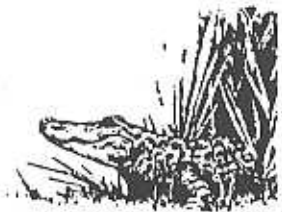




# **THE EVERGLADES COALITION**

## **EVERGLADES RESTORATION: A VISION OF THE FIRST TEN YEARS**

**Presented at the  
16th Annual Everglades Coalition Conference  
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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Year 2000 was a defining year for the Everglades, in which Congress approved a restoration plan, authorized its first projects, and created hope that the goal of a sustainably restored Everglades may actually be achieved. Yet it was also a year in which the full complexity and contentiousness of actually implementing restoration became apparent. Although we have faced challenging decisions in the last decade, many of the most difficult lie ahead.

In its 2010 vision document, the Coalition has crafted 14 "vision statements" which capture those objectives that we consider to be critical to the first decade of the restoration implementation process. These statements are accompanied by detailed "road maps" for realizing each vision by the end of the coming decade. These vision statements are summarized below.

- Maximize restoration benefits in the first ten years.
- Bring lands necessary for restoration into public ownership and expand spatial extent of wetlands.
- By 2002, programmatic regulations that guide the planning, development and implementation of the CERP must be developed and promulgated.
- Water generated by the CERP will be available for the natural system in adequate volumes and consistent with the restoration of hydrologic timing and distribution.
- The restoration of the quantity, quality, timing, and distribution of flows to Northeast Shark River Slough and Taylor Slough will be complete or near completion by 2010.
- By 2010 the CERP implementation phase has established a pattern of proceeding on schedule.
- By 2010, water management and Everglades restoration will guide land use decisions in the south Florida region.
- By 2010, the ecological decline of Lake Okeechobee will be reversed, and recovery will be measurable.
- By 2010, implementation will be underway of a plan for an ecologically sustainable and economically viable future for south Miami-Dade County that is compatible with the health of Biscayne and Everglades National Parks.
- By 2010, ecological conditions in the Everglades Protection Area (EPA) will have greatly improved as a result of setting by 2001 and meeting by 2006 water quality standards as specified in the EPA.
- By 2010, the wetlands and groundwater resources within the Lakebelt will have received permanent protection.
- By 2010, make substantial progress in restoring the abundance and diversity of native plant and animal life in the greater south Florida ecosystem; including meeting or exceeding 10 year recovery goals for listed species and their habitats
- By 2010, the Feasibility Study for Southwest Florida will be completed and funding for the projects will be approved by Congress and the Florida Legislature.
- Ensure protection for Everglades coastal and marine resources.

If we are to realize our goal of a sustainably restored Everglades ecosystem, a commitment must be made to achieving the goals represented by these vision statements. Such a commitment will require continuous leadership, fortitude, and the willingness to squarely face the challenges to come.

**VISION: Maximize restoration benefits in the first ten years.**

The Everglades is an ecosystem in drastic decline - the comprehensive attempt to rescue it comes in the system's eleventh hour. The reversal of this ecological decline must begin immediately if we expect to recover the Everglades before it is too late. From the headwaters of the Everglades to the coral reefs, achieving maximum restoration benefits in the first decade must be a primary priority. Successful implementation of the CERP cannot be guaranteed even by the greatest effort and victories on the legislative front. We can only take full advantage of the CERP's potential to restore the Everglades by working to maximize restoration benefits at each step in the restoration process.

**Roadmap to Realizing the Vision:**

- Achieve 50% restoration performance by 2010.
- Using National Academy of Sciences Committee on the Restoration of the Greater Everglades Ecosystem (CROGEE), RECOVER, and other appropriate processes, agencies should immediately devise solutions for the remaining restoration performance shortfalls concerning the 50% restoration performance described above and other standards, particularly for Everglades National Park and Biscayne National Park; implement these solutions, including as necessary, through legislation.
- Scientific peer review of all phases of the CERP implementation, as mandated by WRDA 2000 legislation, must be fully and independently conducted by the CROGEE.
- A 10 ppb phosphorus water quality standard must be immediately established for the Everglades Protection Area.
- Comprehensive programmatic regulations must be promulgated no later than early 2002.
- Project Implementation Reports consistent with provisions in the programmatic regulations concerning: (1) the achievement of 50% of restoration benefits by expenditure of 50% of total CERP funding; and (2) allocating 80% of "new water supply" for the Everglades (see discussion below) should be completed for all 6 pilot projects, initial authorization projects, and 15 additional priority projects by 2002.
- CERP surface storage components should be investigated for acceleration, including further analysis of available funding, streamlining of project management plans, and redirecting additional resources.
- By 2002, the feasibility study for the annual delivery of the additional 245,000 acre-feet to the southern Everglades should be completed and the necessary CERP revisions should be submitted to Congress in time to be authorized in subsequent WRDA authorizations.
- The plan for all 50,000 acres of Everglades Agricultural Area Storage (Talisman property) Phase I must be implemented at the earliest possible time, beginning construction no later than 2005, and completing construction by 2009.
- 75% of all surface water storage, or nearly 125,000 acres of ~ 170,000 total acres of storage, should be completed by 2010.
- An Aquifer Storage and Recovery (ASR) Contingency Plan should be completed by 2002, and the ASR pilot projects should be completed by 2005.
- Aquifer Management Plan should be completed by 2005, concurrent with the completion of Aquifer Storage and Recovery pilot projects.
- All Pilot Projects construction and monitoring should be complete by 2010, and the scope of these projects must not be limited by budgetary constraints. Additionally, acceleration should be pursued to the extent that timelines, staffing, and funding enable referenced issues to be addressed.

- WCA-3 Decompartmentalization Phase I should be completed by 2010 and Phase II should be accelerated in order to ensure its completion immediately thereafter.
- Water levels within the Everglades Protection Area shall be managed to benefit native Everglades habitat.

**VISION: Bring lands that are necessary for restoration into public ownership and expand spatial extent of wetlands.**

The vast spatial extent of the historic Everglades was one of the system's defining characteristics. Drainage and development have permanently removed about half of the historic Everglades wetlands, including forested wetlands, from the natural system. Restoration efforts must include the avoidance of further loss of wetlands and focus upon recovery of degraded and remnant wetland systems. Furthermore, we must reestablish wetlands on agricultural land as it goes out of production.

**Roadmap to Realizing the Vision:**

- On an immediate basis, a willing seller and wetland restoration program for the entire 8.5 Square Mile Area (8.5 SMA) should be fully funded and implemented.
- By 2002, more than 50% of the entire existing Water Preserve Area (WPA) footprint for Miami-Dade, Broward and Palm Beach Counties should be acquired, or 77% of the non-Lakebelt area of the WPA, for a minimum of 18,500 acres.
- The Lakebelt area must become a site for wetland restoration, preservation and protection.
- A natural resource protection area/west coast buffer should be designated and protected for Collier and Lee Counties.
- A water preserve area/east coast buffer should be designated and protected for Martin and St. Lucie Counties.
- Exotic and nuisance plant removal programs should be initiated in the entire restoration footprint and no new species shall be introduced for biological control practices.
- Land acquisition should be completed for approximately 30 project components by 2005, totaling nearly 90,000 (86,652) acres. Land acquisition costs alone are estimated at \$1.6 billion by 2005.
- By 2010, a land acquisition plan for the Everglades Agricultural Area (EAA), which includes funding to purchase land from willing sellers, should also be in place.
- A plan should be created to reconnect Lake Okeechobee with the rest of the Everglades.
- 150,000 acres of land should be acquired by 2010 throughout South Florida for the implementation of CERP project components.

**VISION: By 2002, programmatic regulations that guide the planning, development and implementation of CERP must be developed and promulgated.**

The programmatic regulations are the linchpin of the restoration effort. Pursuant to the authorizing legislation, these regulations will be developed over the next two years and will be regularly reviewed and revised thereafter by the involved agencies. In addition to guiding the planning, development and implementation of the CERP, the programmatic regulations are a primary means by which the Department of Interior, which manages approximately half of the remaining Everglades, exercises its critical oversight responsibilities over the CERP. The Everglades Coalition believes that effective and comprehensive programmatic regulations are the key to whether the CERP will accomplish adequate, expedient and cost-effective restoration.

### **Roadmap to Realizing the Vision:**

- The programmatic regulations should contain quantitative and measurable restoration performance targets. Such performance targets should ensure, *at a minimum*, that:
  - ⇒ CERP projects achieve at least 50 % of the restoration benefits predicted for this plan by the time 50 % of the funds are spent. This minimum standard of performance will help maintain the support of Congress and the American public.
  - ⇒ On an ongoing basis, at least 80 % of the water “created” by the CERP is delivered to the natural system. This means that, as new water supply comes “on-line,” the overall project will deliver additional water to the natural system and to other uses according to a roughly 80/20 split.
  - ⇒ CERP projects do not contribute to degradation of current background water quality in the natural system.
- The programmatic regulations must ensure that individual Project Implementation Reports (PIRs) and other CERP regulations meet the restoration performance targets. The programmatic regulations must provide for regular review and recommendations by an independent science panel concerning all significant stages of CERP implementation, and achievement of performance goals and objectives, including the PIRs, prior to Congressional authorization.

**VISION: Water generated by the CERP will be available for the natural system in adequate volumes and consistent with the restoration of hydrologic timing and distribution.**

The CERP’s authorizing legislation requires a binding agreement between federal and state authorities enforceable by third parties. This agreement requires that Florida ensure that water intended to restore the Everglades will not be permitted away until adequate water reservations for restoration purposes have been made. The Coalition expects that water made available by the CERP will be reserved for the natural system before it is made available for consumptive use, or irrigation.

### **Roadmap to Realizing the Vision:**

- The agreement should specify, in quantitative terms, the amount of water that will be subject to the agreement (i.e., protected from permitting and other uses). Such an upfront quantitative identification will enable the agreement’s effective and timely enforcement.
- The agreement should be completed by March 2001.
- Reservations made pursuant to project specific regulations (e.g. PIRs) or to state law, must conform to the upfront allocation(s).
- The federal/state agreement must also include the additional 245,000 acre-feet of annual water deliveries that will begin to address water shortfalls to federal lands in the southern end of the system, including Everglades National Park. Although these flows will be the subject of additional study, they must be part of the upfront allocation - at least on a contingent basis - in order to ensure that the water remains available.
- Identification of adequate volumes for the natural system must be science-driven, based upon ecological needs and not political or economic considerations. Models must be fully and independently peer reviewed.