

BIG CYPRESS RCT

Draft Meeting Minutes

November 19, 2004

Rookery Bay Visitors Center: Buttonwood Room

Members:

Organization	Member	Alternate
Army Corps of Engineers	TBA	
Audubon	Jason Lauritsen	Ed Carlson
Big Cypress Basin	Clarence Tears	Ananta Nath/ Tim Howard
Big Cypress Nat'l Preserve	Bob Sobczak	Damon Doumlele
CH-C RCT/ CHNEP	Lisa Beever	Catherine Corbett
City of Naples	Jon Staiger	Gary Pettit
Collier County - Nat. Res.	Bill Lorenz	Mac Hatcher
Conservancy of SW Florida	Dave Ceilley	David Addison
CREW	Ellen Lindblad	
Estero Bay - ABM	Ellen Lindblad	
Everglades National Park	Tom Schmidt	
Florida DEP - S. District	Rick Cantrell	Karen Bickford/Jennifer Nelson
Florida DEP - Estero Bay	Heather Stafford	Sherry Furnari
Florida DEP - Fakahatchee	Greg Toppin	Mike Owen
Florida Division of Forestry	Hank Graham	Sonja Durrwachter
FFWCC	Jim Beever	Joe Bozzo
FGCU	Mike Savarese	Brenda Brooks-Solveson
Hendry County	Ron Zimmerly	
Lee Co Dept of Nat Res	Roland Ottolini	Tony Pellicer
Lee Co Smart Growth	Wayne Daltry	
Regional Planning Council	David Burr	
Rookery Bay NERR	Gary Lytton	Mike Shirley
SFRESTORE Task Force	Carrie Beeler	
SFWMD	Carla Palmer	Janet Starnes, Mike Duever
TTI & Panther Refuge	Lane Hamilton	Ron Popowski
UF IFAS	Ed Hanlon	Marty Main
USDA	Tony Polizos	
US EPA		
US Fish and Wildlife	Art Roybal	Daryl Thomas
USGS	Eduardo Patino	Mike Byrne
WilsonMiller	Mike Bauer	

Those in bold were present at the meeting.

Attachments Distributed at Meeting:

- Hydrologic Conditions summary map and graphics
- Science plan list
- Group charter

The group discussed the **2005 agenda** for the upcoming year. Mike Savarese introduced Brenda Brooks-Solveson to the group. Brenda is a graduate student at FGCU and will be assisting our group on a half-time basis through funding provided by the Big Cypress Basin. Annual agenda items were discussed as follows. (1) **Revisiting the Big Cypress Science Plan.** Mike Savarese discussed the need to market the plan to relevant audiences to make sure that the plan doesn't just sit on a shelf and collect dust. Tim Howard discussed the need to make sure that the Science Plan is tied to restoration projects, and emphasized that local funding is often contingent on seeing earth turning on water resources or ecosystem enhancement projects. (2) **Big Cypress Restoration Plan.** The group discussed the need to identify and advocate smaller scale ecosystem restoration projects that often do not register on the radar of larger ecosystem projects. Tim Howard commented that smaller scale projects that show direct ecosystem improvement often do not have to go through the full permitting process. Jennifer Nelson commented on the degree that mitigation and permitting money can be used towards monitoring and science. For example, mitigation money cannot be used to acquire property, and are usually not used exclusively for research or monitoring, but that sometimes monitoring can be tagged on so long as mitigation is also being done. Carrie Beeler suggested that we may not need a fully flushed-out plan and that a matrix might suffice. Bob Sobczak suggested organizing the small scale projects by subregion or flow systems. (3) **Inventory of monitoring.** Mike Shirley raised the idea of creating a regional map and an inventory of monitoring. The group expressed interest in improving our knowledge base of what sort of monitoring is being performed in different parts of the Big Cypress area. (4) **Sub-itemization of restoration projects.** Tim Howard suggested breaking larger restoration projects into smaller bit-size chunks. For example, restoration of the Camp Keais Strand consists of a number of projects, some large and some small, that could be more easily accomplished by identifying them as smaller individual projects. The same concept could be applied to OK Slough, Tamiami Trail, etc. (5) **Coordinating with the Watershed Initiatives.** The group discussed the opportunity of cross-coordinating on the Big Cypress, Naples, and Estero Bay Watershed Initiatives. Jason Lauritsen commented that these initiatives are a good source of funds for the smaller scale restoration projects. (6) **Working Group coordination.** Carrie Beeler discussed the need to keep the momentum moving forward on our interactions with the Working Group. She indicated that the Working Group was very interested in the Wordstork Flow Ways project and other projects and that the ball was in our court to keep them informed. (7) **Enhancing the hydrologic conditions report.** Bob discussed the idea of expanding the hydrologic conditions report to include hydrographic summaries of other areas in the basin (Corkscrew, etc), and making the graphics available from the web as opposed to sending them by email.

Picayune Strand Restoration. Mike Duever provided an overview on the status of the Picayune Strand Restoration. Ideas and concepts discussed in his presentation include the following. 200,000 land owners were involved in the government buyback of the

land, and that 2 still remain. The original land development scheme resulted in construction of 280 miles of road and 48 miles of canal through the ecosystem. The project led to large scale dewatering of the landscape, and massive invasion of sabal palms, especially in the cypress strand areas. In 1996, alternative 3C was identified by the Big Cypress Basin and estimated at a cost of \$15 million. Involvement of the USACE has resulted in consideration of alternatives D1, D2, and D3 in order to provide more flood control for Northern Golden Gate Estates. The original 1996 plan consisted of three pumps with 200, 500, and 160 cfs capacity. The new plan calls for three pumps at 1000, 2000, and 800 cfs capacity. It calls for adding 83 plugs of varying width and removal of 227 miles of road. Operation of the pumps and facility will cost around \$3 million per year. Water will be spread south by a series of spreader canals. Berms will be replaced around the project area near NE Belle Meade, 6Ls, and Port of the Islands. The project is estimated to cost around \$100 million. It is included under the ACCELER8 program. The current status of the project is that northern Prairie Canal has been filled in with plugs of variable width using indigenous sediment present along the bank. The PIR for the rest of the project is out for review. The project is estimated to start in about 2 years, but the canals cannot be filled in until the pumps are ready. Operation of how waters will be regulated with the pumps are under discussion. A rainfall-driven regime would be preferable for the ecosystem. There is also a concern that too much pumping may dewater the Northern Golden Gate Estates area, rather than just provide “current level” flood control protection. Approximately 30 acres of contaminated agricultural soils are in the process of being treated. Mike Savarese discussed the idea of monitoring to link flow changes to salinity response in the downstream estuary. Mike Duever commented that pumping water to the Picayne Strand is constrained between “pumping too little”, causing flooding to the north, and “pumping too much”, resulting in artificial drying of the lands north of I75. Mike Duever commented that the same idea of plugging Prairie Canal could be applied to the southern stretch of Barron River Canal, and if that scenario occurs, excess water from the Northern Estates could be directed down the I75 canal to the Barron River Canal. Mike Duever commented that the “no pumps” alternative caused flooding in the Northern Estates, and that did not get as much water as desirable into the Picayne Strand.

Mike Shirley led a discussion on results of a side scan radar initiative used to map basal structure, oyster reefs, and grass beds of select bays in the 10000 Islands. Karen Bickford suggested that the mapping technique would be used to assess estuarine health and track changes in estuaries. Mike Shirley commented that getting this work done in several areas is critical to understand the ecosystem status at our reference sites in addition to areas that are being threatened by upstream development. Mike Shirley also provided an update on water quality reporting for the reserve at select locations in the estuary.

Bob Sobczak presented the **hydrologic and rainfall conditions update**. This past year’s rainy season was shown to be below normal for southwest Florida despite all the scare from the active hurricane season. The rainy season had a relatively late start thanks to a very dry May and a below normal June and most of July. A tropical system just prior to Charley and Charley itself dropped lots of rain in Southwest Florida in early August, but Jeanne and Francis dropped little rain in our area (but dropped lots of rain in the Upper

Kissimmee watershed). The rainy season ended with below average rainfall and the fall and winter season to date has seen very little rain despite the presence of an El Nino condition brewing in the equatorial Pacific off the coast of Peru. The Big Cypress area averaged 40 inches of rain this rainy season (May-Oct), in comparison to 50 inches over the past 3 years. This year's rainy season was comparable to the drought season of 2000. The Lake Okeechobee and WCA3A hydrographic summaries were discussed. Discharges down the Caloosahatchee and St Lucie were compared to low level discharges in the winter. Water stage after the onslaught of hurricanes was compared to previous year conditions.

The group led a roundtable discussion on **breaking environmental news in southwest Florida** and the rest of the Everglades. Carrie Beeler discussed the release of Audubon's plan for the EAA, and projected changes occurring with regards to land management in that area. The current status of the Ave Maria project was discussed. The current status of the Tamiami Trail project was discussed on the east and west sides of the Trail. Mike Duever suggested that the Big Cypress Science Plan add fire management with respect to ecosystem preservation. Jason Lauritsen recommended that the Big Cypress RCT should play a bigger role in the Watershed Council.

Upcoming Meetings:

- A meeting (possibly Dec 17th) to discuss in more detail the agenda items presented in this meeting.
- Our next quarterly meeting will be on Friday, March 4, 2005 at 9:00 (Rookery Bay).

Big Cypress Restoration Coordination Team

December 16, 2004

Rookery Bay Conference Room

Meeting Minutes

DRAFT December 20, 2004

Members:

Organization	Member	Alternate
Army Corps of Engineers	TBA	
Audubon	Jason Lauritsen	Ed Carlson
Big Cypress Basin	Clarence Tears	Ananta Nath
Big Cypress Nat'l Preserve	Bob Sobczak	Damon Doumlele
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US EPA		
US Fish and Wildlife	Art Roybal	Daryl Thomas
USGS	Eduardo Patino	
WilsonMiller	Mike Bauer	

Those in bold were present at the meeting.

The purpose of this meeting was to go over, in more detail, the 6 annual agenda items discussed at the last quarterly meeting.

6 Annual Agenda Items:

1. Market the Big Cypress Science Plan
2. Create a subregional regional restoration project list & market it
3. Inventory of monitoring efforts
4. Coordinate Big Cypress Watershed initiatives
5. Expansion of hydrologic & meteorological reports

1. Big Cypress Science Plan

- Mike Savarese noted that the BC Science Plan needs to be marketed since this resource seems to be underutilized by the groups in which it was originally given to, but needs to be updated (last revision was 2 yrs ago) before mass producing the plan. At this time a workshop was thought to be the best format in which to discuss the link between Science Plan and restoration projects needs. Mike Duever pointed out that fire is currently not included, but should be considered during the updating process.
- It was suggested that the Science Plan not only be delivered, but also presented so that the managers, researchers, etc understand how to use the plan to its fullest capacity.
- Dave Ceilley announced that the Conservancy of Southwest Florida is co-hosting a conference from January 14-16, 2005 in Naples and this event would be an opportunity to present the BC Science Plan.
- Facilitators: Mike Savarese & Bob Sobczak

2. Create a Subregional Restoration Project List & Market It

- Bob Sobczak suggested that the members of BC RCT could identify the smaller projects that have been overlooked (Ex: Loop Road plugging, OK Slough & SR 29) thus bringing these projects to the attention of others that would then work with us.
- Mike Savarese stated that work on a Restoration Project Listing process was started 2 yrs ago and should be reinstated. The past list and survey will need to be re-evaluated.
- It was commented that it may be possible to tie in with the "Coastal Corridors" effort (contact: Jim Beever) to develop a GIS-based map organized into subregions (Eastern BC, Fakahatchee, Estero, Corkscrew, Naples Bay, Picayune, Panther Preserve, Coco, OK Slough, etc) for the purpose of better monitoring and identify projects within these regions as well as Lee County's Master Mitigation Plan.
- Various purposes for such a plan were laid out. They include: the need to focus and organize restoration, as opposed to it occurring piece meal, to give smaller projects a step up on potential funding sources, to inform

agency reps on the specific restoration needs for a given area or resource, to educate the public and advocacy groups, and to become a potential source for mitigation monies that are currently being underutilized.

- Directing mitigation dollars for restoration projects is an important funding source for these smaller projects that BC RCT will continue to look into.
- Mac Hatcher offered to present Conservation Collier's restoration projects at our upcoming BC RCT March meeting.
- Facilitators: Mike Savarese & Bob Sobczak

3. Inventory of monitoring efforts

- Bob Sobczak began with the fact that despite every agency's on-going monitoring efforts, this information is not often shared with others in an effective and easily accessible format such as an established website.
- It was suggested that we work with Jill Trubey's current database and that during our March meeting the BC RCT members establish guidelines (ex: latitude & longitude in UTM's) so that everyone is using the same format as well as what data would be most useful to a larger audience (e.g. surface water levels, rainfall, etc.).
- It was suggested that we start with inventorying a relatively simple parameter such as water level or rainfall as a pilot case
- Facilitators: Karen Bickford, Brenda Brooks-Solveson

4. Coordinate Big Cypress Watershed Initiatives

- Daryl Thomas volunteered to contact SFWMD to get an update on the status of BC and EB Watershed Initiatives and pass on the update to BC RCT at our March meeting.
- Mike Savarese suggested that BC RCT offer to take on the responsibility for coordinating the BC.
- It was brought up that we may miss funding opportunities for this year if we wait until our March meeting.
- Facilitator: Daryl Thomas

5. Expansion of Hydrologic & Meteorological Reports

- Bob Sobczak suggested that we expand on our monitory efforts and include information from Corkscrew, CREW, Lake Trafford, Faka Union, DB Hydro, etc.
- Bob Sobczak will work on a website so that all this information will be available as opposed to weekly emails.
- Facilitator: Bob Sobczak