Public Involvement Challenges and Triumphs in the CERP Master Recreation Plan

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Abstract
The Master Recreation Plan (MRP) being developed under the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Project (CERP) adopts a systematic approach to identifying the impacts of restoration programs. Implementation of existing recreation uses within the south Florida ecosystem, and identifying opportunities for new recreation, public use and education as the program is implemented. As CERP components are developed, recreational opportunities will be developed through partnerships with the non-federal sponsor and other state and local agencies.

Public Outreach Plan
The MRP outreach plan was developed and conducted primarily by the Corps and the non-federal sponsor, the South Florida Water Management District. Other agency team members representing the US Fish and Wildlife Service, the Everglades National Park, the Florida Division of Forestry, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection also participated.

Public Outreach Objectives
Objectives were developed to use key components and performance measures for success:
• Educate and inform the public and stakeholders throughout the course of the MRP development
• Provide opportunities for interaction between the public and the MRP study team
• Obtain input from the public and make plan documents readily available for public review
• Communicate decisions, procedure, and results
• Use innovative efforts to engage and educate traditionally under-represented and non-participatory communities
• Use a variety of media and methods to promote public participation in public meetings and other forums and build credibility with the public
• Develop and facilitate relationships critical to the success of the MRP and implementation if a recommendations

Public Outreach Goals
The goals developed to meet the objectives were:
• Increase public awareness of the significance and intent of the MRP
• Involve stakeholders, agencies, tribes, minority and other interested groups and individuals throughout the development of the MRP
• Ensure public values and input are fully considered
• Identify CERP project effects on existing public recreation resources
• Identify opportunities for public use and recreation on a regional level
• Develop and utilize innovative techniques to engage traditionally under-represented communities

Public Outreach Activities
Opportunities were developed to use key components and performance measures for success:
• Increase public awareness of the significance and intent of the MRP
• Involve stakeholders, agencies, tribes, minority and other interested groups and individuals in the development of the MRP
• Ensure public values and input are fully considered
• Identify CERP project effects on existing public recreation resources
• Identify opportunities for public use and recreation on a regional level
• Develop and utilize innovative techniques to engage traditionally under-represented communities

Project Study Area
The CERP recreation area is comprised of 9 regions covering all of South Florida from Fort Myers on the west coast to Fort Pierce on the east coast, and from Key West in the southernmost point to Jupiter Island in the northern part of the study area. The CERP study area included 68 major components. The MRP study area was subdivided into 9 regions of southern Florida and 40904 Tamiami Trail (US Highway 41) as main entry points. The study was conducted and reviewed by the Corps and the non-federal sponsor and other state and local agencies.

Public Outreach Components, Regional Distribution
The outreach meeting is a forum for obtaining comments and developing relationships with users and stakeholders; we are here to listen and seek understanding.

- Begin planning process early with primary technical specialist, include graphic designer, webmaster, outreach and public affairs specialist, programmers, consultants, and key stakeholders
- Engage team members in collaborative planning and consensus based decision-making throughout the process from plan to execution
- Engage a facilitator to manage the process and ensure fairness to all participants, establish non-verbal cues
- Contingency planning is critical, back-ups for everything from your presentations, to equipment, printed materials, and transportation for your traveling road show
- Stay in tune with the weather and have emergency contact information for everyone on the team, POCs back at the office and your travel agent
- Arrive at the location early and stay until the lights are on
- Use pre-meeting to develop the meeting on the game plan, strategies and provide feedback on areas of improvement and highlight accomplishments
- Get to know your audience and direct them with your stakeholders and associations on their turf
- Use open house format and formal presentation to begin when a critical mass has been reached. Stay flexible and tailor to the audience.
- Close the audience before and after the meeting to obtain feedback on everything from how they found out about the meeting to how well did we deliver the message at this particular location.

Key Findings and Recommendations
- The outreach meeting is a forum for obtaining comments and developing relationships with users and stakeholders; we are here to listen and seek understanding
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- Encourage use of comment cards and keep a good supply of business cards on hand
- Focus on your goals and ensure consistent delivery of the message

Gladsmen Culture
The Gladsmen culture appears to have started as a culture in the Lower Everglades, and these communities thrived, largely associated with cattle ranching, the Gladsmen are largely associated with cattle ranching, livestock, and livestock. The Gladsmen, a group under 50 years, ca. 1961

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