



# FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF Environmental Protection

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3900 Commonwealth Boulevard  
Tallahassee, FL 32399

Ron DeSantis  
Governor

Jeanette Nunez  
Lt. Governor

NoahValenstein  
Secretary

April 14, 2020

Mr. Chris Stahl  
Florida State Clearinghouse  
3800 Commonwealth Boulevard, MS 47  
Tallahassee, Florida 32399-2400

Dear Mr. Stahl:

Please accept the Department's revised letter of support on the Final Integrated Project Implementation Report and Environmental Impact Statement Loxahatchee River Watershed Restoration Project (LRWRP), specifically updating paragraph five of the original letter to resolve potential misinterpretations that may have been construed. The Department continues to offer support for the LRWRP based upon the merits of the project, the broad public and agency support, and the project's role in meeting the MFL obligations. The Department concurs with the South Florida Water Management District that the features of the project will promote improved health and functionality of wetland and upland areas, restore hydrologic and ecological connectivity and enhance the quantity and quality of native plant communities to support fish and wildlife.

In our offer of support, the Department requests that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers remain focused and committed to the final approval and full implementation of the EAA Reservoir Project. The Department looks forward to our continued partnership with USACE and SFWMD on this project and others, especially completing all conditions of Restoration Strategies in a timely manner. Should you have any questions regarding this letter, please contact me at (850) 245-3169.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Edward C. Smith".

Edward C. Smith, Director  
Florida Department of Environmental Protection  
Office of Water Policy and Ecosystems Restoration



# Memorandum

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TO: Chris Stahl, Florida State Clearinghouse

THROUGH: Edward C. Smith, Director *ECS*  
Office of Water Policy and Ecosystems Restoration

FROM: Inger Hansen  
Office of Water Policy and Ecosystems Restoration

DATE: April 14, 2020

SUBJECT: Department of the Army, Jacksonville District Corps of Engineers —  
Loxahatchee River Watershed Restoration Project (LRWRP) Integrated Project  
Implementation Report (PIR) and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) in  
Palm Beach and Martin Counties, Florida

SAI #: FL202002128839C

## Summary:

On February 5, 2020, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) released the Loxahatchee River Watershed Restoration Project (LRWRP) Integrated Project Implementation Report (PIR) and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) with a Draft Chiefs Report for public comment. The LRWRP is part of the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan. The purpose of the LRWRP is to improve the quantity, quality, timing, and distribution of water flows to the Northwest Fork of the Loxahatchee River and restore the hydrologic conditions and connectivity of wetlands and watersheds that form the historic headwaters of the river. The project area comprises approximately 753 square miles located in central and northern Palm Beach County and southern Martin County. The Northwest Fork of the Loxahatchee River is federally designated as a National Wild and Scenic River; and it has also been designated an Outstanding Florida Water, which warrants special protection.

The PIR identifies Alternative 5R as the Recommended Plan that includes new pump stations and canals, ditch plugs, new and modified culverts and weirs, and other measures to rehydrate over-drained areas of the watershed. Project components also include storage features to restore volume and seasonal timing of flows to the Northwest Fork, including a 9,500 acre-foot C-18W reservoir, and a four-well aquifer storage and recovery system on the Mecca Farms site. The Mecca Farms land was purchased by South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) from Palm Beach County to provide a replacement storage reservoir site to assist with the recovery of Loxahatchee River and achieve the required Minimum Flows and Levels (MFLs), part of a recovery plan for the River.

**Comments:**

The Florida Department of Environmental Protection (Department) continues to support the USACE and SFWMD in this project with the understanding that the USACE and SFWMD will undertake additional analysis during the design phase of the project to ensure adjacent properties are not impacted. The Department's support is based upon the merits of the project, the broad public and agency support, and the project's role in meeting the MFL obligations and the completion milestones for Restoration Strategies.

As noted in our prior comments on the Draft PIR, the LRWRP is consistent with the Department's restoration vision for Loxahatchee River and will significantly improve both wet season and dry season target flows, which are critical for restoration of the freshwater riverine floodplain forest and reversing saltwater intrusion within the tidal floodplain. In addition, the LRWRP provides a significant increase in water flow to the federally designated Wild and Scenic Northwest Fork of the Loxahatchee River, restores 17,000 acres of agricultural land back to wetlands, and improves an additional 9,500 acres of natural areas that were part of the historical Greater Everglades system.

The Department recommends that support for the authorization of LRWRP be made contingent upon the USACE finalizing its approval of the EAA Reservoir Project.

The Department is supportive of the Loxahatchee River Watershed Restoration Project and looks forward to continuing our partnership with USACE and SFWMD on this project and others, especially completing all conditions of Restoration Strategies in a timely manner. Should you have any questions regarding our comments, please contact Ed Cambeiro at (850) 245-3176.

**Electronic copies to:**

Ed Smith  
Frank Powell  
Inger Hansen  
Jordan Tedio  
Natalie Barfield  
Ed Cambeiro  
Kelli Edson  
Chad Kennedy  
Paul Julian  
Alyssa Gilhooly  
Kenny Dayman