

RECORD OF DECISION

Central and Southern Florida Project Biscayne Bay Coastal Wetlands Phase I Project Miami-Dade County, Florida

The Final Integrated Project Implementation Report and Environmental Impact Statement (PIR/EIS), dated March 2012, and the report of the Chief of Engineers, dated May 2, 2012, address ecosystem restoration and recreation in southeast Florida. Based on these reports, the reviews of other Federal, State and local agencies, input from the public, and the review by my staff, I find the Biscayne Bay Coastal Wetlands Phase I project to be technically feasible, environmentally justified, cost effective, in accordance with environmental statutes, and in the public interest. Thus, I approve the Biscayne Bay Coastal Wetlands Phase I project for construction.

The PIR/EIS documents the evaluation of alternatives to restore aquatic habitat in coastal wetlands and Biscayne Bay that has been adversely affected by the diversion of water to the Atlantic Ocean. The selected plan is Alternative O Phase I. This plan is the National Ecosystem Restoration plan and it consists of the following major features:

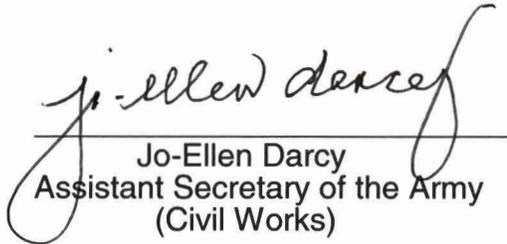
- Construction of a 500-foot canal extension, pump station, and spreader structure in the Deering Estate area that would convey water to a freshwater wetland;
- Construction of a pump station, about 7,000 linear feet of canal, three culverts, and about 13,160 linear feet of spreader canal in the Cutler Wetlands area that would convey water to saltwater wetlands;
- Placement of mosquito control ditch plugs in the Cutler Wetlands that would discourage channelization;
- Construction of five pump stations with outlet spreaders, an inverted siphon and water control structures in the L-31 East Flow Way area to deliver water that would restore freshwater and saltwater wetlands;
- Construction of features that would enable incidental recreation, including interpretive signs, a shade shelter, restrooms, parking, tent platforms, a pedestrian bridge, benches, bike racks, trash receptacles, a security gate, trail signage, potable water supply, and a bird watching platform; and
- Monitoring of habitat changes that would ensure restoration of ecological outputs.

In addition to the no action plan, 17 alternatives are evaluated in the PIR/EIS. The alternatives include different combinations of stormwater treatment areas and polishing ponds, detention areas and reservoirs, connector and spreader canals, canal and ditch modifications, water control structures, pumps, water treatment plants, and a desalinization plant. All of the alternatives are fully described and evaluated in the PIR/EIS, which is incorporated herein by reference. The selected plan would capture runoff that is currently discharged directly to Biscayne Bay and redirect it into coastal wetlands where it would more slowly flow into estuarine areas.

The selected plan would increase the spatial extent of natural areas and create more natural water flow patterns. This would increase the productivity of freshwater wetlands, improve aquatic habitat and functional quality, reestablish critical ecotones, and improve native plant and animal species abundance and diversity. The selected plan would restore the ecological function for about 30,700 acres of wetlands and about 8,600 acres of nearshore habitat in Biscayne Bay. The selected plan is the environmentally preferable alternative. All practicable means to avoid or minimize adverse environmental effects have been incorporated into the project and no impacts that would require compensatory mitigation have been identified. The selected plan would require authorization.

Technical, environmental, economic, and risk criteria used in the formulation of alternative plans are those specified in the Water Resources Council's Economic and Environmental Principles and Guidelines for Water and Related Land Resources Implementation Studies. All applicable laws, Executive Orders, regulations and local government plans are considered in the evaluation of alternatives and the selection of the recommended plan. Based on review of these evaluations, I find that the public interest would be best served by implementing the recommended plan. This Record of Decision completes the National Environmental Policy Act process.

Sept. 19, 2012
Date


Jo-Ellen Darcy
Assistant Secretary of the Army
(Civil Works)