

MEMORANDUM

TO: Governing Board Members

FROM: Kenneth G. Ammon, P.E., Deputy Executive Director, Everglades Restoration Resource Area *JBS* For KGA

DATE: February 2, 2009

SUBJECT: Boundary Revision for the Southern CREW Critical Restoration Project

Background: This project is located in southern Lee County bordering the western boundary of the Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed (CREW). The environmentally sensitive area east of the City of Bonita Springs has been altered by the construction of roads, house pads, agricultural berms and ditches. These alterations have resulted in restriction of the historical sheetflow, unnatural water impoundment and flooding, increased pollutant loading to the Imperial River and Estero Bay, and disruption of natural wetland functions. The original project called for the replacement of the Imperial Bonita Estates Bridge, replacement of the Kehl Canal Weir and modifications to its operating schedule, and the restoration of historic sheetflow by removal of canal and road berms, house pads and ditches. The original project boundary included up to 4,670 acres located upstream of the Kehl Canal weir. This area is hydrologically connected with the Corkscrew Swamp located nearby and upstream. The project also included acquisition of easements or other interests in the floodway downstream of the Kehl Canal weir, if needed to improve or preserve the floodway (Imperial River Flowway). There are no additional easements or other interests needed for the Imperial River Flowway. The revised project boundary will include 4,116 acres upstream of the Kehl Canal weir and will achieve the project's original objectives.

At Governing Board direction, staff has requested the assistance of Lee County in completing the acquisition of outstanding project lands. The Lee County Commission has agreed to assist by including the Southern CREW project footprint on its list of potential acquisition parcels. Acquisition will proceed as funds become available and in consideration of other County acquisition priorities.

To date, 3,684 acres have been acquired, the Imperial Bonita Estates Bridge has been removed and the Kehl Canal Weir has been replaced. In addition, exotic plants have been removed from 2,560 acres and hydropattern restoration has occurred on 640 acres of wetland.

This action by the Governing Board will allow District staff to complete permitting requirements, limit the number of parcels requiring acquisition to the remaining critical parcels, and allow hydropattern restoration of the revised project footprint to achieve the original goal of the Critical Project.

How this helps meet the District's 10-Year Strategic Plan: The Southern Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed is part of the District's Strategic Plan and Annual Work Plan. Revising the project boundary will address recent development within the original project boundary and the economic constraint of escalating land costs in the area. The revision lowers the project cost by reducing the number of acres required for acquisition.

Funding Source: No new funding is associated with this action.

This Board item impacts what areas of the District, both resource areas and geography: The Southern CREW Critical Project is located in southeastern Lee County. The project is located upstream of the Kehl Canal weir and discharges to the Imperial River and Estero Bay. This project will restore habitat, hydrology and natural sheet flow to the area located upstream of the Kehl Canal weir and associated hydrologically with the Corkscrew Swamp located nearby and upstream. The Everglades Restoration Resource Area will coordinate the remaining land acquisition and project implementation.

What concerns could this Board item raise? The project has completed four of the six original objectives with the final two being acquiring "up to 4,670 acres" upstream of the Kehl Canal weir, and restoring the historic sheetflow to the area. The Governing Board can expect some stakeholder input on the revised acreage and requests for assurances that the project will achieve its original goals with the revised boundary.

Why should the Governing Board approve this item? The District has committed to the implementation of CERP, which includes the Southern CREW Critical Project. Revising the project footprint will allow for the completion of the project in a timely manner and will also eliminate any alleged perceived threat of condemnation on those parcels removed from the project boundary. Revision of the footprint will reduce the need for additional future land acquisition funds.

Attachments – Resolution, Maps
KGA/jms