

There are no other Everglades in the world.

They are, they have always been, one of the unique regions of the earth, remote, never wholly known. Nothing anywhere else is like them: their vast glittering openness, wider than the enormous visible round of the horizon, the racing free saltness and sweetness of their massive winds, under the dazzling blue heights of space. They are unique also in the simplicity, the diversity, and the related harmony of the forms of life they enclose. The miracle of light pours over the green and brown expanse of saw grass and of water, shining and slow-moving below, the grass and water that is the central fact of the Everglades of Florida. It is a river of grass.

Marjory Stoneman Douglas in The Everglades: River of Grass

America's Everglades are in Serious Peril

“River of Grass” captures the beauty of the Everglades and the rich complexity of its landscapes and seascapes, sawgrass sloughs, cypress swamps and coastal lagoons and bays. The greater Everglades ecosystem, called the south Florida ecosystem, stretches south from Orlando through the Chain of Lakes, the Kissimmee Valley, Lake Okeechobee, the remaining Everglades, and on to the waters of Florida Bay and the coral reefs. This south Florida ecosystem is much larger than what most people see when they visit the “Everglades” — usually just Everglades National Park.

The Everglades of today are not the same place that Mrs. Douglas wrote about in 1947. People in great numbers have encroached upon the ecosystem that once was the domain of panthers, alligators and flocks of birds so vast that they would darken the sky. With the arrival of people came the desire to manage the water, to tame the free flowing River of Grass from Lake Okeechobee to the Florida Keys.

The Central and Southern Florida Project was authorized 50 years ago to provide flood protection and fresh water to south Florida.

What is the Existing Central and Southern Florida Project?

Created through legislation in 1948, south Florida's existing water management system – the Central and Southern Florida Project – encompasses 18,000 square miles. The project covers 16 counties and includes 1,000 miles of canals, 720 miles of levees, and almost 200 water control structures. This project provides water supply, flood protection, water management and other benefits to south Florida. However, it is 50 years old and must be modernized to address its negative consequences on the environment of south Florida.

This project accomplished its intended purpose and allowed people to more easily live on the land. It did so, however, at tremendous ecological cost to the Everglades. While the population of people has risen from 500,000 in the 1950s to more than 6 million today, the numbers of native birds and other wildlife have dwindled and some have vanished. The size of the Everglades has been reduced by half. The splendor that was the Everglades is rapidly being lost.

INTRODUCTION

Water is the lifeblood of the south Florida ecosystem. Compared to the historic Everglades, approximately 70 percent less water flows through the ecosystem today. The quality of the water that does enter the ecosystem has been seriously degraded. It does not follow the timing and duration of the natural Everglades nor can it move freely throughout the entire system. The whole south Florida ecosystem has suffered. The health of Lake Okeechobee, the second largest freshwater lake wholly in the United States and an important home to fish and wildlife, is seriously threatened. A number of plants and animals that live in south Florida and the Everglades are in danger of becoming extinct because their habitat has been damaged,

It is important to remember that this restoration effort does not affect just south Florida, but is of national and international significance

reduced or eliminated. Clean water is not available to the estuaries and bays that are critical nurseries and homes to many fish and wildlife. There is not enough water for the people either. Water shortages and water restrictions are now a way of life in some parts of south Florida.

The Water Resources Development Acts of 1992 and 1996 provided the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers with the authority to review the current Central and Southern Florida Project. The Corps was asked to develop a Comprehensive Plan to restore and preserve south Florida's natural ecosystem, while enhancing water supplies and maintaining flood protection. The resulting Central and Southern Florida Project Comprehensive Review Study – commonly called the Restudy – was led by the Army Corps of Engineers and the South Florida Water Management District. The Restudy was accomplished by a team of more than 100 ecologists, hydrologists, engineers and other professionals from more than



Guiding Principles for the Comprehensive Plan

1. The overarching objective of the Comprehensive Plan is the restoration, preservation and protection of the south Florida ecosystem while providing for other water-related needs of the region.
2. The Comprehensive Plan is based on the best available science, and independent scientific review is an integral part of its development and implementation.
3. The Comprehensive Plan was developed through an inclusive and open process that engaged all stakeholders and interest groups.
4. All applicable federal, tribal, state and local agencies were full partners and their views were considered fully.
5. The Comprehensive Plan is a flexible plan that is based on the concept of adaptive assessment — recognizing that modifications will be made in the future based on new information.

30 federal, state, tribal, and local agencies. Unlike most previous studies, the Restudy took a system-wide look at water.

The Central and Southern Florida Project Comprehensive Plan provides the road map for restoring and protecting the south Florida ecosystem. This Plan “gets the water right” by addressing four fundamental issues: the quantity, quality, timing and distribution of water.

As Mrs. Douglas wrote, “There are no other Everglades in the world.” The significance of the remaining Everglades to the nation and the world has been affirmed time and again. Congress established Everglades National Park. The Everglades have also been designated an International Biosphere Reserve, a World Heritage Site, and a Wetland of International Significance. Identified as one of the world’s major ecosystem types, the Everglades are home to 68 threatened or endangered plant and animal species. The benefits and functions of these plants and animals may never be known if we do not restore and protect their habitat. Saving the Everglades requires us to save the entire south Florida ecosystem.

The ecological and cultural significance of the Everglades is equal to the Grand Canyon, the Rocky Mountains or the Mississippi River. As responsible stewards of our natural and cultural resources, we cannot sit idly by and watch any of these disappear. The Everglades deserves the same recognition and support.

What is the Purpose of the Comprehensive Plan?

Often described as the world’s largest ecosystem restoration effort, the primary and overarching purpose of the Comprehensive Plan is to restore the south Florida ecosystem, which includes the Everglades. This purpose has guided all aspects of the Plan’s development and proposed implementation. As required by law, the Plan also provides for the other water-related needs of the region including urban and agricultural water supply and flood protection.