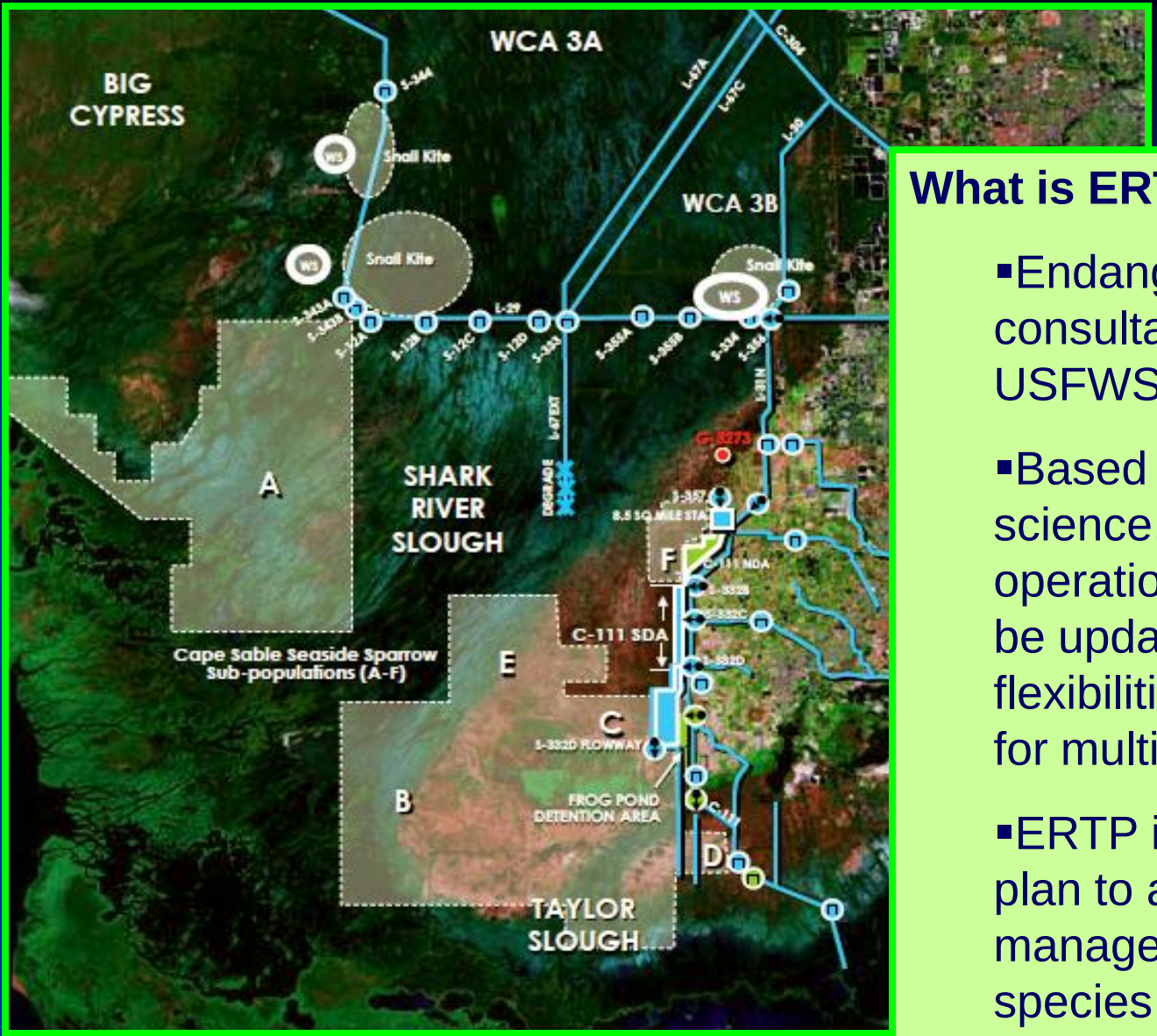
Everglades Restoration Transition Plan – Phase 1

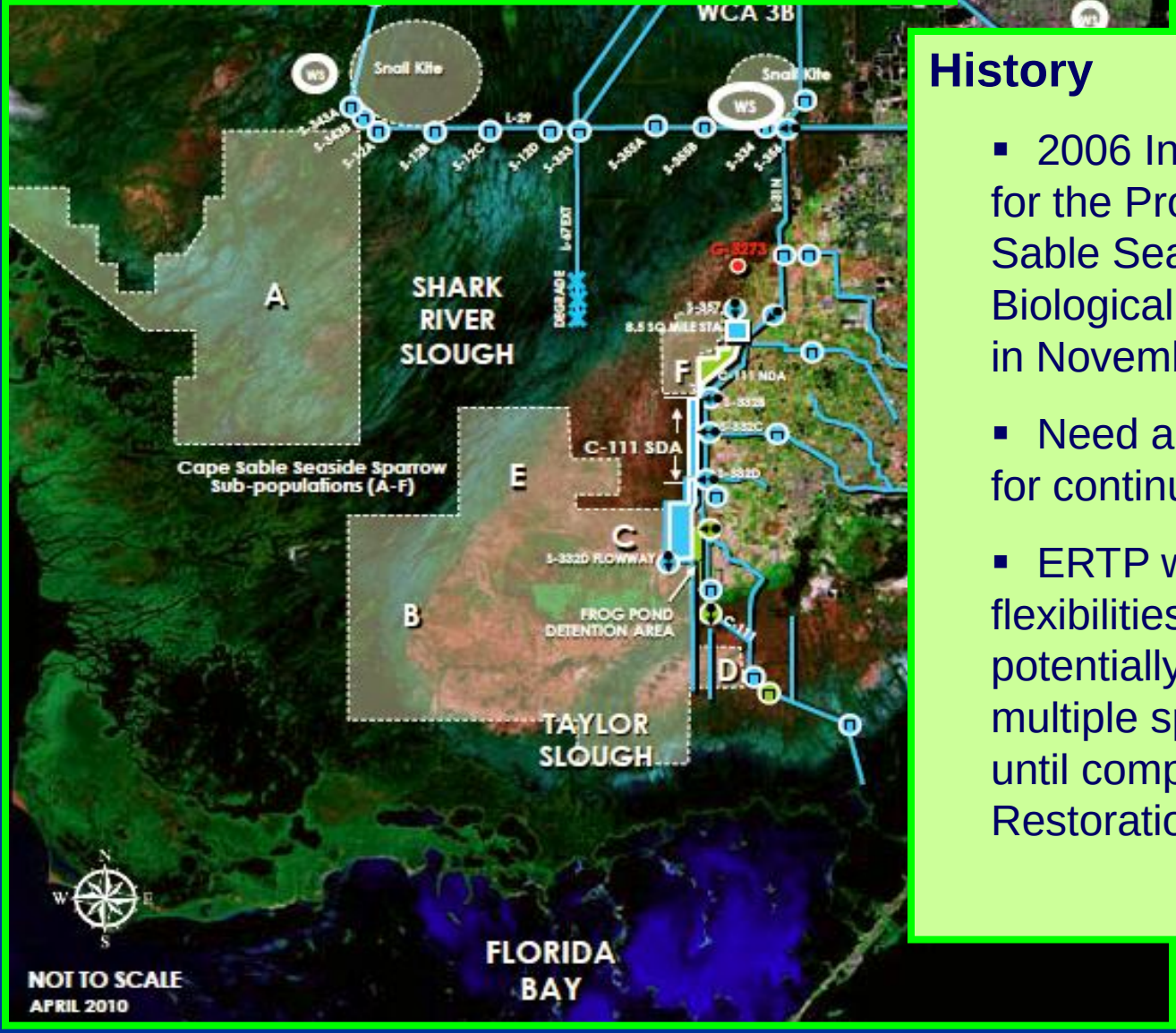


Everglades Restoration Transition Plan – Phase 1

What is ERTP – Phase 1?

- Endangered Species consultation between USFWS and USACE
- Based on the best available science, the current operational plan (IOP) will be updated with some flexibilities to better manage for multiple species
- ERTP is an operational plan to allow for management of multiple species as we transition towards Everglades restoration

Everglades Restoration Transition Plan (Phase I)



History

- 2006 Interim Operational Plan for the Protection of the Cape Sable Seaside Sparrow (IOP) Biological Opinion (BO) expires in November 2010
- Need a new BA, BO and EIS for continued operations
- ERTP will use operational flexibilities to maintain or potentially improve conditions for multiple species and habitats until completion of Everglades Restoration

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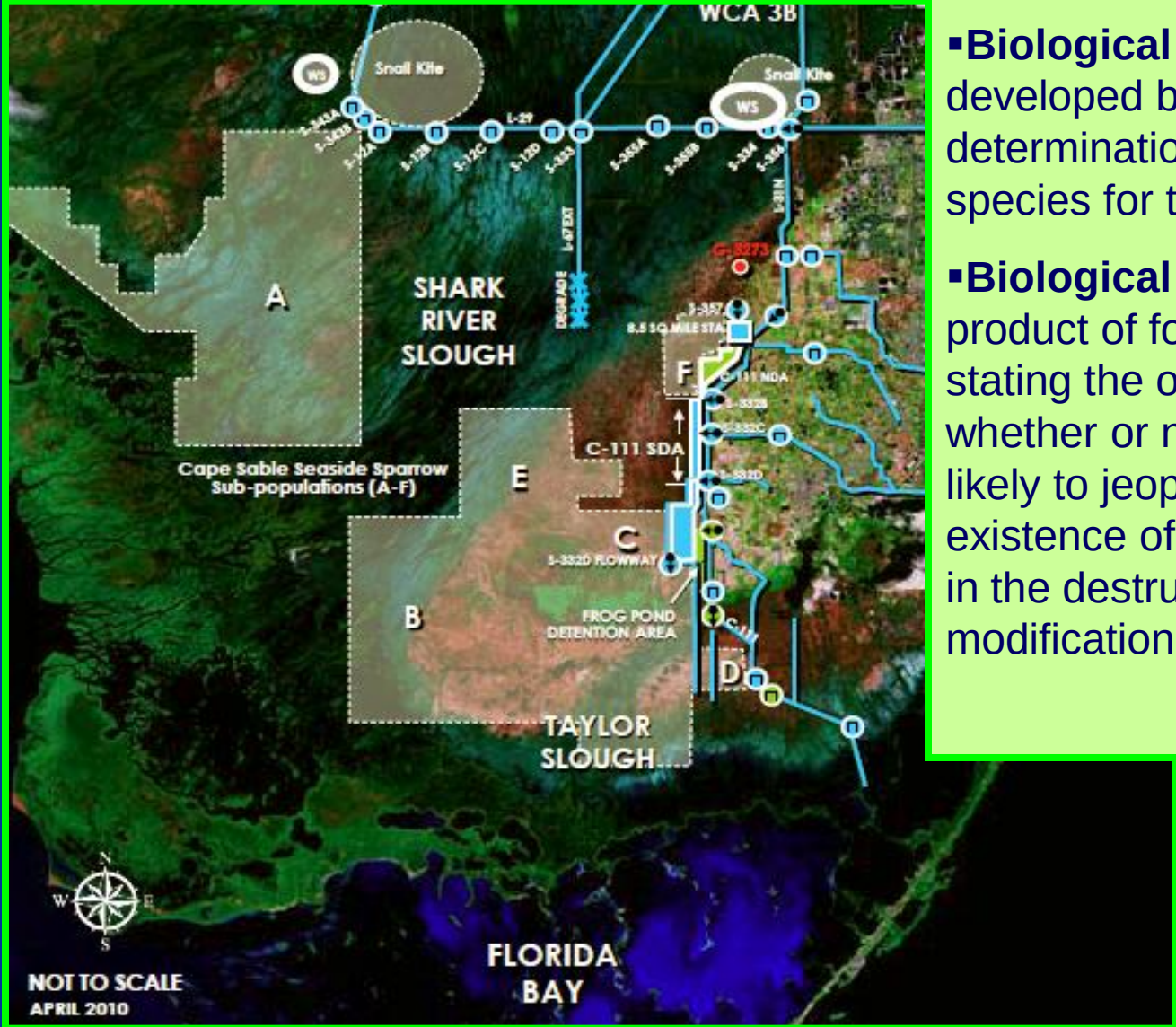
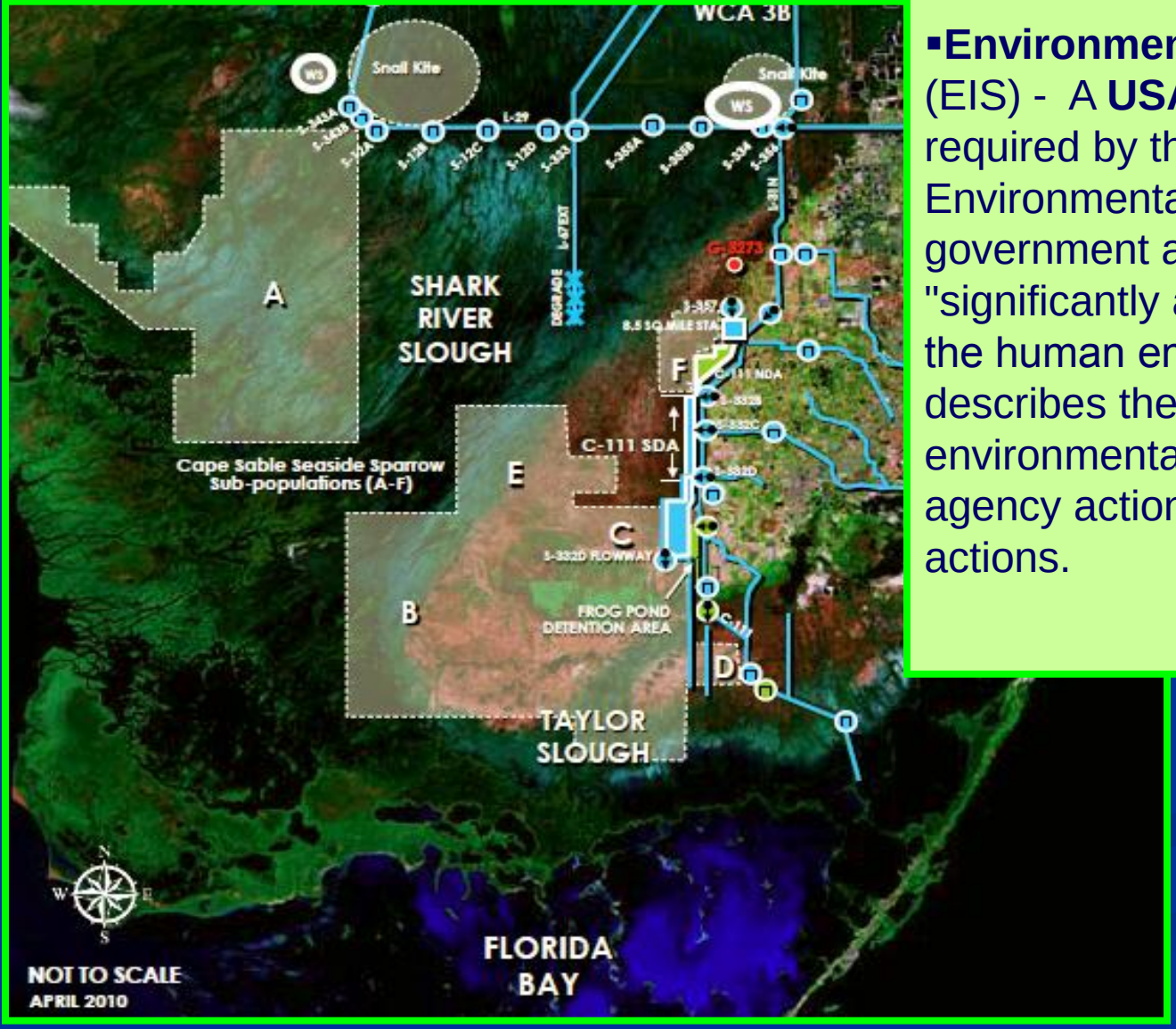


Products

- **Biological Assessment** (BA) is developed by **USACE** and lists the determinations of effects for each species for the proposed action
- **Biological Opinion** (BO) is a product of formal consultation, stating the opinion of the **USFWS** on whether or not a federal action is likely to jeopardize the continued existence of listed species or result in the destruction or adverse modification of critical habitat.

Everglades Restoration Transition Plan (Phase I)



Products Cont.

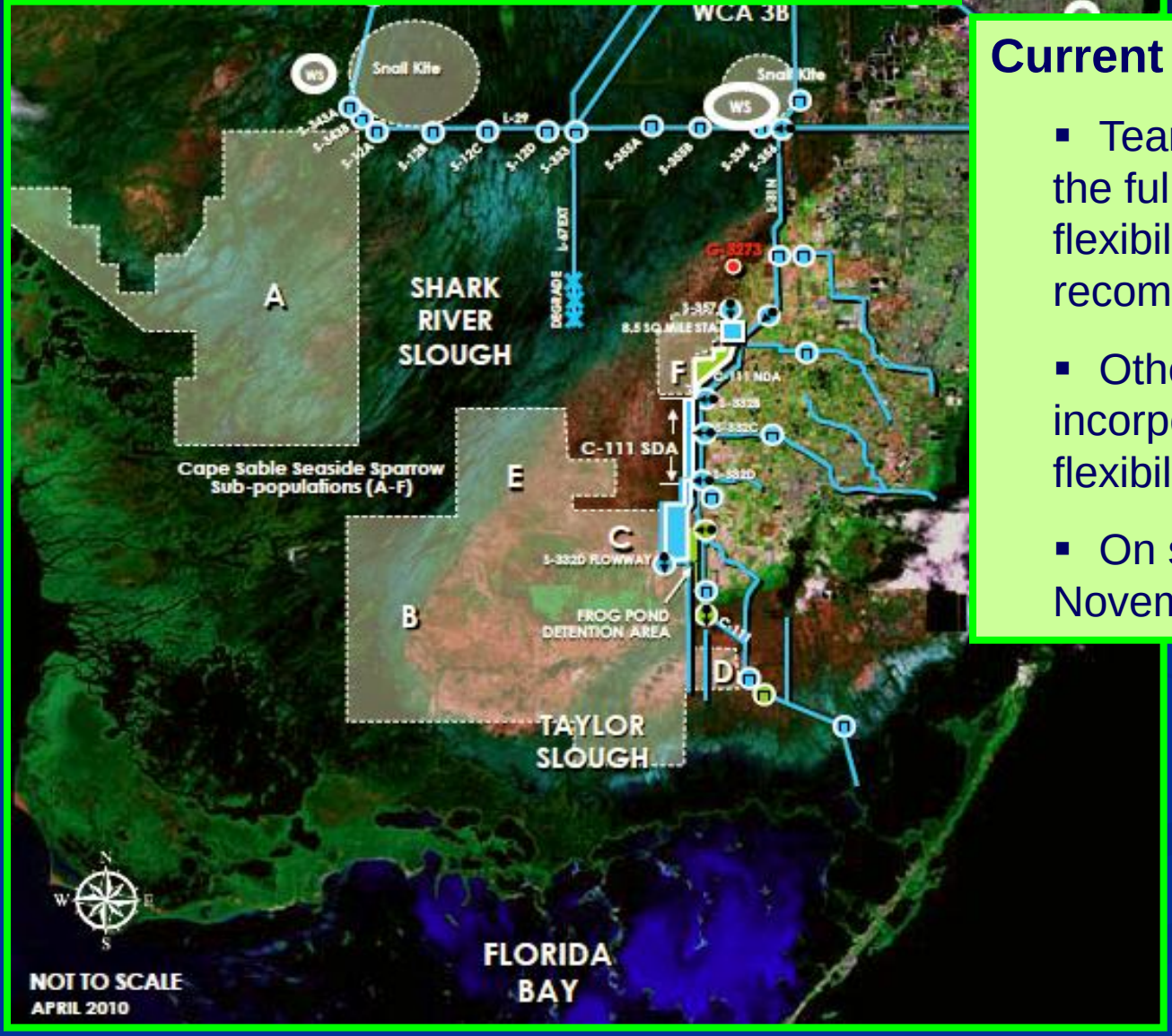
- **Environmental Impact Statement** (EIS) - A **USACE** document required by the National Environmental Policy Act for federal government agency actions "significantly affecting the quality of the human environment." An EIS describes the positive and negative environmental effects of proposed agency action - and cites alternative actions.

Everglades Restoration Transition Plan (Phase I)

Goals

- Multi-species management
- Operational flexibility to allow water managers to use scientific input on a real-time basis
- Monitor to improve available data for planning of future operational plans

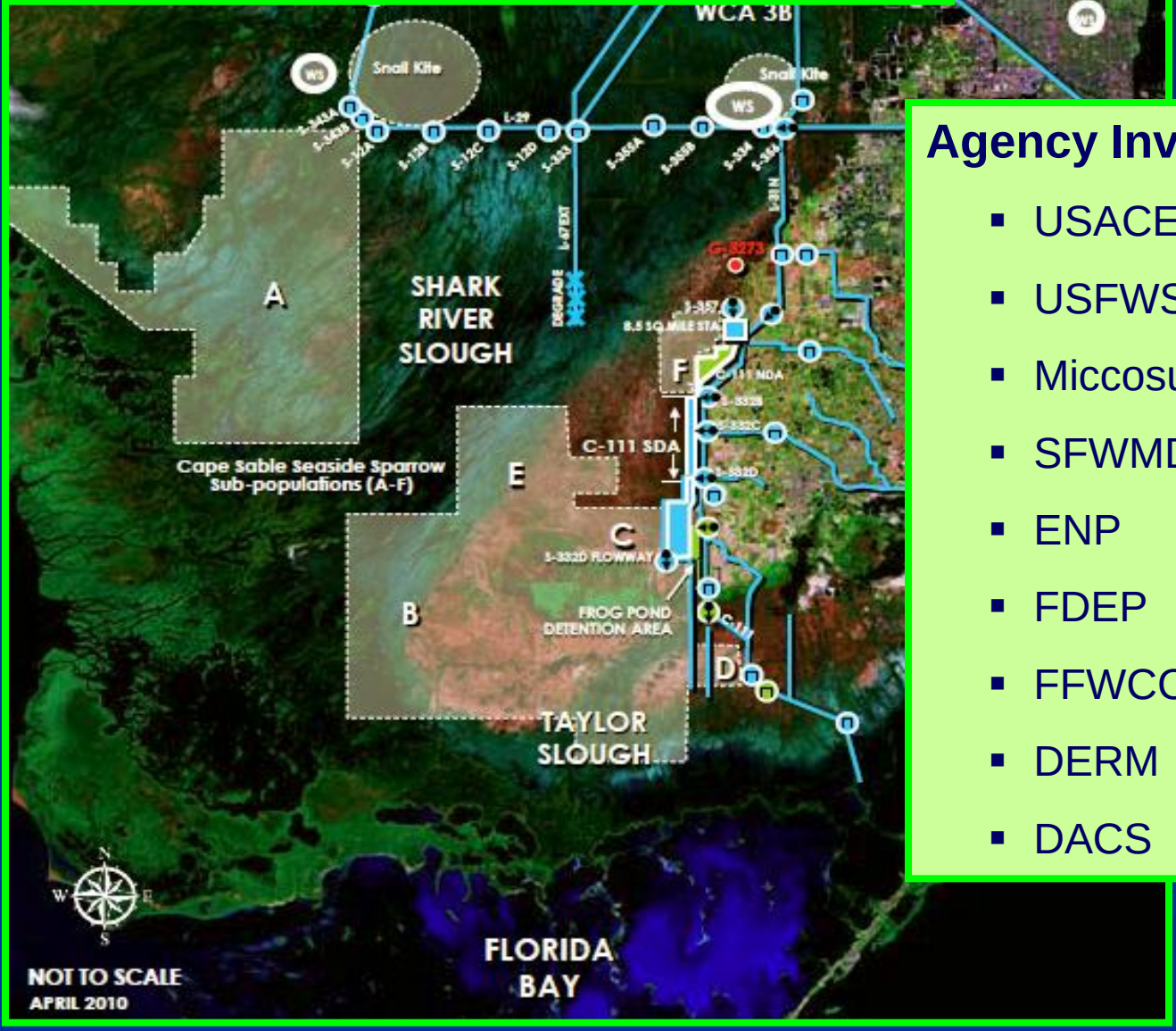
Everglades Restoration Transition Plan (Phase I)



Current Status

- Team currently reviewing the full suite of operational flexibilities in order to recommend a plan
- Other ERTP phases may incorporate additional flexibilities
- On schedule to meet November 2010 deadline

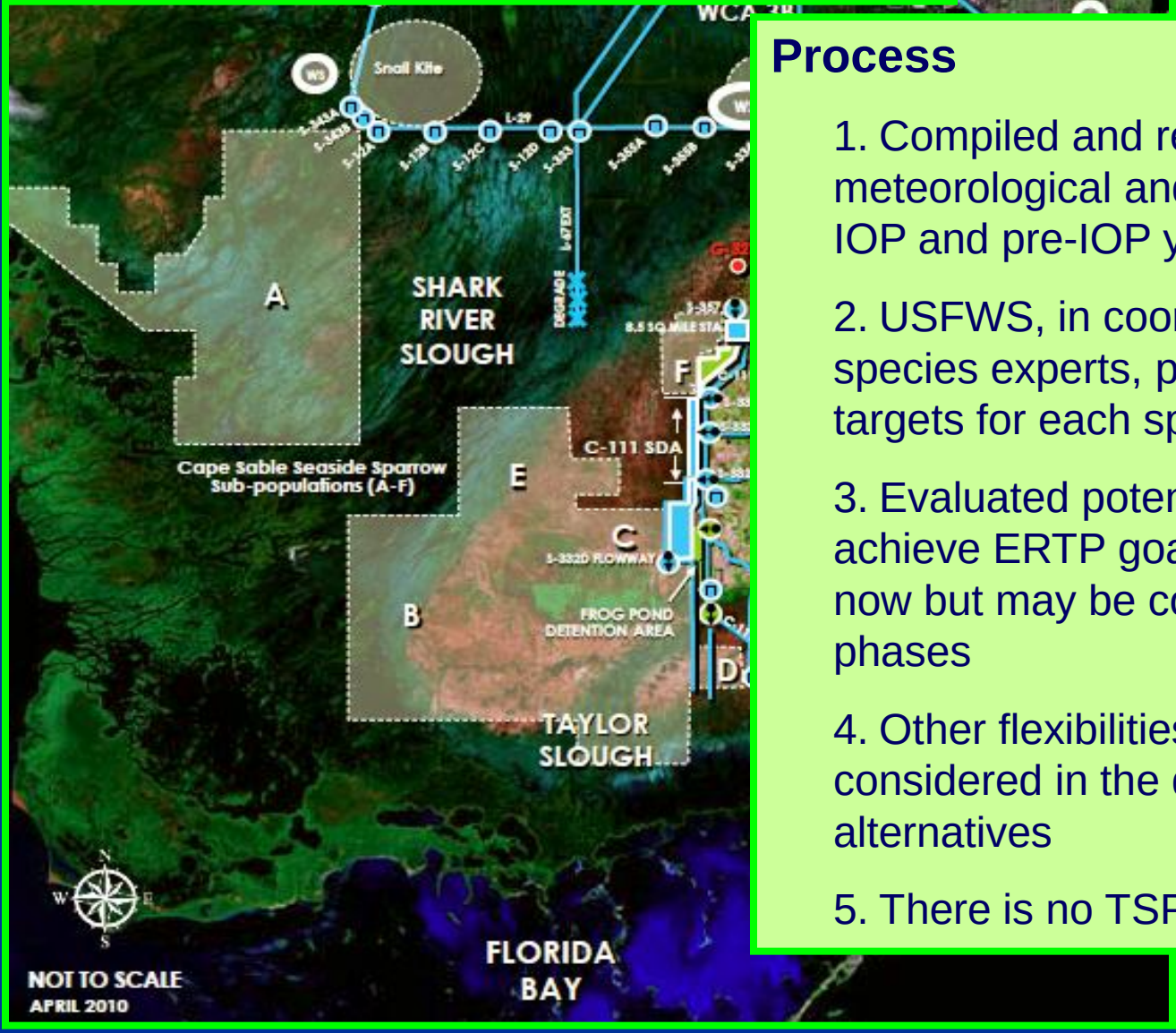
Everglades Restoration Transition Plan (Phase I)



Agency Involvement

- USACE
- USFWS
- Miccosukee Tribe
- SFWMD
- ENP
- FDEP
- FFWCC
- DERM
- DACS

Everglades Restoration Transition Plan (Phase I)



Process

1. Compiled and reviewed hydrologic, meteorological and ecological data under IOP and pre-IOP years
2. USFWS, in coordination with other species experts, proposed ecological targets for each species
3. Evaluated potential flexibilities to achieve ERTP goals; some are infeasible now but may be considered in future phases
4. Other flexibilities continue to be considered in the development of alternatives
5. There is no TSP at this time

Everglade Snail Kite Recommendations

Identify the Probable Cause(s)

Related hydrological parameters to focus on:

Water levels in Fall (Sept-Jan) are too high for too long, resulting in:

- habitat degradation
- delayed/ reduced apple snail egg production

Wet season high water
- level
- timing
- duration

Pre-breeding water
- level
- timing

Long-term water levels in Spring-Summer are too low for too long, resulting in:

- reduced snail kite reproduction, recruitment, and survival
- reduced apple snail productivity and juvenile survival

Dry season low water
- level
- timing
- duration

Recession rates between these water levels are too fast, resulting in:

- reduced apple snail egg production
- reduced snail kite reproduction, recruitment, and survival

Recession rate

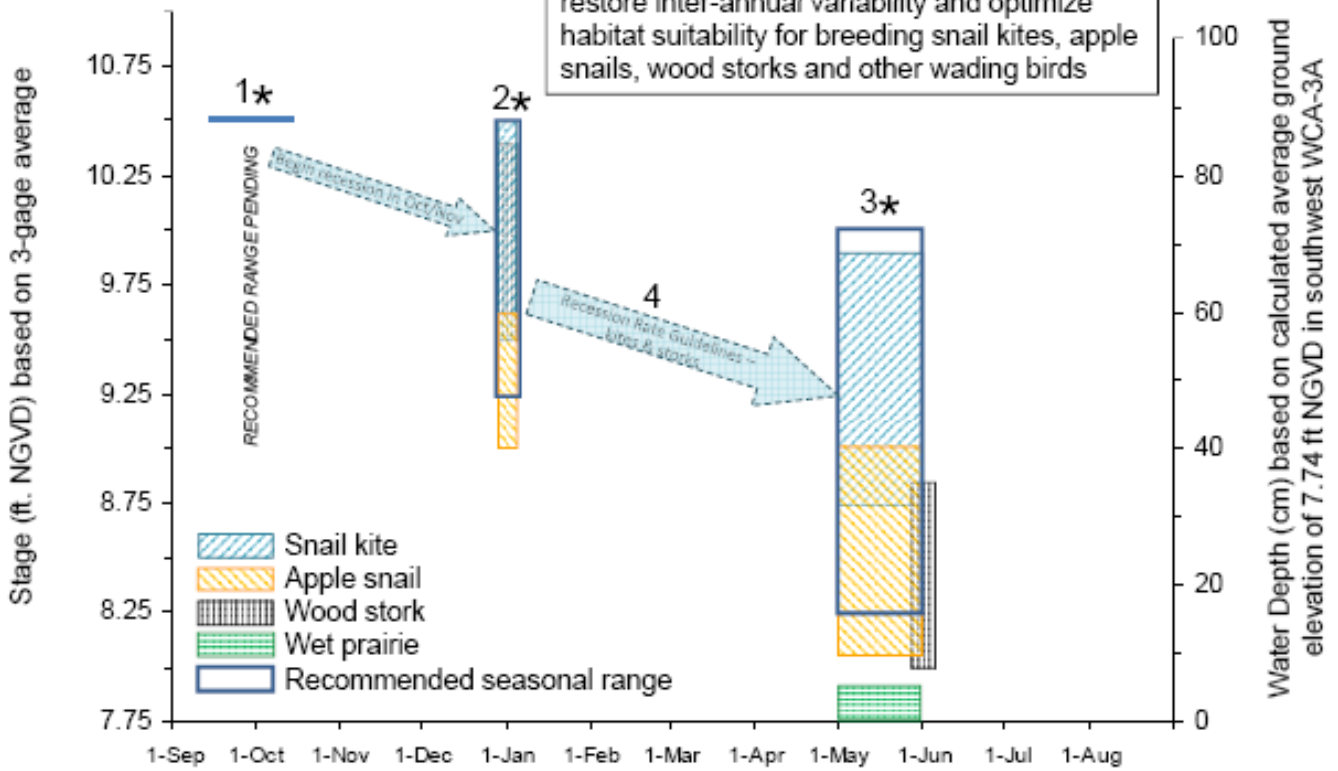
Snail Kite Recommendations

WCA-3A

USFWS Multi-Species Transition Strategy

Draft April 1, 2010

Goal: Through water level management, restore inter-annual variability and optimize habitat suitability for breeding snail kites, apple snails, wood storks and other wading birds



* Management decisions (targets) to be determined by an interagency group meeting regularly throughout the year (minimum October, January and May). Intent is to manage for inter-annual variation with seasonal targets based on an interagency assessment of species needs (evaluated w/monitoring data), forecasted climate in the coming months, and past years' hydrology.

Wood Stork/Wading Birds Recommendations

- Strive to maintain a recession rate of 0.05 to 0.16 feet per week February through May.

- Strive to maintain areas of appropriate foraging depths (5-25 cm) within the Core Foraging Area (18.6 mile radius) of any active wood stork colony.

Cape Sable Seaside Sparrow Recommendations

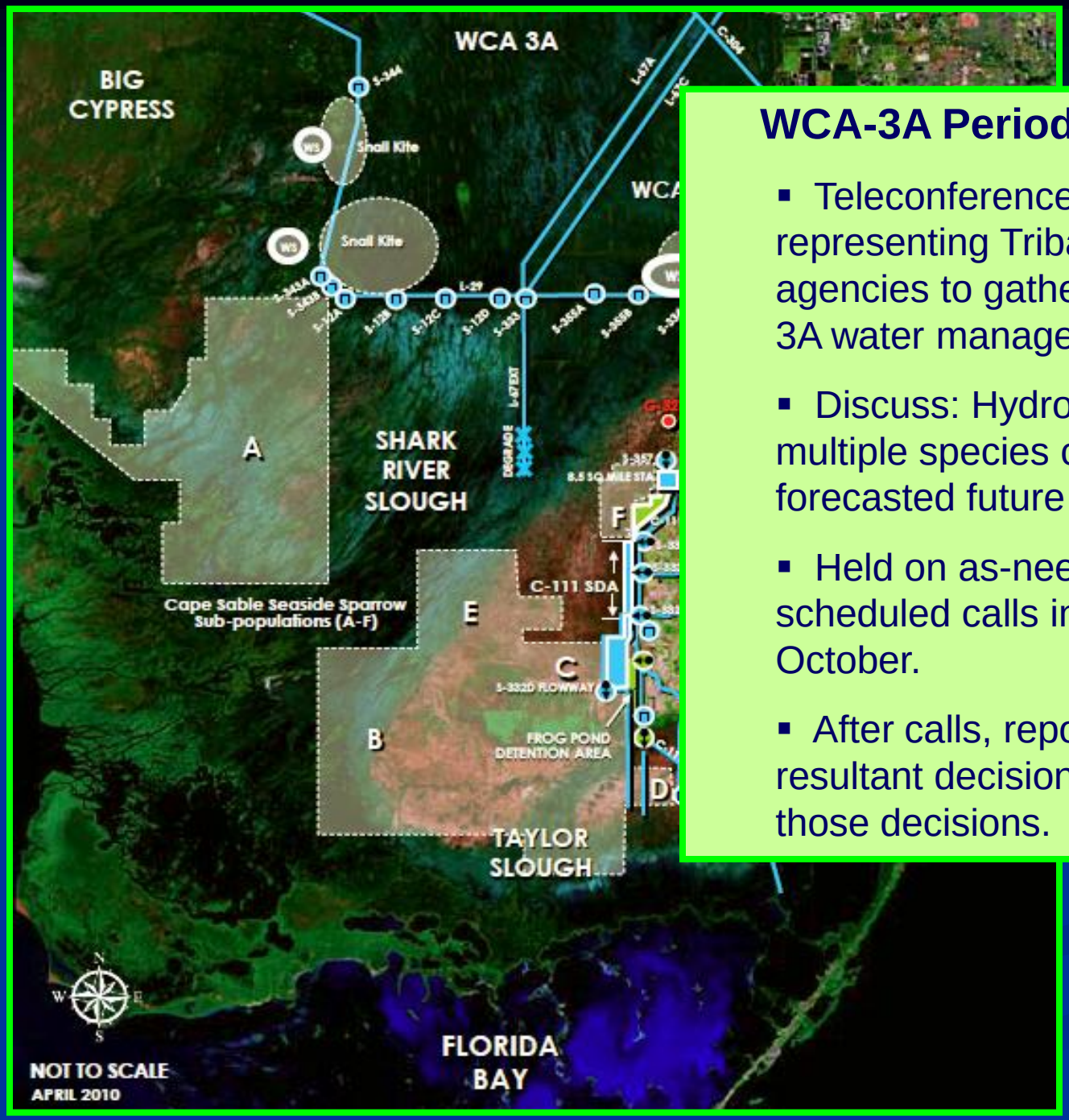
- Provide a minimum of 60 consecutive days at NP205 below 6.0 feet NGVD starting no later than March 15.
- Use flexibilities to reach a water level of 7.0 feet NGVD at NP 205 by December 31 to allow water levels to reach 6.0 feet NGVD by mid-March.
- Use flexibilities to maintain a hydroperiod to sustain marl prairie vegetation.

Tree Island Recommendations

- Avoid high water peaks ≥10.5 feet NGVD or reach water levels < 10.0 feet NGVD by December 31.
- Limit tree island inundation over 2.5 feet for a maximum of 120 days per year.
- Manage for a weekly rate of rise of 0.05 to 0.16 feet June through November to avoid impacts to tree island vegetation.

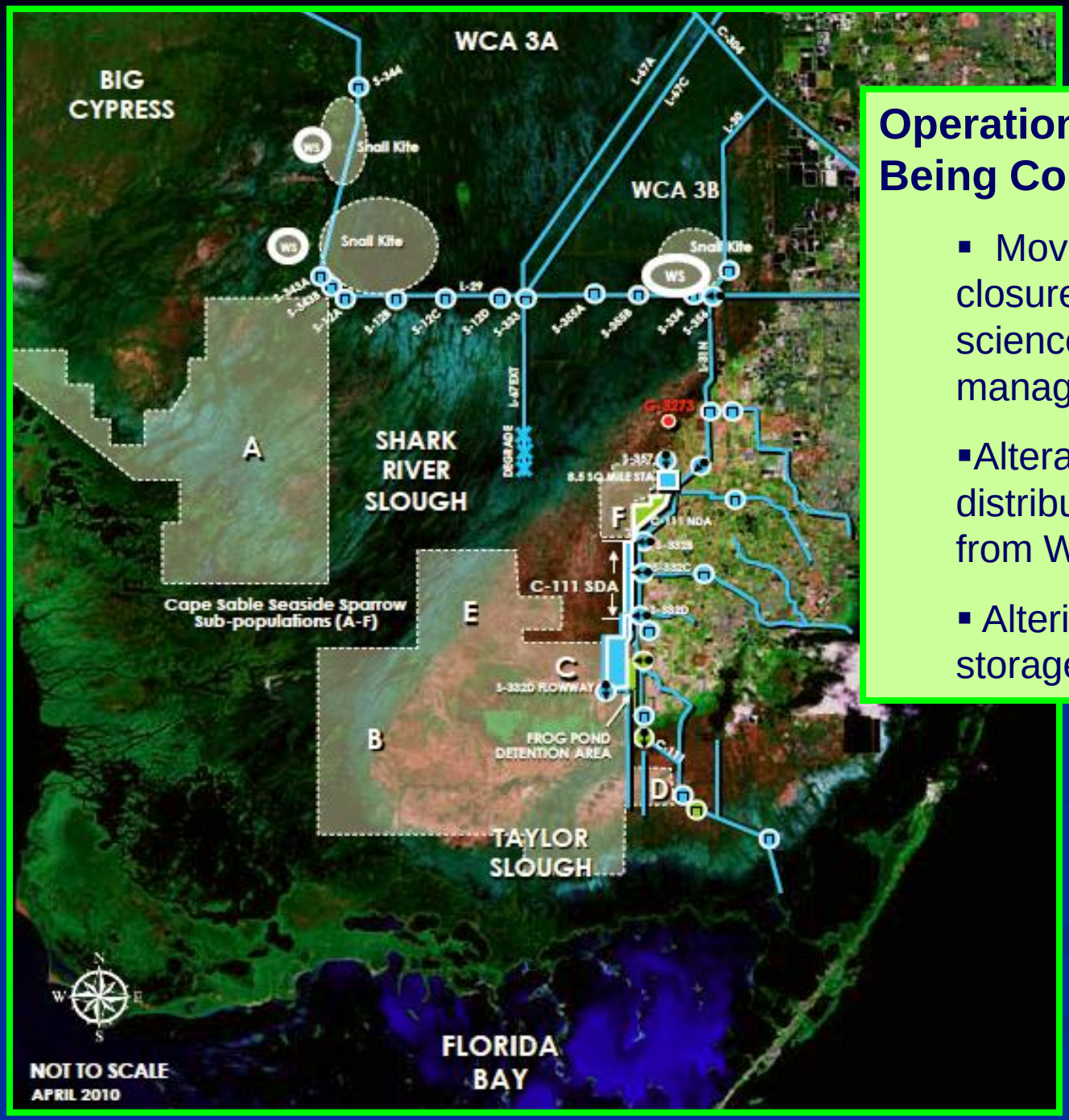
Current Proposed Operational Flexibilities

- There is not yet a final plan
- All options must be reviewed by USACE and USFWS for impacts and may be adjusted as a result of those reviews
- Some options may be recommended for a later phase of ERTP or other efforts
- This presentation is just an overview - operational guidance document available upon request



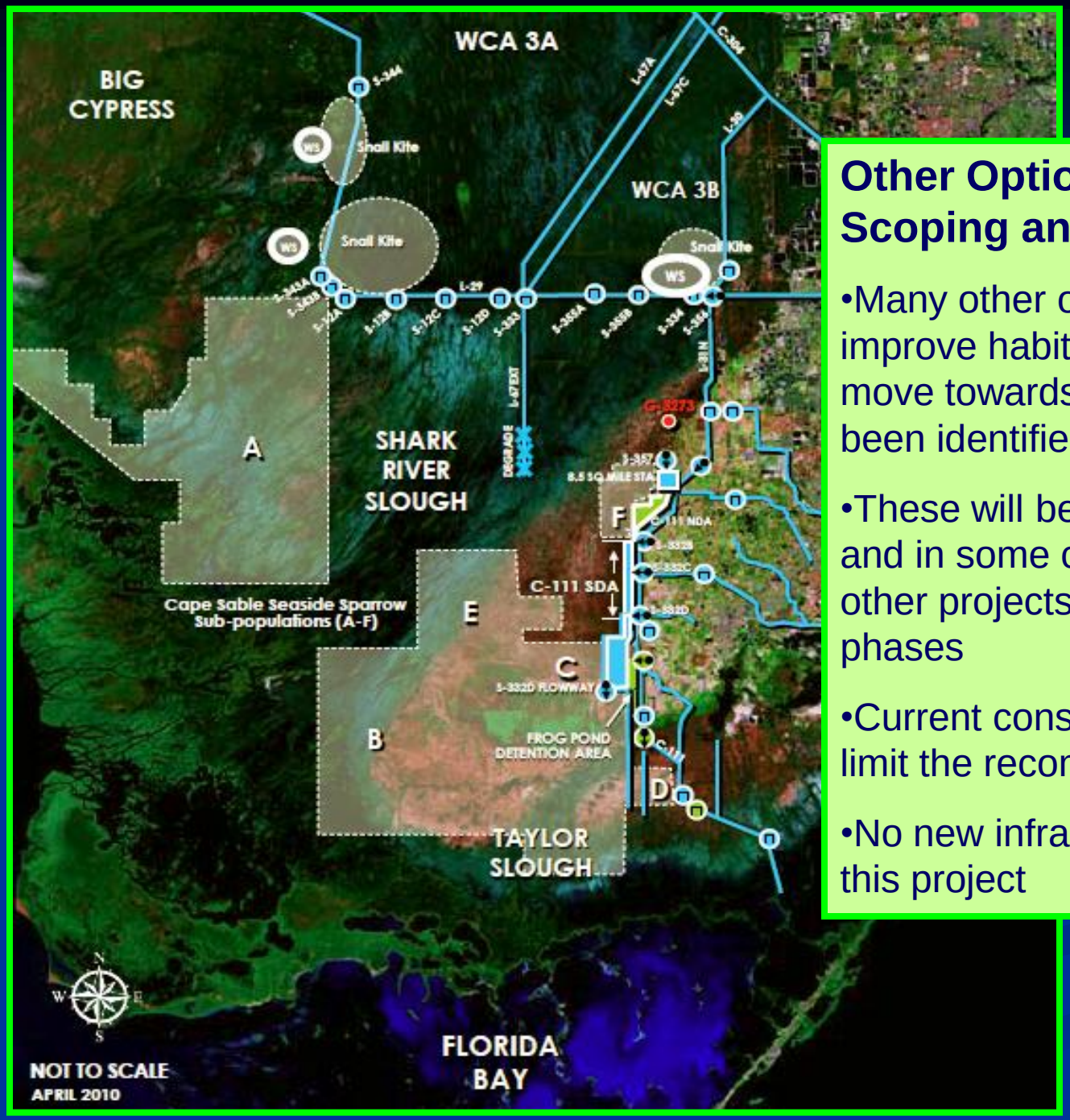
WCA-3A Periodic Scientist Calls

- Teleconference with scientists representing Tribal and Governmental agencies to gather input for Corps WCA-3A water management decision making.
- Discuss: Hydrologic, ecological and multiple species conditions as well as forecasted future desirable conditions.
- Held on as-needed basis as well as scheduled calls in January, May and October.
- After calls, report to participants resultant decisions and input used for those decisions.



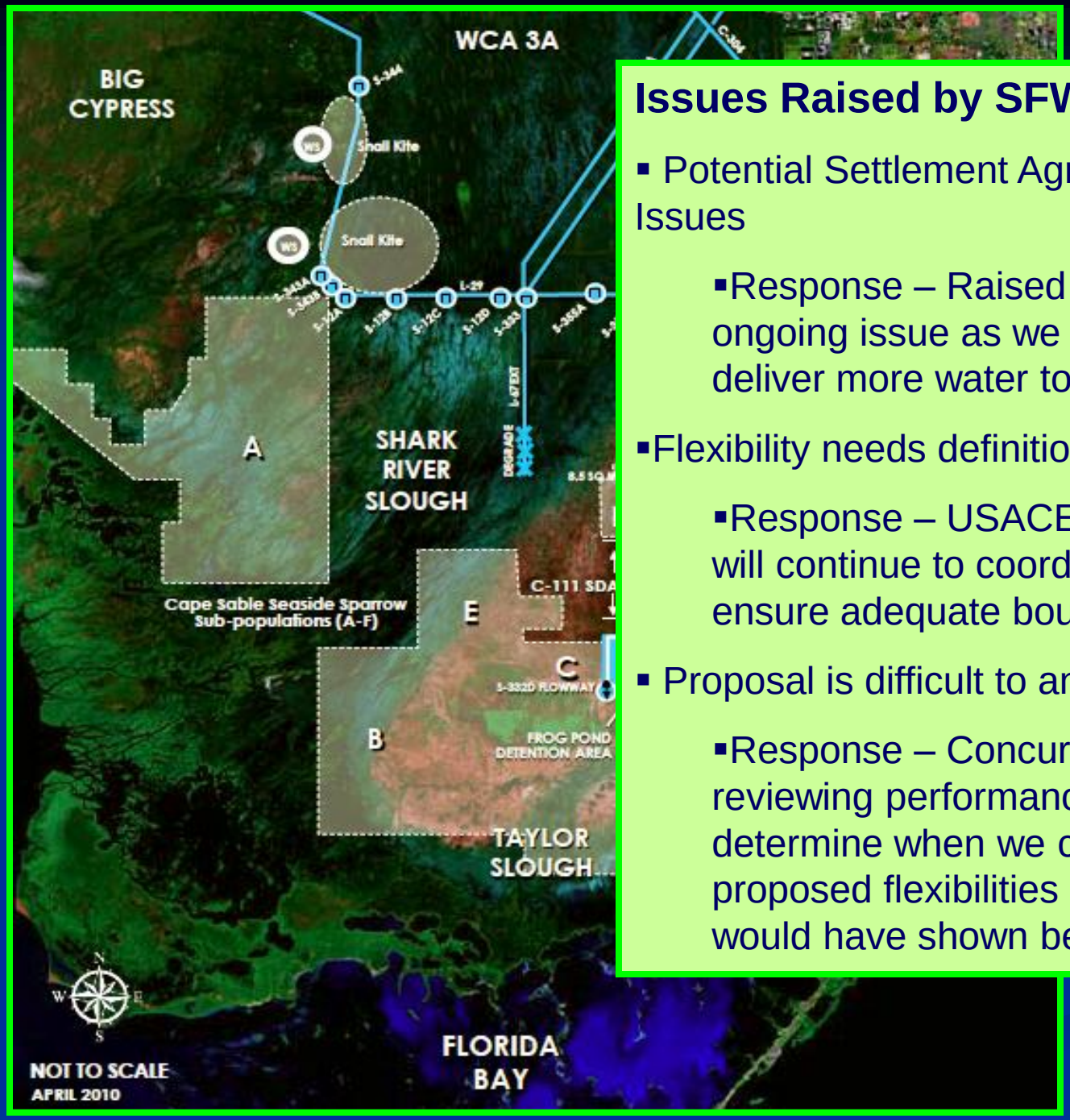
Operational Flexibilities Being Considered

- Move away from hard closure dates and towards science-based, real-time management
- Alterations to the timing and distribution of water releases from WCA-3A
- Altering constraints on the storage capacity in C-111 SDA



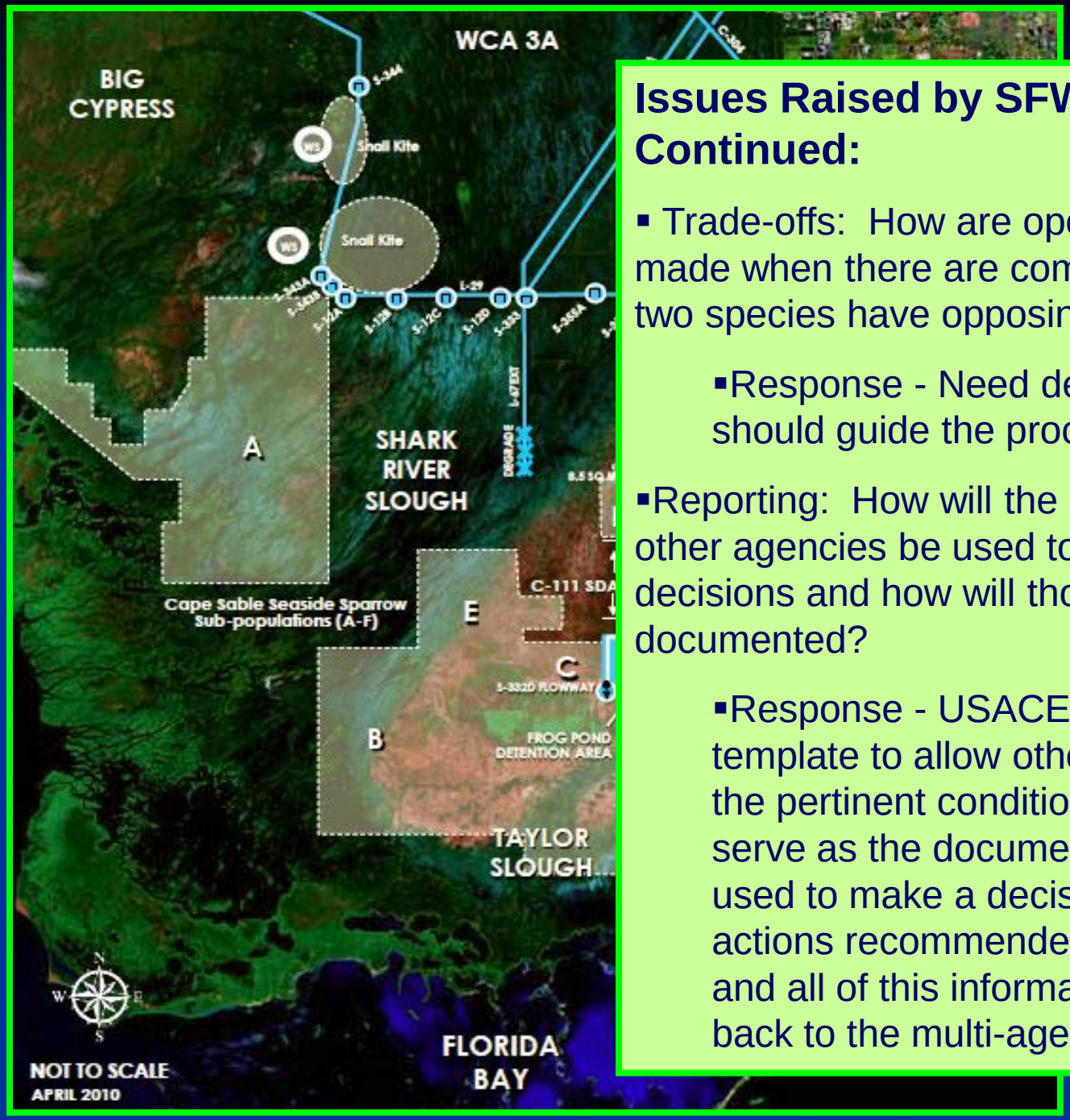
Other Options Raised During Scoping and Agency Review

- Many other opportunities to improve habitat for species and move towards restoration have been identified
- These will be discussed in the EIS and in some cases suggested for other projects or later ERTP phases
- Current constraints on the system limit the recommendation
- No new infrastructure as part of this project



Issues Raised by SFWMD Staff:

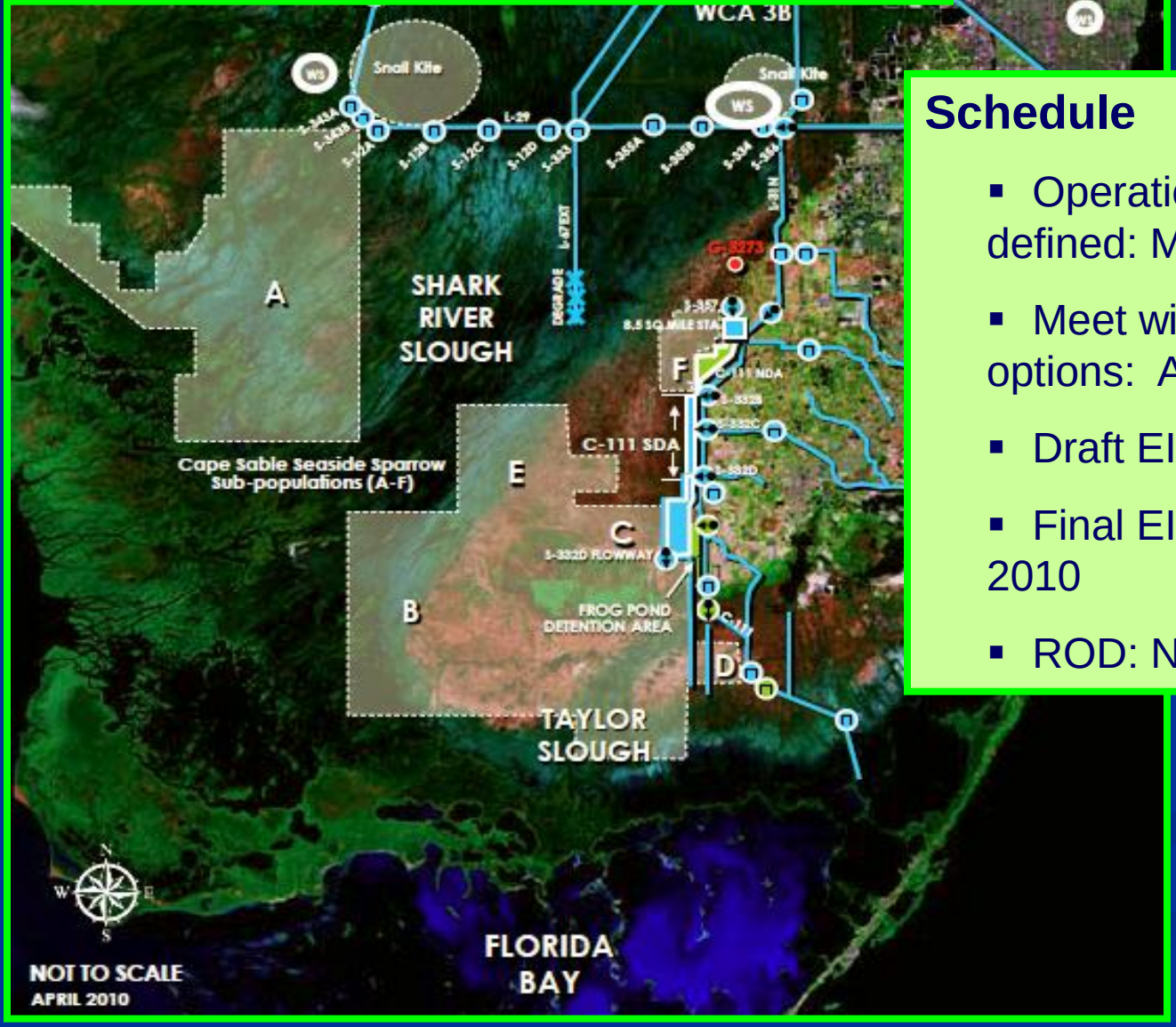
- Potential Settlement Agreement (Water Quality) Issues
  - Response – Raised to TOC. This will be an ongoing issue as we continue to try to deliver more water to NESRS
- Flexibility needs definition and bounds
  - Response – USACE and USFWS have and will continue to coordinate with WMD staff to ensure adequate bounds on the flexibilities
- Proposal is difficult to analyze
  - Response – Concur. We are currently reviewing performance under IOP to determine when we could have used the proposed flexibilities and if the flexibilities would have shown benefits or impacts



Issues Raised by SFWMD Staff Continued:

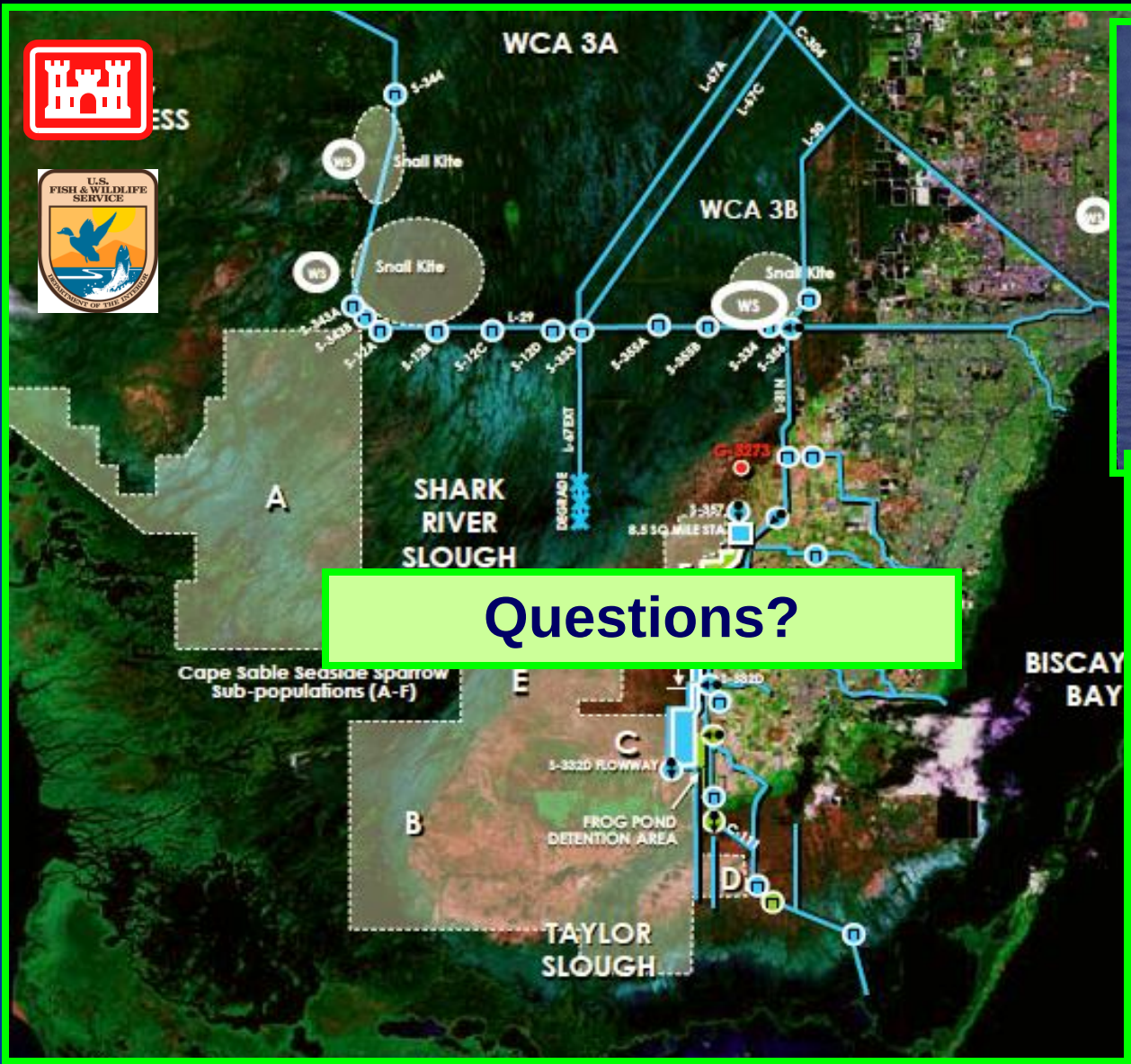
- Trade-offs: How are operational decisions made when there are competing interests (i.e. two species have opposing needs)?
  - Response - Need decision matrix. ESA should guide the process.
- Reporting: How will the information provided by other agencies be used to make operational decisions and how will those decisions be documented?
  - Response - USACE is developing a template to allow other agencies to share the pertinent conditions, which will also serve as the documentation of information used to make a decision. The operational actions recommended will then be described and all of this information will be distributed back to the multi-agency team.

Everglades Restoration Transition Plan (Phase I)



Schedule

- Operational flexibility options defined: March 2010
- Meet with agencies to discuss options: April 2010
- Draft EIS: June 2010
- Final EIS and BO: September 2010
- ROD: November 2010



Questions?

Everglades Restoration Transition Plan (Phase I)