

**Minutes - South Florida Ecosystem Connectivity Working Group
September 20, 2022**

Action Items for September 20, 2022 (note: May 15, 2022 action items are at the very bottom of these minutes; please see pg 6 for potential presentations for upcoming meetings that were not specifically noted as action items)

Action Item 1: Erin Muller will draft a comment regarding adaptive management for new coral restoration and nursery areas that come online to create a mechanism to add future sites.

Link to Connectivity Team Working Group (CT) Google Drive:
https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Scah13MLR3HBJEyz_MNjLnE1tLq-w3NY/edit?usp=sharing&oid=101270934445107027562&rtpof=true&sd=true

Action Item 2: We stress that specific, time-bound, and measurable goals should be included in the Management Plan.

Action Item 3: Adam Gelber will obtain the Coral Reef Coordination Team amendments made at the September 1, 2022 meeting and provide to the CT; these will be posted publicly online soon as well. Adam will email to Karen and she will place into the Google Drive.

Action Item 4: Ask for a CT presentation from the Task Force once there is more development on the new Coral Reef Coordination Team (Jerry).

Action Item 5: Karen will send new links to Google Drive to everyone (COMPLETED, SEE September 20 email).

Action Item 6: The CT subcommittee writing team may be able to get back together for some edits on what to recommend to the the FKNMS SAC prior to the SAC meeting on October 18th in Marathon. Please send comments by September 27, 2022 to Jerry, Karen, or Cara – if you can access the Google Drive, please add your comments directly. If you do not have access to the Google Drive - send written comments in an email to Jerry, Karen, and Cara. CT recommendations need to be finalized by October 4 to get on the SAC agenda. Link to Google Drive - https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Scah13MLR3HBJEyz_MNjLnE1tLq-w3NY/edit?usp=sharing&oid=101270934445107027562&rtpof=true&sd=true

Action Item 7: Ask Heather Blough to speak about fishing gear outside of the Sanctuary that may enter the Sanctuary including derelict fishing gear, turbidity from bottom trawling, and bycatch.

Action Item 8: Tylan can take the lead on a presenter for the ongoing algae bloom in Florida Bay for the November 15 meeting and work with Jerry and Karen to get an update. WQPP SC would likely also want to hear that presentation, or a TAC meeting// **Action Item 9:** Karen will

follow-up with Tylan and Jerry on Connectivity Team updates to the WQPP SC or a TAC meeting?

Attendees: Karen Bohnsack, Jerry Lorenz, Shelly Krueger, Cara Capp, Erin Muller, Emma Haydocy, Matt Semcheski, Suzy Roebling, Chris Berg, Adam Gelber, Jolly Benson, Steve Friedman, Paul Julian, Tylan Dean, Nick Parr, Marisa C, and Kelly Cox

Absent: Steve Davis, Steve Blackburn, Amelia Moura, Brian Cumbie, Joe Weatherby, Mike Goldberg, Chris Madden, Gina Ralph, and Luke McEachron

Agenda:

10:00 am **Welcome, Introductions, and Administrative Items** - Roll call by Karen Bohnsack.

Paul Julian recognized as a new team member. Paul is with Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation and involved in Everglades science and policy. Paul has a PhD in Soil and Water Sciences with a focus on nutrients in soil and water column.

The South Florida Ecosystem Connectivity Working Group (CT) July meeting was skipped due to release of the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary (FKNMS) Restoration Blueprint (RB) and a special Sanctuary Advisory Council (SAC) meeting was convened on July 12. Many members of the CT attended the FKNMS SAC meeting in July. A CT subcommittee was formed to comment upon the Restoration Blueprint (RB; members: Emma, Chris, Kelly, Marisa, Paul, Cara?, and Jerry) and wrote a 4-page report specifying what is important within the RB from a connectivity perspective. Goal to finalize the document by the Connectivity Team and send to the FKNMS SAC. These are only recommendations, and not a resolution, to the Sanctuary and the SAC. These should be a part of the October SAC meeting and must be submitted by October 4 to be included on the agenda.

10:15 am

Restoration Blueprint Assessment and Discussion - *Dr. Jerry Lorenz will lead an overview of the recently released Restoration Blueprint and the findings of the working group*

CT supports the Western Sambo Ecological Reserve expansion out to the 90' for no anchoring and no fishing. This would make the Western Sambo Ecological Reserve be from the shore to the 90' depth contour, which is located on the Pourtales Gyre, which enhances larval dispersal and retention within the Lower Keys. Corals on the deeper reefs are critical reservoirs of biodiversity.

The Connectivity Teams supports the prohibition of large vessel anchoring at Pulley Ridge and the Dry Tortugas areas, these are VIP areas that are upstream in terms of connectivity to the rest of the Florida Keys and the Florida mainland. CT recommends FKNMS works with other agencies, including fisheries management councils (Gulf Council and South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (SAFMC) to minimize impacts from derelict fishing gear, whether or not it

is deployed within the Sanctuary, or not, since many gear types can enter the Sanctuary once derelict or abandoned or lost.

Enhance existing connectivity through Sanctuary boundary expansion -- CT supports the expansion to include Pulley Ridge and western regions of the Dry Tortugas for added protection to sensitive habitats. The Gulf Council has created a habitat area of particular concern (HAPC) but can only regulate fishing impacts. CT supports expansion of the "Tortugas Corridor" from anchoring.

CT considering asking the Sanctuary to add something back into the draft environmental impact statement (DEIS) that was removed regarding the protection of fish spawning aggregations, these areas support resilience for fished species that are important economically.

The objective of the CT subcommittee was to provide recommendations that apply connectivity principles Sanctuary-wide as well as in the Everglades. They would also like to recognize the efforts of the RB to add to the management plan for coral reef restoration areas – including the coral restoration sites and nurseries. There does not appear to be a process within the RB management plan to react to adding more nurseries identified within the RB – is there a way to add a mechanism to add new nurseries and restoration sites that come online within the next several years for adaptive management? CT should comment on creating an adaptive management plan to be able to add more coral restoration/nursery areas in the future. **Action Item 1:** Erin Muller will draft a comment regarding adaptive management for new coral restoration and nursery areas that come online to create a mechanism to add future sites. This can be added to the report to send to the SAC? (this may be out of the purview of this working group, but a comment for the record can be incorporated into the CT report). Erin will add text to the teams shared Google Drive folder. Karen will place this draft report into the CT Google Drive; anyone unable to access the Google Drive can email Karen Bohnsack to add for them, or to send as an attachment for reviewing.

Connectivity Overview – Activities in the RB Management Plan (RB MB) don't specify timelines or metrics for achievement. While some of these items are ongoing, it is not apparent in the RB MB in the way the plan was written. Can we request a time frame(s) or metrics for achievement on management actions? These are very important comments, and documentation or reporting on whether these actions are occurring, or not, if warranted.

Action Item 2: We stress that specific, time-bound, and measurable goals should be included in the Management Plan.

The Sanctuary must assume an active role in Everglades Restoration. The Florida Keys are hydrologically linked with Florida Bay and the Greater Everglades ecosystem. The South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force (Task Force) southern phase recently created the Coral Reef Coordination Team to provide connectivity between the southern phase working group? The purpose of the new Coral Reef Coordination Team is to task Federal and State leadership and tribal representatives for water management to include coral reefs. Salinity at the coastal fringe is under the purview already, and a performance measure for the Task Force. There has

been a long-term goal to heighten the importance of coral reef restoration. The RB is not on the Task Force agenda for consultation but the leadership will be briefed. The Task Force is not subject to the RB consultation process. Still working out details for Coral Reef Coordination Team.

Here's a link to the charter for the Coral Reef Coordination Team:

https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5d5179e7e42ca1000117872f/t/630e43358a6b86183cc91278/1661879094871/5b_Revised+draft+Coral+Reef+Team+Charter+1Sep2022_wgscgmtg_JME.pdf

The FKNMS Charter has seats suggested for representatives for the Coral Reef Coordination Team for voting and non-voting members (on the coordination team.?) The FKNMS is suggested for a voting member. Looking for members with the expertise and availability to join the Coral Reef Coordination Team, since it will take a significant amount of time. The S. FL Ecosystem Connectivity Task Force (aka Task Force; Karen is a member) will contribute to how that moves forward. This represents a new opportunity to enhance coordination at a regional level and with agencies that in the past have not been as involved with coral reef management issues. Coral Reef Coordination Team still being built and working out the details. There will be a lot of continued coordination with coral reef issues and the Florida Coral Disease Outbreak Response Teams (FCDOR), but this new team will not fully replace FCDOR.

In 1996, Congress established the Office of Everglades Restoration initiatives and created the Task Force – with functional groups – 2 tribal, x state, x federal – to focus on South Florida landscape restoration, which is separate from from the Sanctuary and FL Keys. 18 months ago – a new group was created and attached to the Task Force in addition to the existing Working Group and Science Coordination Group – (kinda captured this part...) . NOAA has more seats at the Coordination Team and the Task Force has a NOAA representative at the Assistant Secretary level. The teams perform the work that is sent to the Task Force, which is a smaller group of leadership representatives.

MISSION: The mission of this Team (Coral Reef Coordination Team) is to regionally integrate and coordinate management and restoration-related activities to conserve and restore Florida's Coral Reef and associated resources to protect, sustain, and enhance the South Florida ecosystem's ecological and aesthetic character, function, and resilience. This will be achieved in the context of ongoing anthropogenic disturbance through the implementation and completion of South Florida Ecosystem Restoration projects, programs, and r

Link to September 1 meeting -- <https://www.evergladesrestoration.gov/working-group/sept-1-2022-working-group-science-coordination-group-meeting-nbr4m-p38hs> and link to July 7 meetings --<https://www.evergladesrestoration.gov/working-group/july-7-2022-working-group-science-coordination-group-meeting-nbr4m>

Amendments were made at the September 1, 2022 meeting. **Action Item 3:** Adam Gelber will obtain the Coral Reef Coordination Team amendments made at the September 1, 2022 meeting

and provide to the CT; these will be posted publicly online soon as well. Adam will email to Karen and she will place into the Google Drive. **Action Item 4:** Ask for a CT presentation from the Task Force once there is more development on the new Coral Reef Coordination Team. **Action Item 5:** Karen will send new links to Google Drive to everyone (done).

CT supports the Card Sound wildlife management area from a connectivity standpoint because it is an area where factors related to Everglades Restoration can be measured. There is connectivity and a net movement of nutrients and redistribution of resources, e.g., due to bird nesting and the bird droppings.

Many thanks to the CT subcommittee who delved into the RB and contributing to the report. Various agencies are heavily involved in consultation with RB, especially state partners DEP and FWC, and federal agencies like the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council and South Atlantic Fishery Management Council have held public meetings.

Interagency collaboration and consistency are key to user safety and resource protection – CT would like to see regulations that are the same within the Sanctuary, adjacent wildlife management areas, and Everglades National Park, etc. should all have similar rules (e.g., boater education courses required, fish feeding not allowed in state parks) for safety and consistency for enforcement. Consider signage that is consistent. CT is concerned that the boater education requirement was removed from the 2019 FKNMS DEIS.

There is concern that communication surrounding the Sanctuary does not specifically address day visitors. CT recommends engagement with the outer counties in S. Florida, as the number of South Florida residents who visit the Sanctuary has increased (especially from Miami-Dade, Broward, Palm Beach, Lee, and Collier counties) – these day visitors may be wholly unaware they are entering a national marine sanctuary.

Course of action from here:

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What is the purpose of this report from the CT to the SAC? This is an Advisory Note from the CT and provides a series of recommendations given to the SAC and will be posted online and emailed to the SAC and made public on the FKNMS SAC listserv by October 4, 2022. If CT is given time at the SAC meeting, Jerry (with help from other CT member's present) will present slides and highlights of main points from this report as delivered to the SAC from the CT. The

October SAC meeting is primarily about providing information to the SAC and the December meeting will be more of an opportunity for SAC members voting and resolutions.

11:15 am **Public Comment – none**

11:30 am **Team Member Updates:**

Ideas for upcoming meetings:

- Presentation about minimum flows especially in Florida Bay and how to better protect estuaries in S. Florida.
- Not quite far enough along for new Coral Reef Coordination Team. Will find someone – Karen is a member of the Task Force and has this on her radar, not quite there yet
- Fishing and gear outside of the Sanctuary that may enter the Sanctuary – perhaps Heather Blough could talk to CT about these topics. E.g., derelict fishing gear, turbidity from bottom trawling, and bycatch. **Action Item 7:** ask Heather Blough to speak about fishing gear outside of the Sanctuary that may enter the Sanctuary including derelict fishing gear, turbidity from bottom trawling, and bycatch.
- Everglades National Park – presentation about how the boater education program has worked, effective, lessons learned? Updates on what they've seen since implementation and channel marking program, plus pros and cons.
- Integrated Delivery Schedule – IDS update, BBSEER, LOSOM updates (ongoing)
- Very timely: Ongoing algae bloom in Florida Bay with high sponge mortality. Chris Madden may know someone at SFWMD or Zac (data collector). **Action Item 8:** Tylan could take the lead on a presenter for the ongoing algae bloom in Florida Bay for the November meeting and work with Jerry and Karen to get an update. WQPP SC would likely also want to hear that presentation, or a TAC meeting.

Tropical Audubon Society leading effort against. Miami-Dade Commissioners Set New Hearing on Expanding Urban Development Border <https://commercialobserver.com/2022/09/miami-dade-commissioners-set-new-hearing-on-expanding-urban-development-border/> Can reach out to Cara Capp for more information. Next Miami-Dade Commission meeting is this Thursday, September 22. Still time to give public comment.

The May resolution was sent from the CT to the SAC. It was amended and accepted by the SAC. This resolution was related to mainland wastewater treatment upgrades and sent to Miami-Dade and Broward County and thanked other municipalities for their upgrades. Sent to 9 counties and municipalities.

WQPP met in August 11, 2022. Chris Bergh gave comments to WQPP SC about CT. **Action Item 9:** Karen will follow-up with Tylan and Jerry on Connectivity Team updates to the WQPP SC or a TAC meeting.

Next meeting of the Connectivity Team is Tuesday, November 15, 2022.

Jerry adjourned meeting at 11:39 pm.

Action items from May 17, 2022:

- Topics for next South Florida Ecosystem connectivity working group meeting: discussion about the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary Restoration Blueprint draft rule. Could have a subcommittee to assess Restoration Blueprint and how to respond.
- FKNMS WQPP SC could add Lake O discharges via the Caloosahatchee River into a special priority-funding topic to look into connectivity between Lake O discharges and water turbidity into the Florida Keys. This is already a priority since the special geographic regions were extended into the IRL, St. Lucie River, and Caloosahatchee River through EPA South Geographic Initiative. The EPA RFA that usually comes out in the springtime could address this.
- Dr. Nick Parr can share the FDEP sensor data from Lignum Vitae AP
- Would like to invite someone from SCCF to join this working group at least on a regular basis.
- FKNMS SAC Standing time to report out for this working group: can this be added to a standing time for the agencies report.
- FKNMS WQPP SC is August 11 at Marathon City Hall (in-person; likely remote will be available, too). Shelly can help to present updates to the FKNMS WQPP SC and Shelly will recommend adding this to the agenda for August 11 via the management committee.
- Steve Blackburn, Kelly Cox, and Joe Weatherby will help Chris Bergh draft the resolution.
- Links to previous meeting minutes:
<https://nmsfloridakeys.blob.core.windows.net/floridakeys-prod/media/docs/20220315-connectivity-team-minutes.pdf>