Reviving THE river OF grass

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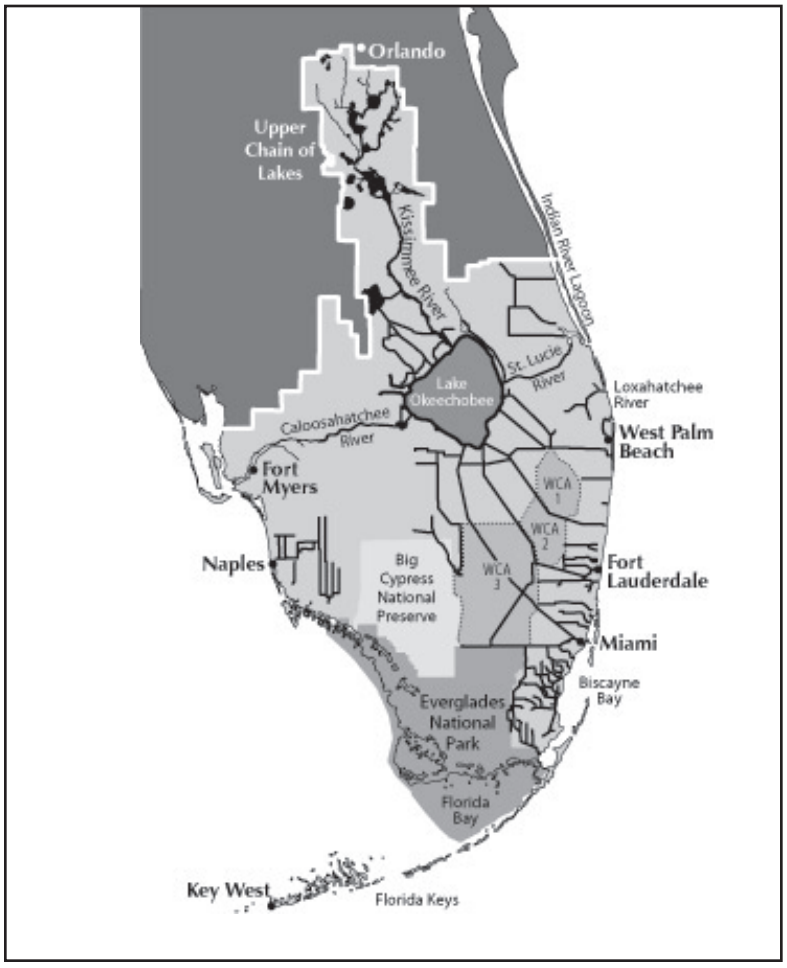
America's Everglades was once a vibrant, free-flowing "river of grass," extending from the Kissimmee Chain of Lakes near Orlando…all the way to the southernmost tip of the peninsula at Florida Bay.

Over time, significant development took place within the region, allowing for tremendous population and economic growth. The construction of canals and water control structures, along with increased urban and agricultural water needs, contributed to unintended consequences – loss of 50% of wetlands and floodplains, disrupted timing of water flows, deterioration of water quality, reductions in wading birds, declining lake and estuary health and loss of native habitat to exotic species.



Recognizing that a healthy ecosystem is vital to a healthy economy, the State of Florida and the South Florida Water Management District are committed to revitalizing and protecting this national treasure. Significant progress has been made in many areas.

The potential acquisition of vast tracts of long sought-after land in the Everglades Agricultural Area now offers the unprecedented opportunity to reestablish an historic connection between Lake Okeechobee and the remnant Everglades through a managed system of water storage and water quality treatment. Acquiring this "missing link" of real estate is expected to build upon and enhance the 30-year State-Federal Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) and the State's Northern Everglades program to restore and protect Lake Okeechobee and the coastal estuaries.

(See Progress to Date on back)

Kissimmee River Restoration

- The acquisition of 102,064 acres of needed land is complete.
- To date, 9.5 miles of channelized river have been backfilled by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.
- When complete, the project will restore an estimated 40 square miles of river/floodplain ecosystem including 27,000 acres of wetlands, 43 continuous miles of meandering river and will provide habitat for over 300 species, including the endangered bald eagle, snail kite, and wood stork.

Everglades Funding/Land Acquisition

- Since 2000, Florida has invested approximately $2.4 billion to improve the quality, timing and distribution of water in the ecosystem, including approximately $325 million in construction currently under way or completed as a part of the State's expedited projects and Northern Everglades restoration.
- To date, more than $1.5 billion has been invested to acquire the lands needed to implement CERP projects. As of March 2008, 58 percent or 224,489 acres of the estimated needed lands have been acquired.
- In addition to acquiring land and constructing projects, Florida has invested more than $1.8 billion alone to improve water quality in the Everglades.
- In 2007, the State expanded Florida's Lake Okeechobee Protection Act to improve the environmental health of Lake Okeechobee, the St Lucie and Caloosahatchee estuaries, and extended Everglades funding through 2020 to dedicate another $2.3 billion toward restoration of the South Florida ecosystem.

Expedited Projects

- 99 percent of the land needed for the District's suite of expedited projects is in public ownership.
- Issued initial certificates of participation revenue bonds for expediting restoration – the country's first-time use of this funding mechanism for environmental purposes.
- Planning, design and/or construction in progress on all expedited project components.

Everglades Water Quality Improvements

- The State of Florida is successfully implementing water quality improvements and lowering phosphorus levels in Everglades-bound waters. This is being accomplished through the implementation of farming Best Management Practices (BMPs) and construction of Stormwater Treatment Areas (STAs) in compliance with the State's Everglades Forever Act.
- At present, 52,000 acres of land south of Lake Okeechobee have been converted to STAs, yielding 45,000 acres of effective treatment marsh. One of them, at almost 17,000 acres, is the largest constructed wetland in the world.
- During Water Year 2007, these treatment areas captured and treated nearly one million-acre feet of water, improving the quality of water flowing into the Everglades and reducing phosphorus loads by 71 percent.
- Everglades Agricultural Area (EAA) landowners also continue to meet the phosphorus load reduction requirements of Florida's Everglades Forever Act through the use of BMPs. The most recent three-year trend shows a 40-percent reduction, well above the amount required by law.
- To date, BMPs and STAs combined have prevented more than 2,600 metric tons of phosphorus from entering the Everglades. A decade ago, phosphorus concentrations leaving the EAA averaged 170 parts per billion (ppb). They now average below 50 ppb and have been documented as low as 12 ppb.