

**FLORIDA KEYS NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY ADVISORY COUNCIL WORKING GROUP:
Florida Keys and South Florida Ecosystem Connectivity Team**

Meeting #1

Thursday, March 18, 2021

9:00 AM – 11:00 AM

NOTES

Attendees: Matt Semcheski (CFK), Karen Bohnsack (FKNMS), Shelly Krueger (Florida Sea Grant), Gus Rios (FDEP), Jerry Lorenz (Audubon Florida), Adam Gelber (DOI Office of Everglades Restoration Initiatives), Steve Blackburn (EPA), Jolly Benson (Lower Keys Fishing Guides Association), Emma Haydocy (Florida Bay Forever), Kelly Cox (Miami Waterkeeper), Luke McEachron (FWC), Mike Goldberg (Key Dives/I.CARE), Nick Parr, Chris Kavanagh, Chris Bergh (TNC), Beth Devieney (FKNMS), Amelia Moura (Coral Restoration Foundation), Erin Muller (Mote Marine Lab), Cara Capp (National Parks Conservation Association), Steve Davis (Everglades Foundation), and Suzy Roebing (FKNMS Advisory Council, Citizen at Large).

Absent: Joe Weatherby (Artificial Reefs International) and Steve Friedman (Fishing Guide)

Working Group Website: <https://floridakeys.noaa.gov/review/workgroups.html>

Action Items:

- Create a Google Drive folder or similar tool where WG members can provide resources, e.g., documents and videos.
- WG members send resources to Karen and Jerry to share with the group to create a living resources library.

9:00 AM Call to Order by Jerry Lorenz 9:03. Purpose of working group is to work on regional approach for items related to the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary (FKNMS). Similar working group (WG) active until 2010.

Member Introductions

9:30 AM Administrative Business: Connectivity Team Purpose, Objectives, Structure and Operating Guidelines

The creation of this working group stemmed from recognition that water quality is affected by regional issues, in particular wastewater and restoration of the Florida Everglades. The two advisory bodies to the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary are the Water Quality Protection Program (WQPP) and the Sanctuary Advisory Council (SAC). The WQPP and SAC approved recommendations to improve engagement on these regional issues, and thus on Dec 8, 2020 created the Florida Keys and South Florida Ecosystem Connectivity Team. This is an official working group created by the SAC, with the purpose to inform and engage members of the SAC, WQPP, and Florida Keys community in South Florida

Ecosystem restoration. Furthermore, to ensure the interests of the FKNMS are represented in the S. FL ecosystem restoration task force, and other relevant decision making processes and facilitate regular participation by the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) and the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) at the Florida Keys and South Florida Ecosystem Connectivity Team working group, SAC, and WQPP meetings. The Florida Keys and South Florida Ecosystem Connectivity Team has not yet identified participants from SFWMD or the USACE. The Florida Keys and South Florida Ecosystem Connectivity Team will provide a platform for collaboration on the S. FL ecosystem restoration and other S. FL regional issues of mutual interest and most urgent importance to the Florida Keys.

Outline of roles and responsibilities. Karen Bohnsack is the FKNMS Staff Lead, providing administrative support to the working group.

Can reach out beyond the working group members for external support, e.g., scientists, hydrologists, as agency advisors to serve as subject matter experts and assist with providing technical information and answering questions.

Team Chair is Dr. Jerry Lorenz, and the team chair is required to also be a SAC member. The Team Chair will work with staff lead to develop and lead working group meeting agendas, tasks, and action items. A Co-Chair needs to be elected to assist with these tasks. The Secretary is responsible for meeting minutes and notes, and can be a rotating role. The WG members shall be representatives from the SAC and local community, who serve as active participants in framing problems, developing suggestions, and sharing information. The WG will promote awareness of the team among the community and provide reports and/or recommendations to the SAC and WQPP.

Recommendations and External Communications. WG do not directly advise FKNMS staff or the superintendent. WG advise the SAC; the SAC advises the superintendent. Preliminary recommendations or work completed by the WG will first be provided to the SAC for deliberation at a public meeting. The SAC will determine what recommendations to accept and pass along to the superintendent. With the superintendent's approval, the SAC can also opt to share information with other local, state, and federal agencies.

Meeting Logistics. Meetings will be scheduled as necessary. Initial concept is every other month (March, May, July, Sept, Nov, Jan) in between months that the SAC meets. Public is invited to all meetings and public participation time will be provided. All meetings and agenda will be posted to the WG webpage (URL above). Working groups are required to produce written reports or recommendations to the full SAC. These are the routine requirements for a FKNMS working group.

What about reporting to the WQPP? Should be cognizant of providing report outs to the WQPP.

Shelly Krueger volunteered to be the Secretary for the time being. Can be rotation on the Secretary position.

Chair is required to be on the SAC. Nominations for Co-Chair? (Co-Chair does not have to be on the SAC). Jerry willing to be chair for at least 6 months and then revisit for a possible new Chair. Co-Chair tabled.

The Florida Keys and South Florida Ecosystem Connectivity Team will meet every third Tuesday on the months that are opposite of when SAC meets, e.g., starting January and then every other month on the third Tuesday of the month, 10 am to 12.

- Understanding the purpose and objectives of this working group, what do you hope to accomplish? What does success look like? (could be task specific and can evolve over time) Consider these issues and keep in mind as the WG proceeds.

10:00 AM Everglades Restoration and Regional Issues: Introductory Discussion on Key Topics for Connectivity Team Engagement

South Florida Ecosystem: Priorities of the WQPP and SAC for the WG were exogenous issues that affect water quality in the Keys, specifically Florida Everglades restoration and mainland wastewater outlets. Could also include oil exploration in the Gulf of Mexico, or issues in Cuba and Bahamas, for example; should be aware of and responsive if needed. Loop current is definitely a source of potential impacts for Florida Keys. For the time being, should focus on the Florida mainland per the SAC recommendations. Harmful algal blooms impact S. Florida, although they may originate elsewhere.

Jamboard sticky notes:

1. BBSEER Plan – Biscayne Bay Southeastern Everglades Ecosystem Restoration Plan (part of CERP). Designed to rehydrate wetlands in Biscayne; includes FL Bay and the C-111 canal.
2. Consider northern projects as well and ensure the WG is informing the SAC and community about the connectivity of these to the Keys.
3. Ecosystem threats (have as a standing agenda item to give the opportunity to flag threats in the ecosystem). E.g., oil drilling in the Big Cypress National Preserve, attempts to commercialize and expand Homestead Air Reserve.
4. Turkey Point – keep aware of the developments with FPL, hypersaline water, unlined cooling canals, use of treated wastewater, and possible expansion.
5. Ballast Water - awareness of this as a potential, which was also raised for SCTLD.
6. Urban pollution inputs. Miami has untreated wastewater and stormwater, failing septic tanks, etc. Consider connectivity ...
7. Section 404 of the CWA. State of Florida recently assumed permitting authority of section 404 of the CWA, which gives regulatory permitting authority to the state instead of the federal government.
8. Lake Okeechobee System Operations Manual updates can potentially affect northern estuaries and provide ecological benefits to the Keys. Projected water releases/management for the coming year. What is different/how can releases be handled? What can we expect from freshwater releases during wet season/hurricane season coupled with timing?

9. Closure of mainland wastewater outfalls that are only secondarily treated (slated for closure in a few years; keep up to date on this)
10. Funding for restoration is the #1 challenge, there is an opportunity for the SAC to understand USACE civil works budgets/how all federal money flows. This is a limitation.
11. Southern Everglades Study (white portion of Integrated Delivery Schedule – IDS). This has not started yet but may affect Taylor Slough/Florida Bay. Looking at a series of projects associated with the entire area.
12. Agriculture/potential pollution entering Florida Bay (at least learn more to determine if it should be a priority focus area).
13. Mainland visitors to the FKNMS. How does the SAC/FKNMS reach these visitors to contribute to the economy but don't degrade the environment?
14. FDEP has ongoing process for impaired waters and corrective actions, including an effort in the Keys. Agricultural contributions and nonpoint sources are included in the basin management action plans (BMAPs) have been developed through FDEP's Division of Environmental Assessment and Restoration (DEAR). Caloosahatchee basin has a management plan, which is another resource that we can consult.
15. Emerging pollutants of concern (notwithstanding nutrients, sewage outflows) – but also personal care products, petroleum products, microplastics, et al. in time and space and influence on health of the ecosystem. Ecotoxicology working group is working on some of these topics.
16. Combined Operational Plan (COP). Projected water releases/management for the coming year. What is different/how can releases be handled? What can we expect from freshwater releases during wet season/hurricane season?
17. Sequencing and timing of Everglades Projects, so the WG team can calendar opportunities for engagement. The Integrated Delivery Schedule (IDS) is the timetable for all of these projects.
18. Everglades Restoration 101! What are the integrated delivery schedule (IDS) projects (Adam Gerber has some resources, link <https://w3.saj.usace.army.mil/h2o/reports/SDCSDaily.htm> and <https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=urWTBhhLe02TQfMvQApUIKivETkdubJKivshorbwlAVUQzAzTkhVMDixMjA3UUhUUU1ZQUhYS0hDRC4u> and https://www.evergladesrestoration.gov/content/ids/meetings/091720/IDS_091020_WORKING_DRAFT_placemat.pdf)

10:40 AM Public Comment – NONE

10:55 AM Wrap-Up and Review Action Items

Even if we do not have an action item, we have a mission to teach. Karen will look into creating a shared Google Drive folder (if external access will be allowed per the federal government) that we can all contribute to, where we can drop documents and videos to study prior to the scheduled meetings (action item). Should we have WG members rank the sticky notes? It is a long list, and would be impossible to tackle all at once, especially in light of bimonthly 2-hour calls. Next meeting, or homework for next meeting: whom should we invited to give presentations?

After brief discussion the items listed below were highlighted as starting priorities:

Priorities:

1. Projected water releases/management for the coming year. What is different/how can releases be handled? What can we expect from freshwater releases during wet season/hurricane season. (copied to Lake O)
2. Presentations: Everglades Restoration 101!
3. Sequencing and timing of Everglades Projects, so the WG team can calendar opportunities for engagement. The Integrated Delivery Schedule (IDS) is the timetable for all of these projects.
4. Legislation requiring closure of sewage outfalls north of FKNMS except during "emergency" events.
5. Education and focus on the BBSEER
6. Ways to share links and news items between meetings is a good idea. Please send resources to Karen and Jerry to share with the group to create a living resources library.
7. Topics for next meeting: presentations to educate WG on some of these priorities, and open to the public. Now that we have a standing meeting date, the info to join virtual meetings will be the same and therefore easier for the public to participate, every third Tuesday from 10 am to Noon (bi-monthly). Karen will work with staff to share community announcements.

Any volunteers for co-chairs? Co-chair does not have to be a SAC member.

11:00 PM Jerry Lorenz called to adjourn at 11:01.