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environmentalists and journalists from all over the planet visit and report on the unprecedented efforts to restore and protect the Kissimmee River, Lake Okeechobee and the Everglades. Using an adaptive management approach, the "lessons learned" in southern Florida will prove invaluable for future restoration efforts – within and outside the state.

Everglades Plan Land Requirements

Estimated Land Needed	400,000 acres
Land Acquired	184,000 acres
Land Costs to Date	$612 million
Land Still Needed	216,000 acres

A major cornerstone of this massive undertaking is the joint U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and South Florida Water Management District plan of action to restore, protect and preserve the water resources of central and southern Florida. The $7.8 billion Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) consists of more than 60 projects spanning 16 counties. Many will serve to capture and store 1.7 billion gallons of water a day, which will help revitalize the Everglades "River of Grass" while enhancing urban and agricultural water supplies. The plan centers around an update of the 50-year-old Central & Southern Florida Project, a system of more than 1,000 miles of canals and 720 miles of levees originally built to manage southern Florida's water resources.

The remaining $7 billion investment includes the Kissimmee River Restoration Project, the Everglades Construction Project, the C-111 Spreader Canal Project, the Modified Water Deliveries to Everglades National Park Project, other previously identified and authorized "critical projects," state water management/water quality plans, and local, state and federal land acquisitions. (Future *WaterMatters* articles will describe these and other initiatives in more detail.)

Acquiring land vital to restoration

Land acquisition is a significant and costly undertaking that supports and underlies water management and ecosystem restoration efforts. Because lands needed for restoration are subject to development pressures and land values continue to rise, getting the needed lands into public ownership as soon as possible is a priority.

To date, 46 percent of the land needed for implementing the Everglades Plan has been acquired at a cost of $612 million. New state legislation authorizing bonding for land acquisition purposes allows water management districts to actively move forward with an even more aggressive land purchasing strategy. The South Florida Water Management District budgeted $350 million in 2003 to acquire and manage more than 50,000 additional acres.

Land acquisition partnerships at the federal, state and local levels are critical to the success of this high-priority initiative. Many central and south Florida local governments have stepped-up to the plate and taken the lead in providing additional funding sources for acquiring needed acreage – so far contributing more than $60 million toward this effort.

SFWMD Governing Board member Patrick Gleason (left) presents a $13.7 million check to Palm Beach County Commission Chair Warren Newell in fulfillment of a joint land acquisition partnership with the county. The 624-acre parcel will be used to store water for ecosystem restoration purposes.

Partnerships key to success

Ecosystem restoration is a long-term commitment that will ultimately yield even longer-term benefits. Ensuring that the multi-decade, multi-billion-dollar effort becomes a reality will require widespread government, university and public participation and support. Effective communication and collaboration based on mutual goals is the key to success. Working together to revitalize the southern Florida ecosystem will leave a lasting legacy for future generations.

Planning for the Unthinkable:

Emergency Management after 9/11

"… no matter the circumstance — hurricane, flood, or terrorist attack — we will be able to continue operating the District's extensive flood control system from undisclosed, alternate sites."

– Olivia McLean
Director of Emergency Management

Before September 11, most requests for information were handled on a first come, first served basis. Since the terrorist attacks, when any request involves sensitive information that could be used to harm the public, that request is closely reviewed. If the request comes from a source whose identity or purpose are questionable under guidelines established for government agencies, then the requester may be asked for additional information to "fill in the blanks."

"Unusual requests, with a lack of validity to them, are an example of the new awareness that the federal government has told all government agencies to pay close attention to since September 11," said Olivia McLean, the District's Director of Emergency Management.

This is just one example of how the scope of emergency management has changed since the September attacks. New state legislation now provides for the protection of security related documents from public disclosure. This means that a request for public records must now be balanced between the public's right to know and security issues.

"It's a way to protect the public by keeping critical information out of the hands of individuals or groups whose intent may be to cause public harm," said McLean. Information deemed to be of a critical nature has already been removed from the District's web site.

Additionally, new legislation requires all state agencies to complete a Continuity of Operations Plan by June 2003. "What this means," said McLean, "is that no matter the circumstance – hurricane, flood, or terrorist attack – we will be able to continue operating the District's extensive flood control system from undisclosed, alternate sites."

Shortly after September 11, 2001, Governor Jeb Bush established seven Regional Domestic Security Task Forces. The District's participation focuses on actions required under the Homeland Security Threat Alert System. These actions include completion of vulnerability assessments of critical District infrastructure, and establishing regional terrorism response plans.

By partnering with local, state, and federal agencies, the District is able to share in intelligence information, monitor developing situations, and plan for joint responses in case of an event. The sharing of information resulted in the creation of a huge data base of critical infrastructures around the state that could be a potential target.

McLean noted that effective security depends on a well-trained and alert staff. But she also recognizes that the public plays an important part in domestic security as well – by reporting to law enforcement officials any unusual activity observed on or around District structures or other property.

"There is no credible evidence that we are a target," said McLean. "However, the Oklahoma City bombing and September 11th have shown that any government agency that provides a service to a large number of people must be diligent in its security efforts and prepared to respond to the worst."