

Central Everglades Planning Project

Roadmap to Achieve Restoration Results



A Call to Reverse Ecological Decline

As a result of continued ecosystem decline, Audubon has long urged for the prioritization of critical restoration projects to provide immediate ecological benefits. Bundling the planning and implementation of key inter-dependent projects in the core areas of the Everglades provides the opportunity to more quickly reverse ecological decline. Many Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) projects are underway, but progress toward moving greater volumes of water from Lake Okeechobee through the Central Everglades to Everglades National Park has lagged. The National Research Council's 2008 Biennial Review of Everglades restoration stated *"ongoing delay in Everglades restoration has not only postponed improvements —it has allowed ecological decline to continue."*

Movement Toward More Rapid Progress

In part because of the call to quickly reverse continuing ecosystem decline, the Everglades is now the focus of an expedited planning effort. The Central Everglades Planning Project (CEPP), unveiled in late 2011, is part of a nation-wide pilot program aiming

Central Everglades Planning Project

Who: The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the South Florida Water Management District with other partners, including the Department of Interior as well as all interested stakeholders

What: Bundle of several key restoration projects planned and implemented together

Where: Increase water flow through the Central to the Southern Everglades; reduce damaging discharges to the Northern estuaries

When: Completed project plan in 2013

Why: To expedite restoration progress and prevent further ecological decline

How: CEPP included in U.S. Army Corps of Engineers National Pilot Program for Feasibility Studies

to shorten the timeframe required to design restoration projects within the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) planning process. The U.S. Department of Interior, state of Florida with the South Florida Water Management District acting as local sponsor, and other partners have committed to join the Corps in expediting the planning of several key CERP restoration projects. CEPP represents an unprecedented opportunity to successfully expedite restoration planning to more quickly reverse ecological decline.

Despite a shortened timeframe, the process is also offering considerable opportunity for stakeholder involvement through a series of public workshops sponsored by the South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force Working Group. It is critical that CEPP not only meets key deadlines but that the projects planned will deliver measurable ecosystem benefits. Increased stakeholder participation throughout the planning process should help achieve these goals.



The critically endangered Everglade Snail Kite will benefit from restoration efforts in the Central Everglades. © Larry Fragge



Roadmap to Achieve Restoration Success



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Wood Storks and other species require improved habitat.

CEPP success must be measured by its ability to provide ecosystem benefits such as the rehydration of areas suffering from decades of overly dry conditions. Wading bird populations across the Everglades have declined dramatically, but a more robust prey base—provided by more natural hydrology and reduced drydown events—will enable bird populations to rebound. A true

measure of success for Everglades restoration is not the number of restoration projects planned or built, but the ability of the ecosystem to support abundant populations of wading birds.

The first iteration of CEPP is not the final restoration vision for the Everglades. It is the implementation of a more efficient and coordinated planning effort with an increased opportunity for stakeholder involvement during project development. Additional restoration projects are necessary to bring full ecosystem benefits to the Everglades. CEPP offers the opportunity to pave the way for future restoration projects to be planned and implemented more expediently, bringing faster results. Support for its implementation is critical to future restoration efforts.

The goal of CEPP is to increase the total amount of clean water available to the Everglades where needed by increasing the ability to store, treat and convey water south of Lake Okeechobee. Removing barriers to flow, such as canals and levees, will be critical to allow water to follow a more natural path. Stopping water from seeping away from the natural system and toward developed areas is also an important component of the suite of projects. Planned, packaged, and implemented together, these projects can make a measureable difference for the ecosystem.

Central Everglades Project Components

The CEPP is expected to consist of more than one phase; the initial increment will include portions of the following projects:

Water Storage Reservoirs

Reservoirs in the Everglades Agricultural Area will enable the capture, storage and treatment of Lake Okeechobee water currently discharged to the Caloosahatchee and St. Lucie estuaries. Conveying this water south along a more natural path will help both Northern and Southern estuaries.

Decomartmentalization

Backfill and plug treatments to the canal bisecting Water Conservation Area (WCA) 3 will enable the return of sheetflow to critical Everglades habitat. Degrading levee barriers will enable more natural freshwater flow into WCA 3B and Everglades National Park.

Everglades National Park Seepage Management

Water that enters Everglades National Park can easily be carried away from the natural system to urbanized areas because of the highly transmissive nature of the water table. Managing for seepage will help more water remain in the natural system to create ecosystem benefits.

Combined with other related restoration efforts currently underway, such as Tamiami Trail bridging, the C-111 projects, and improved water quality treatment capacity, CEPP will aid in getting needed freshwater to Everglades National Park. Increased flows here are critical to revive more natural flows to Florida Bay.



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The effects of canals must be minimized through restoration projects like CEPP to enable wading birds to rebound.