



United States Department of the Interior



FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
South Florida Ecological Services Office
1339 20th Street
Vero Beach, Florida 32960

November 17, 2003

James C. Duck
Chief, Planning Division
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
701 San Marco Boulevard, Room 372
Jacksonville FL 32207-8175

Dear Mr. Duck:

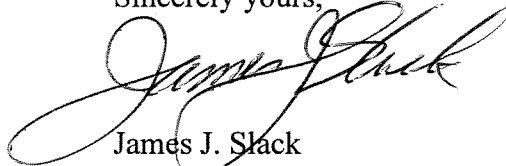
The Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) has prepared this Planning Aid Letter (PAL) in support of the Everglades Agricultural Area Storage Reservoirs Project (EAA Project), Phase 1. The EAA Project is a component of the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP), authorized under the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) of 2000. This PAL is provided in accordance with the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act (FWCA) of 1958, as amended (48 Stat. 401; 16 U.S.C. 661 *et seq.*), the Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1973, as amended (87 Stat. 884; 16 U.S.C. 1531 *et seq.*), and the scope of work agreed upon by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) and the Service for CERP planning studies in fiscal year (FY) 2003. This PAL does not constitute the report of the Secretary of Interior as required by section 2(b) of the FWCA, nor does it constitute a biological opinion under section 7 of the ESA. The purpose of this PAL is to deliver a final Environmental Existing Conditions (EEC) report for use by the Project Delivery Team (PDT) in completing an EAA Project Implementation Report.

In April 2003, a South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) preliminary report identified environmental conditions in the EAA based on available data (SFWMD 2003). The enclosed report, prepared by the Service, includes not only information and text taken directly from the SFWMD preliminary report, but also additional information and the results of a multi-agency wetland habitat verification and evaluation conducted during the last quarter of FY 2003. The Service directed the wetland analyses with the support of an EEC subteam comprised of PDT members from the Service, Corps, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, SFWMD, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, and Florida Department of Environmental Protection. The report and attachments (including maps, figures, tables, and habitat evaluation data sheets) are included on the attached compact disk (Enclosure 1).

James C. Duck
November 17, 2003
Page 2

The Service appreciates this opportunity to incorporate the results of our work over the past several months into a final report in support of the EAA Project. If you have questions or comments, please feel free to contact Cindy Brashear, Fish and Wildlife Biologist, at 772-532-9776.

Sincerely yours,



James J. Slack
Field Supervisor
South Florida Ecological Services Office

Enclosures

cc w/o enclosures:

Corps, Jacksonville, Florida (Brad Clark, Janet Cushing)
SFWMD, West Palm Beach, Florida (Angela Prymas)
Service, Loxahatchee NWR, Boynton Beach, Florida (Cindy Brashear, Susan Teel)
Service, Vero Beach, Florida (Sharon Fauver, Tim Pinion)
Service, Jacksonville, Florida (Miles Meyer)
Service, Everglades Program Team, Loxahatchee NWR, Boynton Beach, Florida (Mike Waldon)
FWC, Vero Beach, Florida (Yvette Alger)
DEP, West Palm Beach, Florida (Dianne Crigger)

LITERATURE CITED

South Florida Water Management District [SFWMD]. 2003. Appendix H: Existing conditions, H.5 Environmental, Everglades Agricultural Area storage reservoirs, Phase 1.