

Bringing Together the Everglades Restoration Community: Establishing a Collective Understanding of Monitoring Efforts Occurring in South Florida

Stephanie Verhulst and Gina Ralph

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Jacksonville District, Jacksonville, FL, USA

South Florida hosts diverse ecosystems ranging from the Everglades headwaters of Lake Okeechobee to the freshwater Everglades to the coastal estuaries and bays. Drastic and damaging changes to the function, composition, and spatial extent of these ecosystems began when Everglades drainage activities started in the early 1900s and continued through the 1960s with the Central and Southern Florida Flood Control Project. Congressional authorization in 2000 for Everglades restoration approved the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) to restore, preserve, and protect the south Florida ecosystem while providing for other water-related needs of the region including water supply and flood protection.

Everglades restoration requires system-wide monitoring efforts throughout the various ecosystems to assess CERP success. REStoration, COOrdination and VERification (RECOVER), an interagency and interdisciplinary scientific and technical team within CERP, developed a Monitoring and Assessment Plan (MAP) to guide Everglades monitoring to reduce uncertainties about key ecological components and linkages within the distinct ecosystems and assess ecosystem responses to CERP activities. Recognizing RECOVER is one of many entities involved in Everglades restoration, RECOVER partnered with the South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force Science Coordination Group to host a workshop for the south Florida restoration community to collectively identify current monitoring efforts occurring within the CERP footprint and future science and monitoring needs to address remaining uncertainties and assess CERP success. Two goals of the workshop were to (1) crosswalk monitoring occurring by various entities with RECOVER hypotheses and uncertainties and (2) identify overlaps and gaps in science and monitoring to support CERP restoration goals. The workshop brought together over 100 participants representing local, state, federal, tribal, and academic entities and provided opportunities for promoting and leveraging collaboration. Group discussions focused on specific aspects of Everglades restoration while developing a system-wide perspective of monitoring activities. The collaborative efforts of the restoration community produced an ecological and hydrological monitoring inventory for south Florida which includes spatial and temporal scales and monitoring metrics. Information gained during the workshop will inform a future RECOVER MAP update. Benefits extended beyond the product-driven workshop goals to include reestablishing a collective sense of community and shared restoration goals, developing new connections between participants, and developing effective and efficient communication tools for future RECOVER engagements.

Contact Information: Stephanie Verhulst, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Jacksonville District, 701 San Marco Blvd., Jacksonville, FL, USA 32207, Phone: 904-232-1818, Email: Stephanie.A.Verhulst@usace.army.mil