

## **Updating a System-wide Monitoring and Assessment Plan for a Large-scale Ecosystem Restoration Project**

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Authorized by Congress in 2000, the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) aims to find the correct balance among flow characteristics throughout the Florida Everglades by changing the quantity, quality, timing, and distribution of water, leading to improved ecosystem health and ensuring quality of life in south Florida. RECOVER (REstoration COordination & VERification) is a multi-agency and multi-disciplinary team that organizes and applies scientific and technical information to support the goals and objectives of the CERP. RECOVER applies a system-wide perspective to the planning and implementation of CERP and communicates and coordinates the results of evaluations and assessments to managers, decision-makers, and the public.

The CERP is the largest environmental restoration effort ever pursued and documenting its success relies on a system-wide monitoring plan as the basis for assessing system-wide performance. The CERP monitoring plan was conceived as the primary tool by which RECOVER will assess the performance of the south Florida ecosystem as it responds to CERP implementation. The purposes of the monitoring plan are to: (a) provide a framework that supports measurement of system-wide responses to determine how well CERP is achieving its goals and objectives; and (b) support and enable adaptive management for updating and improving the CERP, when needed. From the inception of the CERP monitoring plan in 2000, it was recognized that refinement of the document would be a continuous and iterative process. As CERP implementation has proceeded, new information, lessons learned, and changing priorities have been the impetus for updating the monitoring plan. These factors include recommendations from the National Research Council, information gained from the completion of technical evaluations and reports, the issue of climate change (specifically sea-level rise), and the need to incorporate CERP project-level monitoring into the CERP monitoring plan.

The last update to the CERP monitoring plan occurred in 2009. RECOVER will undertake an update to the monitoring plan that will consider new information pertinent to conceptual ecological models, restoration hypotheses, uncertainties, and individual monitoring components. Examples of methods employed to synthesize new information and to evaluate the current monitoring plan will be provided. Promoting a more insightful and focused monitoring plan enhances the CERP adaptive management program and will provide managers with the capacity to act in an accelerated manner, even in the face of risk, with the knowledge that they have the best information and scientific support available.

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