

South Dade Watershed Project

The South Miami - Dade Watershed Study

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The Study and Plan

A major planning effort is currently underway for the entire south Dade watershed. The ELULC is working with other environmental advocacy organizations to monitor the South Dade Watershed Plan - a project being conducted by Miami - Dade County and the South Florida Regional Planning Council. This project is massive. It is intended to create a land use, water use and infrastructure plan for the entire South Dade watershed. The resulting land use, regulatory, development and other plans that it will yield will either thwart or facilitate each of the southern Everglades projects, such as C111, IOP, CSOP, Modified Water Deliveries, 8. 5 Square Mile Area, Lakebelt, and others.

The planning process is a collaborative effort of Miami-Dade County, the South Florida Water Management District and the South Florida Regional Planning Council. The Plan is legally required by the Miami Dade County Comprehensive Development Master Plan (Comprehensive Plan) as a result of comprehensive plan amendments adopted to address major land and water use conflicts that were brought to a head by the failed proposal to convert the former Homestead Air Reserve Base to a major commercial airport. The Plan is a multi-million dollar project to be developed by a consultant under the direction of the aforementioned agencies. It covers the entire South Dade watershed, which includes many thousands of acres of undeveloped land and impacts Biscayne Bay, Biscayne National Park, the Everglades and Everglades National Park, the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, and the agricultural area of Miami-Dade County, as well as urbanized south Miami-Dade County. The existing conflicts and problems the study is to address include altered timing and volumes of freshwater flow, non-point source pollution from certain agricultural, industrial and urban land uses, and continued population growth and development - which exacerbates each of these conflicts and converts more wildlife habitat to urban uses.

The Project is being done through a committee, which will ultimately make the recommendations to Miami-Dade County, the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) and other agencies. The resulting Plan is to consider all relevant science related to surface and ground waters, wetlands, flood plains, land use patterns, existing rules, and other information, and then result in recommendations to Miami-Dade County for changes to its Comprehensive Plan and Land Development Code and to other agencies - such as the South Florida Water

Management District, whose wetland, consumptive water use and other permitting rules significantly impact the development of this watershed. It is also to recommend a comprehensive Water Management Plan to the SFWMD.

The study is to be completed (recommendations submitted) by October 2005.

The specific legal authority and requirement for the Study comes from Land Use Policy 3E of the Miami-Dade County Comprehensive Development Master Plan, which states:

3E. By January 1, 2002, Miami-Dade County shall develop and initiate implementation of an integrated land use and water management plan for southeastern Miami-Dade County, based on a Comprehensive Study (the "Study") as described below. The January 1, 2002 date may be extended as necessary by a subsequent CDMP amendment filed by the County. The Plan will direct the comprehensive management of land uses and surface and ground water, its quality, quantity, timing, and distribution. The plan will have two time horizons: 1) a short-term component extending through the year 2015, and 2) a long-term component extending through the year 2050. The overall goal of the plan will be to optimize the economic, social, and environmental values currently recognized in the County's Comprehensive Development Master Plan in the study area from the C-2 canal basin south to US-1 as a primary emphasis, and the C-3 to C-2 canal basins as a secondary area.

2. This plan and study, to be known collectively as the South Dade Land Use and Water Management Plan (the "Plan"), will be prepared by an impartial person or entity approved by the Board. The selection process will include representatives from the Biscayne National Park Buffer "Land Bank Trust" Working Group (the "Working Group") on the selection committee. The Working Group will review and make recommendations regarding the final RFP.

3. The Plan must fulfill the following specific objectives:

- a. To identify and protect lands, including their uses and functions, that are essential for preserving the environmental, economic, and community values of Biscayne National Park;
- b. To identify and establish mechanisms for protecting constitutional private property rights of owners of land identified in 3(a) above;
- c. To support a viable, balanced economy including agriculture, recreation, tourism, and urban development in the Plan area; and
- d. To assure compatible land uses and zoning decisions in the Study Area consistent with long term objectives for a sustainable South Miami- Dade.

4. The Study must project, examine, and analyze surface- and ground water uses and corresponding land uses, including water uses for sustaining and restoring the environment, sustaining economically viable agriculture, providing flood protection, supplying and protecting drinking water, and other water uses pertinent to probable land uses. The Study must provide data and analysis necessary to thoroughly support the South Dade Land Use and Water Management Plan. The Study must include an examination and analysis of:

- a. Examples and models of mechanisms of conservation;
- b. All relevant studies pertaining to the Study Area;
- c. Property rights of landowners as they relate to objectives of the plan;
- d. Existing and needed numeric standards for quality, quantity, timing and distribution of waters into and of Biscayne National Park;
- e. Existing and needed studies of freshwater and groundwater supply;
- f. Methods and policies for best management practices of all sources of water runoff and levels of service for flood control in the Study Area;
- g. Socioeconomic factors for optimization of the objectives to the Plan; and
- h. Ways to integrate the Plan into the Central and Southern Florida Restudy.

5. It is recognized that the subject Plan will provide extensive information that will greatly assist in the consideration of proposed new development in the Study Area. Until the plan is approved, the Board shall appoint a review committee, fairly representing the interests of the Working Group, to evaluate

and make recommendations on all requested development approvals and CDMP amendments in the Study Area outside the UDB which require initial approval at a public hearing. The committee's recommendations shall specifically address potential impacts on Biscayne National Park and consistency with the relevant provisions of the CDMP. Until the Plan is completed and adopted, the appropriate County Boards will apply heightened scrutiny to proposed changes in the UDB, land use designations and, zoning, including unusual uses. If implementation of the Plan is not initiated by January 1, 2002, the BCC shall re-evaluate and adopt interim measures to further the objectives of the Plan upon recommendation by the review committee."

This is the language which gives the Committee its charge and governs the substance and purpose of the Study.

Current Status

Since its initial meeting on July 26, 2001, the Advisory Committee, whose members were appointed by the Miami-Dade County Commission, has met approximately 10 times. Detailed minutes of the meetings, as well as copies of exhibits that were presented at them can be found at www.sfrpc.com/institute.htm, then "Projects", then "South Miami Dade Watershed Study Advisory Committee".

Most of the work that has taken place so far has been the selection of a consultant to perform the Study. The committee has hired the team of Keith and Schnars to be the consultant. This hiring was done after seven (7) proposals had been received in response to the RFP. A Selection Committee was formed which included members representing the Advisory Council, the County, the South Florida Regional Planning Council (RPC), the community, the economy and the environment.

To date, the committee has developed a vision statement and heard presentations (available on website) from its members regarding their interests and views regarding what the study should accomplish. They have also crafted a preliminary outline of the parameters of the Study which is as follows:

1. Identify the best use for all land areas
2. Ensure decisions enhance instead of detract from property value
3. Project expected 2020 and 2050 area agricultural land requirements...develop alternative land use plans (environmental boundaries, compatible rural development, urban, etc.)
4. our task is to take data and further refine it
5. develop best land uses by coming up with a plan
6. agriculture needs flexibility to meet changing world and area conditions
7. How to regulate water without destroying agriculture.
8. Drought conditions and the water table; preserving agricultural industry beyond profitability
9. The timing and distribution of water supply for agriculture.
10. Impacts of large land uses on water quality.
11. Set water quality targets for south Biscayne Bay, for a defined set of parameters identify lands essential to the health of south Biscayne Bay and Biscayne National Park
12. Determine and make full use of potential of national parks as pillars of local economy
13. Defining water quality standards is how we get to a healthier parks
14. Developing a scientific basis to identify land to be conserved for Biscayne National Park protection and establishing a realistic funding mechanism.
15. Outline what compatible enterprises are appropriate for the South Miami -Dade Watershed
16. Providing infrastructure an issue? First need to decide on land use
17. Limited urban growth (via zoning regulations)

18. Project expected 2020 and 2050 area agricultural land requirements...develop alternative land use plans (environmental boundaries, compatible rural development, urban, etc.)
19. Achieve set water quality targets by definition of sustainable urban development and outlining water quality components of sustainable urban development
20. How will we meet future housing needed given NIMBY (Not In My Backyard) attitude/ County plan?
21. What makes this area different from other areas of South Florida
22. Look at incentives and encouragement
23. Current conditions
24. Impact of planned projects
25. Balance flooding/quality/distribution/timing and supply of water
26. This applies to all land uses: agriculture, residential, parks
27. Articulate the elements of a 50-100 year vision.
28. Stormwater runoff impacts/tied to population increases and land use changes.
29. Financing alternatives.
30. Who is responsible for maintaining canals?
31. Define the difference between a drainage ditch and a SFWMD canal.
32. Who is needed for implementation to take place?
33. Getting people to listen to the "locals".
34. Being aware of outside forces.
35. Coordination with ongoing projects (e.g. Miami Dade Flooding Study, CERP, MWD, C-111, etc.)

Aside from this, the Committee has not yet made any significant decisions. Most recently, it has been getting its new members up to speed regarding the role of the Committee and interests of the members.

The consultants will be surveying data regarding pertinent issues and putting together recommendations for how the comprehensive plan and developmental regulations should be changed. They will also analyze water management strategies, while the Committee gives constant direction over these activities. This process is expected to take approximately 18 months.

Conclusion

A major concern, and a major reason we think this project requires our attention, is that it could easily become a plan for how to maximize development potential in the region. It would be our objective to make this a plan for a land use and water management strategy that provides greater protection for the natural system and gives the southern Everglades CERP Projects the greatest opportunity to be successful. By and large, objective measures of success will be the achievement of land use and water use plans that meet the needs of the natural system in terms of spatial extent of lands and water quantities and timing as generally described in the CERP "Yellow Book" (adopted by the Federal restoration law as the "guideline" for restoration) and more recent technical information generated by the relevant Everglades restoration study teams. The actual implementation of Study recommendations through the adoption of formal comprehensive plan and regulatory changes would be a final measure of success.