

## **SECTION 9**

### **PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT AND COORDINATION**

Due to the intense public, political, and media interest in restoration of the south Florida ecosystem, public involvement was a critical component of the Water Preserve Areas (WPA) Feasibility Study. Public Outreach efforts for WPA began early in the reconnaissance phase of the Central and Southern Florida (C&SF) Project Comprehensive Review Study. Such efforts were an integral part of the plan formulation stages of the project and will continue throughout implementation of the preferred plan components. Because the plan formulation component of the WPA Feasibility Study was included in the C&SF Project Comprehensive Review Study, several aspects of the two projects are interchangeable. One such aspect is public involvement and coordination. This section describes the public involvement and coordination activities conducted during the WPA Feasibility Study evidenced by overlap during the C&SF Project Comprehensive Review Study.

#### **9.1 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PROGRAM**

Public involvement is a process by which interested and affected individuals, organizations, agencies, and governmental entities are consulted with and participate in a decision-making process. Public involvement in the Comprehensive Review Study had two main functions: to inform the public about the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) and to generate their input on key issues and concerns. This dialogue helped guide the CERP, making it inclusive, balanced, and comprehensive. Public involvement activities also facilitated open and frank discussions that enhanced efforts to develop consensus on important issues. Supporting an exchange of ideas and information among interested individuals and groups has been critical to resolving the challenges involved in the planning effort of both the Comprehensive Review Study and the WPA Feasibility Study.

Due to the large geographic area the CERP encompasses, issues were complex and diversity of interests great. In recognition of these factors, the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) and the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD), as the non-Federal sponsor of the C&SF Project, intensified public involvement activities during the feasibility phase that were begun in the reconnaissance phase of the Comprehensive Review Study. A public involvement program was developed that was inclusive of all interests and concerns and balanced the sometimes-competing interests of this diverse region. This program

was based upon a two-way communication and collaborative problem-solving model with the goal of reaching better, more informed decisions.

Public involvement activities ranged from workshops, focus group meetings, educational and technical briefings, presentations to interested parties, public meetings, fact sheets, and newsletters, to having the results of alternative plan formulation efforts available on a web site for comment back to the Comprehensive Review Study Team. Stakeholders and other interested parties were also invited to participate in the development of the Project Study Plan, which served as the blueprint the team used to perform the work necessary to accomplish the feasibility study.

Public involvement and coordination were identified as critical components of the feasibility study effort, due to the concentrated public, political, and media interest in the objectives of the Comprehensive Review Study. A public participation/public outreach plan was formulated to 1) inform the public, 2) gather information, 3) identify public concerns, 4) develop consensus, and 5) develop and maintain credibility. The overall objective of all outreach activities was to ensure that the south Florida community was informed about the Comprehensive Review Study and that the recommended CERP was reflective of the input received from stakeholders and the public.

Three additional objectives for public involvement were identified:

- Gather input from the diverse groups outside of the Comprehensive Review Study Team to assist in problem identification and the formulation and evaluation of alternative plans;
- Develop relationships critical to the success of the Comprehensive Review Study and the implementation of the recommendations of the CERP; and
- Promote realistic expectations within an atmosphere where there is widespread public interest about the health of south Florida ecosystems, but a lack of awareness about the study.

Further, it was the obligation of the Comprehensive Review Study Team to:

- Keep people informed so that they could make educated choices;
- Provide visible ways to participate in the process; and
- Provide equal access to information and decision-makers regardless of viewpoint.

## **9.2 ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE**

*Executive Order 12898, Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations*, requires the Federal government to achieve environmental justice by identifying and addressing disproportionately high adverse effects of its activities on minority and low-income populations. It requires the analysis of information such as the race, national origin, and income level for areas expected to be impacted by environmental actions. It also requires Federal agencies to identify the need to ensure the protection of populations relying on subsistence consumption of fish and wildlife, through analysis of information on such consumption patterns and communication to the public of associated risk.

For the purpose of this section on public involvement and coordination, the following discussion will focus solely on incorporation of minority and low income stakeholder viewpoints through the initial screening and scoping and subsequent public participation activities of project planning.

### **9.2.1 Initial Screening and Scoping**

Initial screening and scoping seeks to identify potential issues and estimate the geographic scope of the project areas in relation to minority, low income and tribal populations that may be affected. This element overlapped with public participation in practice, as the identification of residents and people who frequent the study area was accomplished through public outreach efforts.

### **9.2.2 Public Participation**

Public participation is intended to reach low income, minority and tribal populations to identify issues of true concern and allow relevant issues to be in the early analyses portions of the process. This involved activities beyond the standard advertising and public outreach practices in which linguistic, cultural, institutional, geographic and other barriers to meaningful participation were overcome. Meetings were held in adequate facilities at hours appropriate for those attending. Public participation was and will continue to be active throughout the entire project to educate, encourage input, answer questions, listen to concerns, and inform the public on how we intend to deal with the concerns.

### 9.3 COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW STUDY RECONNAISSANCE PUBLIC WORKSHOPS

In order to involve the public in the reconnaissance phase of the Comprehensive Review Study, three rounds of public participation meetings were held from December 1993 to June of 1994. The information developed through these rounds of workshops and meetings was used extensively in the reconnaissance study.

The three rounds of public workshops and meetings generated a large amount of correspondence from the public. During the 18 months of the reconnaissance study, thousands of letters concerning restoration and the Comprehensive Review Study were received from all over the country. The *C&SF Project Comprehensive Review Study Reconnaissance Report* dated November 1994 contains a more detailed discussion of the public involvement activities conducted during the reconnaissance phase. No meetings specific to the WPA issues or project were held during the reconnaissance phase.

### 9.4 RESTUDY FOCUS GROUPS

As part of the C&SF Project Feasibility Study process, the Comprehensive Review Study Team conducted focus group meetings throughout south Florida. The meetings were held between January 1997 and December 1997. The purpose of these workshops was to provide information to the public about the overall study, gather input for the initial “problem definition” phase, and solicit input from each subregion on their local issues. An exchange of information between the agencies and the public on both the larger C&SF Comprehensive Review Study, as well as issues specific to the WPA Feasibility Study, took place. The following is a list of focus group workshops held in the WPA study area:

- February 12, 1997 - Miami-Dade County staff
- February 13, 1997 - Florida City /Homestead Chamber of Commerce
- February 18, 1997 - Palm Beach County environmental interests
- February 20, 1997 - Palm Beach County Water Control Districts
- February 20, 1997 - Palm Beach County municipal utilities and county administrator
- February 21, 1997 - Environmental Coalition of Broward County
- February 24, 1997 - Broward County staff
- February 24, 1997 - Broward County regulated and community interests
- September 15, 1997 - Broward County area
- September 16, 1997 - Miami-Dade County area
- September 23, 1997 - Palm Beach County area

- December 9, 1997 - south Miami-Dade agricultural interests

## **9.5 WATER PRESERVE AREAS STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT AND OUTREACH**

Subsequent to gathering input for the initial plan formulation process, a Comprehensive Review Study Strategic Communications and Public Outreach Plan was developed in January 1998. The Comprehensive Review Study Strategic Communications and Public Outreach Plan was comprised of four components: 1) stakeholder involvement, 2) media program, 3) a public information/awareness program, and 4) public meetings on the Comprehensive Review Study's *Draft Integrated Feasibility Report and Integrated Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement*.

### **9.5.1 Stakeholder Involvement and Outreach**

Meetings designed to include a more intensive region-specific effort of engaging the public were held subsequent to development of the Comprehensive Review Study Strategic Communications and Public Outreach Plan. Throughout the duration of the study and project, ample opportunities have been and will continue to be provided for the public to obtain information outside of formal workshops. Civic associations, neighborhood associations, colleges, environmental groups, local government briefings, staff briefings, technical workshops, and other focus groups located in areas that may be impacted by the study have and will continue to provide avenues for the WPA Feasibility Study Team to disseminate information to the public.

### **9.5.2 Stakeholder Group Meetings**

As part of the Comprehensive Review Study, numerous meetings were held with representatives of stakeholder groups including chambers of commerce, environmental interests, economic development groups, and agricultural interests.

### **9.5.3 Small Group Meetings**

Throughout the alternative plan development process, informal meetings were held to maintain dialogue, clarify issues, and identify concerns. Meetings were held with groups such as Florida Power and Light and the Florida Department of Transportation, Districts IV and VI.

### **9.5.4 Local Government Briefings**

Formal presentations to local governments have been made periodically and will continue throughout the life of the study and project. During the WPA

Feasibility Study, presentations were made to the City of Weston, and a Commissioner of Weston.

### **9.5.5 Staff Briefings**

Briefings of managerial, technical, and outreach staff of the SFWMD and the Corps were made throughout the process to provide updates on plan development activities and to discuss stakeholder concerns and possible remedies.

## **9.6 PUBLIC MEETINGS**

A series of public meetings were held in November and December 1998. All meetings followed the same format, beginning with an informal “open house” for individuals to talk with Comprehensive Review Study Team members about the Comprehensive Review Study. Subsequent to the informal one-on-one discussions, formal meetings were held to provide a brief presentation on the study and to take public comment. A court reporter was present at each meeting and a transcript was made which serves as the official record of each meeting. The following meetings were held within the WPA study area:

- November 9, 1998 - Miami
- November 10, 1998 - Fort Lauderdale
- November 12, 1998 - West Palm Beach
- November 18, 1998 - Kendall

A total of approximately 600 individuals attended these four meetings.

## **9.7 REVIEW CONFERENCES**

Four review conferences were conducted during the Comprehensive Review Study to review work and decide courses of action related to specific policy and technical issues. A description of each conference follows:

- Special Resolution Conference: December 5-6, 1996 – Jacksonville, Florida. Attendees included representatives of the SFWMD, Office of the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Natural Resources Conservation Service, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and the Corps. Representatives met to discuss procedural and policy issues related to implementing the provisions of *Section 528 of the Water Resources Development Act of 1996* as it pertains to the Comprehensive Review Study.

- In-Progress Review: December 17, 1997 – Jacksonville, Florida. Representatives of the Comprehensive Review Study Team and Corps higher authority met to discuss the on-going plan formulation and evaluation activities.
- Alternative Formulation Briefing: August 18-19, 1998 – West Palm Beach, Florida. Attendees included representatives of the SFWMD, Office of the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Florida Department of Environmental Protection, and the Corps. Representatives met to discuss the development of the Initial Draft Plan and the preparation of the draft *Integrated Feasibility Report and Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement*.
- In-Progress Review: January 12, 1999 – Atlanta, Georgia. Representatives of the Corps Jacksonville District, SFWMD, Corps higher authority, and the Office of the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works met to discuss remaining issues associated with completing the final *Integrated Feasibility Report and Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement*.
- In-Progress Review: June 6, 2001 – West Palm Beach, Florida. Attendees included representatives of the SFWMD, US. Fish and Wildlife Service, Florida Department of Environmental Protection, and the Corps. Representatives met to discuss the development of the tentative selected plan and the preparation of the draft *Integrated Feasibility Report and Supplemental Impact Statement*.

## 9.8 OTHER REQUIRED COORDINATION

In addition to the scoping required by the *National Environmental Policy Act*, coordination required by other Federal laws and regulations has been conducted with the following agencies:

### 9.8.1 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Two Planning Aid Reports, dated November 22, 1999, and February 15, 2001, were received from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as part of the process for developing alternative plans. The information received was incorporated into the plan formulation process. The draft *Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act Report* was

received on June 13, 2001 and has been included in Annex A. The conclusion and recommendation in the final *Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act Report* for the Comprehensive Review Study was as follows:

- Alternative D-13R, if fully implemented, would do much toward restoring ecological function and structure in south Florida, particularly in the central and southern Everglades.

### **9.8.2 Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission**

A draft *Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act Report* dated April 10, 2001, from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission was received and is included in Annex A.

### **9.8.3 Florida State Historic Officer**

Coordination has been ongoing with the State Historic Preservation Officer in accordance with the procedure of the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation.

## **9.9 SCOPING**

A Notice of Intent to prepare a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement for the WPA Feasibility Study was published in the Federal Register, Volume 65, No. 133, on July 11, 2000. The Notice of Intent outlined in summary form the project purpose and objective; described the study area, project features and scope; and laid out the scoping process utilized to involve Federal, state, and local agencies, affected Native American Tribes, and interested private organizations and parties.

A Scoping Letter, dated June 23, 2000, was sent out by the Corps to over 500 recipients, including Federal, state, and local agencies; Native American Tribes; and private organizations and parties soliciting their views, comments, and information about resources, study objectives, alternatives, and important features within the study area. The record was held open for a 60-day comment period. Over 30 written responses were received within the comment period, representing numerous issues. These issues were compiled and infused into the WPA Feasibility Study plan formulation process over the next one and one-half years.

A sampling of issues resulting from the scoping process includes:

- Proper identification and selection of alternative evaluation tools/models;

- The need to restore more natural timing, volume, and flow patterns of water (i.e., hydroperiods and hydropatterns);
- Increasing spatial extent and restoration of landscape heterogeneity and biodiversity;
- Maintenance of flood protection and water supply functions of the C&SF Project;
- The need to ensure economic and environmental sustainability;
- A process directed at total ecosystem restoration, rather than strictly a species-specific approach to recovery; and
- The importance of identifying clear restoration goals and objectives.

## **9.10 STUDY TEAM**

The WPA Feasibility Study Team is a multidisciplinary, multi-agency group of local, state, and Federal agency representatives. The study team is comprised of approximately 80 members, with approximately 40 individuals typically attending each of the full team meetings. These meetings were open to the public and occasionally would attract stakeholders or individuals from the general public. The Federal, state, and local agencies involved in the execution of the WPA Feasibility Study and report were: Natural Resources Conservation Service, National Marine Fisheries Service, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Geological Survey, Everglades National Park, Biscayne National Park, South Florida Regional Planning Council, Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Florida Department of Transportation, Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Palm Beach County, Broward County, Miami-Dade County, City of Miramar, City of Pembroke Pines, Village of Wellington, Lake Worth Drainage District, Acme Improvement District and the Miccosukee Tribe of Indians. A list of the WPA Feasibility Study Team members is found in Section 13.

## **9.11 INTERNET WEB SITE**

In order to facilitate communication among WPA Feasibility Study Team members and to provide the public with information about the WPA Feasibility Study and the formulation and evaluation of alternative plans, a web site for CERP was established (<http://www.evergladesplan.org>). Information available on the web site includes: description of the planning objectives; assumptions for the with- and without-plan conditions; description of the alternative plans evaluated; descriptions

and applications of the hydrologic, ecologic, and water quality models used to evaluate the alternative plans; summaries of technical workshops in the form of “Frequently Asked Questions”; hydrologic model output for each alternative in the form of performance measures; summaries of the evaluations of each of the alternatives; and CERP documents such as this report.

## **9.12 REVIEW OF DRAFT INTEGRATED FEASIBILITY REPORT AND SUPPLEMENTAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT**

The draft *Integrated Feasibility Report and Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement* is being sent to numerous local, state and Federal agencies and private interest groups for review and comment in accordance with the Council on Environmental Quality’s *National Environmental Policy Act* regulations and related Corps guidance. Comments received during the review will be considered in preparing the final study documents, and will be considered by subsequent reviewers and decision-makers in the Washington-level Federal review process.

### **9.12.1 Integrated Feasibility Report and Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement Recipients**

The following agencies, groups and individuals will be sent copies of the draft *Integrated Feasibility Report and Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement*:

#### **Native American Tribes**

Micosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida  
Seminole Tribe of Florida

#### **Federal Agencies**

Advisory Council on Historic Preservation  
Federal Emergency Management Agency  
Council on Environmental Quality  
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
    Forestry Service  
    Natural Resources Conservation Service  
U.S. Department of Commerce  
    National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration  
        Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary  
        National Marine Fisheries Service  
U.S. Department of Energy  
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
    Bureau of Indian Affairs

Fish and Wildlife Service  
Geological Survey  
National Park Service  
Office of Environmental Policy and Compliance  
U.S. Department of Justice  
U.S. Department of Transportation  
Coast Guard  
Federal Highway Administration  
U.S. Public Health Service

**State Agencies**

Florida State Clearinghouse - Office of the Governor  
Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services  
Florida Department of Community Affairs  
Florida Department of Environmental Protection  
Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission  
Florida Department of Transportation  
Florida Division of Historical Resources - SHPO  
South Florida Water Management District

**Regional Governments**

Central Florida Regional Planning Council  
South Florida Regional Planning Council  
Treasure Coast Regional Planning Council

**County Governments**

Broward County  
Miami-Dade County  
Palm Beach County

**Groups**

Audubon Society of the Everglades  
Biodiversity Legal Foundation  
Miami-Dade County Farm Bureau  
Dairy Farmers, Inc.  
Defenders of Wildlife  
Environmental Coalition of Broward County  
Environmental Defense Fund  
Everglades Coordinating Council  
Everglades Foundation  
Florida Audubon Society  
Florida Biodiversity Project  
Florida Defenders of the Environment  
Florida League of Anglers, Inc.

Florida Power and Light Company  
Florida Sportsman Conservation Association  
Florida Wetlands  
Florida Wildlife Federation  
Friends of Florida  
Friends of the Everglades  
Friends of Whales and Panther Action Coalition  
Izaak Walton League of America, Inc.  
Lake Worth Drainage District  
League of Women Voters  
National Audubon Society  
National Parks and Conservation Association  
National Park Trust  
National Resources Defense Council  
National Wildlife Federation  
Ornithological Council  
Save the Manatee Club  
Sierra Club, Florida Chapter  
South Florida Agricultural Council  
The Environmental Coalition  
The Nature Conservancy  
The Wilderness Society  
Tropical Audubon Society  
Trust for Public Lands  
World Wildlife Fund  
1000 Friends of Florida

### **Individuals**

A list of individuals who will receive the draft *Integrated Feasibility Report and Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement* is on file in the Jacksonville District of the Corps at the address shown on the cover page of this document.

### **9.12.2 Comments and Responses**

The draft *Integrated Feasibility Report and Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement* will be made available to the public and other agencies. After the 45-day review period, comments received from state, Federal and local agencies, the Native American Tribes, non-governmental organizations and concerned individuals will be incorporated. The comment letters received will be on file in the Jacksonville District of the Corps at the address shown on the cover page of this document. A public meeting to solicit additional comments on the report will be held in November 2001.