index.html> and <http://www.epa.gov/owow/oceans/lagoon/>. The POP includes not only standard methods of public information dissemination and outreach, but will also identify, document and utilize innovative efforts to engage and educate minority, disadvantaged and other traditionally non-vocal communities.

### **Media Program**

Many people rely on print and electronic media for information about events, plans, studies or projects that affect them as their primary source of information. The media are an important resource for people who have little time to attend meetings or to participate in public involvement activities. The print and electronic media will provide a primary

mechanism through which the general public will obtain information regarding the IRLN FS. Providing and disseminated information to the public will be done through a variety of venues. The tasks listed in the following paragraphs will be utilized.

*Media Contact*--Contact will be established and maintained with local media including newspapers, television and radio stations and Internet news services. A comprehensive computerized list for media contacts in the project area will be developed and maintained.

*Media Coordination*--Media requests will be coordinated with the USACE and SJRWMD teams and will establish the subject, time and place of interviews or events. A log of all requests and their resolution will be maintained. The media log will also document follow-up contact with the media representative requesting the interview or event to clarify information, and track airing/publication of the final media product.

*News Releases and Meeting Notices*--News release story ideas will be identified and developed. It is anticipated that the news releases will occur before and after each public meeting; other related IRLN FS presentations; and at significant project milestones. The news releases will include the information specific to the meeting, presentation or significant milestone, and other pertinent data and information such as current schedule. All news releases and meeting notices will be coordinated with study and program-level outreach staff.

*Website*--The IRLN FS website will be maintained. The website will include, as a minimum, study purpose, goals, objectives, primary points of contact for the USACE and SJRWMD, schedule, upcoming meeting information, new project information and deliverables, and a public comment or "Feedback" page.

*Brief Reporters and Editorial Boards*--At critical milestones in the study, reporters and editorial boards will be briefed. In addition, throughout the course of the study, guest editorial commentary for local newspapers and radio may be prepared. All media contacts and requests will be documented. All media activities will be coordinated with program-level outreach staff and with each agency's Public Affairs and Communications Offices.

## Meetings and Workshops

The need to continuously gather and disseminate information pertinent to the IRLN FS requires support to monitor local meetings on topics deemed relevant to the project.

*Public Meetings*--Four public meetings will be held at the following times during the course of the IRLN FS: (1) Initial NEPA Scoping and Project Goals Public Workshop, (2) Performance Measures Public Workshop, (3) Alternative Formulation Public Workshop and (4) Draft NEPA Document Public Workshop. A crucial goal will be to “get the word out” so the public meetings are attended by the general public, rather than only the usual stakeholders and activists. Engaging minority communities is extremely important; therefore, innovative efforts will be utilized to engage these communities in the public meetings. For each public meeting, the following will be performed:

- Perform pre-meeting planning and logistics including procurement of a convenient meeting site and time,
- Prepare press kits and speaker cards,
- Prepare agenda,
- Prepare and publish the public notice pursuant to USACE and SJRWMD requirements,
- Prepare press release in a timely manner before the meeting to generate public interest in the meeting,
- Video/audio tape speakers, and
- Prepare a report synthesizing the discussions and public comments and concerns for each public meeting.

*Study Team/Project Delivery Team (PDT) Meetings*--The IRLN FS is a complex undertaking, managed by the SJRWMD and USACE, with input from an interagency PDT. It is the responsibility of the SJRWMD/USACE team to manage the resources made available by both the State and Federal agencies and successfully complete the IRLN FS. A public outreach representative will attend SJRWMD/USACE team or PDT meetings, to advise on public outreach activities or issues.

*Brief SJRWMD Governing Board*--As the non-federal sponsor of the IRLN FS, the SJRWMD Governing Board provided policy guidance during the development of the Feasibility Study. The Board will continue to do so as each individual component project is planned and implemented. The Governing Board invites stakeholder and public input at its meetings. Regular updates on the IRLN FS will be given to the Governing Board at its workshops and meetings.

*Brief Indian River Lagoon Advisory Board*--The National Estuary Program has established an Indian River Lagoon Advisory Board. The Board’s charge is to serve as an

advisory body to the Governing Boards of the SJRWMD and SFWMD, as a forum to consider policy issues, and to provide oversight for CCMP implementation activities. The Board regularly requests presentations on issues of concern to policy makers and the public. Furthermore, when needed, the project managers will request an opportunity to present before the Board.

### **Stakeholder Relations**

Another major aspect of outreach includes seeking input, and involving and coordinating with interest and stakeholder groups. The overall objective of stakeholder relations is to ensure that potentially affected and interested parties are provided opportunities to be engaged in the IRLN FS process.

*Develop Computerized Stakeholder Mailing List*—A computerized mailing list of all stakeholders to be informed on the progress of the IRLN FS will be prepared. Stakeholders consist of individuals; elected officials; citizen groups; community organizations; and other identified interest groups that have expressed a desire to participate in the IRLN FS. Existing stakeholder lists are available from organizations and government agencies (e.g. IRL Quarterly Newsletter, master plans, education projects) as a starting point and may be modified as needed for the IRLN FS. The list of stakeholders is expected to be extensive. The list will be maintained as needed and be capable of being sub-divided and sorted on the basis of relevant categories (i.e. residential location, type of public, etc.). In developing the stakeholder list, the following factors will be utilized:

- Self identification (those who have made their interest known)
- Proximity (those who live near a proposed feature)
- Mandate (agencies that have some authority or groups that have related missions)
- Use (people who may gain or lose some use)
- Economics (those who gain or lose something in the process)

In developing the computerized, stakeholder list, not only standard public outreach methods will be utilized, as stated above, but also, innovative methods will be utilized to include minority, disadvantaged and other traditionally non-vocal communities. The search for and use of the innovative methods for stakeholder identification will be documented in the IRLN FS.

*Comment Tracking System*--A comment tracking system will be developed and maintained to record verbal and written comments from public meetings and during the public comment portion of non-facilitated workshops and meetings; written comments received by mail, email and on the IRLN FS website; telephone comments; and all other public input received on the IRLN FS.

## **Public Information/Education/Awareness**

Raising awareness, informing and educating people are at the heart of any successful outreach program. Public information materials are an essential form of communication in any outreach program. Effective public information materials are designed for the appropriate target audience, and are usually visually attractive, non-technical and brief. Key components of the IRLN FS to be provided to the public include, but are not limited to:

- Study purpose, goal and objectives
- Study impacts/benefits
- Study background
- Identification of issues
- Study progress reviews
- Study monitoring results
- Schedule
- Related projects/studies/program information

Appropriate materials for informing the general public and the identified stakeholders will be prepared. The type and character of such information materials will be dependent on the stakeholders identified, specific needs in relation to the phase of the study, and issues of concern. It is anticipated that such public information materials will consist of briefings, exhibits/displays, feature stories, technical reports, news conferences, news releases, newsletters, information brochures, public service announcements, speaker's bureau, presentations to civic and technical groups, brochures, fact sheets, and media kits. Methods to interact with stakeholders may include, but not be limited to: small group workshops, interviews, focus groups, surveys, poster sessions, on-site meetings/walking tours, and public information exchanges.

The POP will include coordinating requests for SJRWMD/USACE team speakers on the IRLN FS. Background information on groups requesting presentations will be developed, which will be used by the speakers to tailor their message to the needs of the organization. This information will include, but is not limited to: name, goals and location of organization, name of key individuals in organization, number of members, and organizational concerns with the IRLN FS or views on matters of interest to the SJRWMD/USACE team. A log of Speaker's presentations will be maintained.

*Traveling Exhibit (Poster)*--A large, freestanding poster exhibit will be developed and produced to be displayed at government meetings and special events, such as a seafood festival. The poster will be transportable by one person and will be updated periodically, if needed. Therefore, the poster will be designed in a manner for ease of updates. The poster will be comprised of one to three panels. The poster will include both the USACE castle logo and the SJRWMD logo. The poster will include a space for

brochures for public distribution.. An adequate supply of IRLN FS brochures will be available at all times on the poster display.

*Newsletter*—Milestone information and significant matters of interest developed during the course of the IRLN FS will be published in the existing Indian River Lagoon Update. This quarterly newsletter produced by the SJRWMD will include progress updates and Study development information in each successive edition. This newsletter is transferred to an HTML format each quarter and provided for publishing on the SJRWMD website and will be made available to the IRLN FS website.

*Brochures*--Brochures are usually defined as color documents printed on letter size paper, but folded into thirds. These “tri-fold brochures” should include attractive visual images, and should be brief, easy to read, and function as a summary or overview of the most important points to be conveyed. Two brochures will be prepared for the IRLN FS. The first brochure will be prepared shortly after initiation of the IRLN FS. Information in the first brochure will define what the Study is and explain the Feasibility Study process. The second brochure will be prepared after the plan formulation is complete. Information in this brochure will explain the final plan (and all of its components), how it was developed, and how implementation will occur.

*Identify and Manage Emerging Issues*--Much of the outreach work that is conducted revolves around “issue identification and management”. The program managers and PDT members will work with agency outreach staff to proactively identify public issues of concern. They will engage regularly in the following process:

- identify and analyze new issues,
- set goals and priorities for addressing the issues,
- develop strategy for addressing the issue,
- implement a program of action and communication, and
- evaluate effectiveness of actions.

### **Outreach to Minority and Economically and Socially Disadvantaged Communities**

Outreach to minority and low-income communities can be viewed as examples of outreach to two specific stakeholder groups. Many of the activities utilized for other stakeholders are the same that are used for outreach to minority and low-income communities. On the other hand, minority and low-income communities should never be considered as one and the same. Special consideration must be given to unique barriers to involvement experienced either jointly or separately by these communities. For example, some members of minority and low-income communities may have limited time to expend on involvement in community meetings. They may also have limited ability to travel to meetings, making agency decisions about meeting times and locations very important. This is particularly true of low-income communities, whether its members are minorities or not. Finally, minority community members may have language difficulties

that affect decisions regarding how information is made available and presented. Therefore, in all activities relating to outreach to minority and low-income communities care will be taken to consider meeting times, locations and the language needs of the target audience.

The need for study-level outreach to minority, socially and economically disadvantaged communities may be greater if there is either agency or community concern regarding environmental justice, i.e., that the project may have negative impacts on these communities. In this case, additional community engagement will be needed. More community meetings, workshops, small group briefings, and other types of meetings may be required. Furthermore, as part of the process of identifying and considering avoidance and mitigation options, participatory public outreach activities will be utilized.

*Identify Target Audiences*--The program managers will work with the outreach and service center staff and the agency minority outreach specialists to determine both the minority and low-income populations interested in or potentially affected by the IRLN FS.

*Engage Key Community Leaders, Activists, and Opinion Leaders*--The project managers will work with agency staff to identify key community members who should be engaged at the earliest possible point of the IRLN FS. These community leaders will be informed of the Study. Their input regarding potential impacts, community views and interest, mechanisms for engaging the community and message development will be solicited.

*Hold Community Workshops and Meetings*--Meetings may be required at certain times during the IRLN FS. These may be held during the scoping phase of the Study. These meetings may also be held at the draft and final plan stages. Finally, the need to hold meetings may arise if one or more issues of concern arise and require a broad information dissemination effort.

*Identify and Manage New and Emerging Issues*--Much of the outreach work involving minority and low-income communities will require "issue management." Throughout the duration of the IRLN FS, care will be taken to proactively identify issues of concern and develop and implement strategies for addressing these issues.

*Prepare Public Information Materials*--Public information materials, whether written or electronic are critical to effective outreach programs. For both the minority and low-income communities, care must be taken to ensure the message is properly developed and delivered. Utilization of appropriate distribution methods is critical. For example, radio is a primary means of communication within communities where English

is not the language of choice. Local community papers also serve a key role in dissemination of information. The Project managers will work with the outreach and service center staff, as well as with the minority outreach specialists to fully consider appropriate venues for delivery of information. Community leaders will also be asked to provide input regarding this issue.

### **Internal Management and Communication**

Effective management and internal communication between the SJRWMD, USACE, other agency team members, and program level outreach staff is essential for the success of the IRLN FS. The overall objective of this task group is to enhance staff communication and coordination efforts.

*Coordinate with Program-Level Outreach Staff*--The public outreach effort for the IRLN FS will be coordinated with program-level outreach staff, to ensure project- and study-level outreach efforts are planned correctly with those of other projects and organizations involved.

*Manage Project Materials*--All print, electronic, and graphic materials created for the IRLN FS will be documented. Copies of the materials will be presented for inclusion in the library of permanent materials.

*Inventory Existing Resources and Activities*--Many other groups and organizations are either involved in community outreach activities or would like to be involved. An inventory of current activities and potential partnering opportunities will be developed. Special efforts will be made to coordinate and consolidate outreach activities where appropriate.

*Maintain Project Calendar*--A calendar of important dates, deadlines, events, and outreach activities will be maintained and provide for inclusion in the Public Outreach calendar.

*Revise and Update POP*--As the IRLN FS proceeds, the need to revise and update this public outreach plan may arise. Staff will make revisions, as needed. Significant changes will be vetted to the public and reviewed by the PDT and DCT.

### **POP Report**

The end-product of the (POP) will be to summarize the information obtained from the preceding tasks into a Public Involvement section for the IRLN FS. The Public Involvement section of the IRLN FS will include a description of the POP, activities associated with execution of the POP and public input and coordination throughout the course of the study.