

## Short-Term Recommendations

1. The final phase of the Kissimmee River Restoration Project is designed to complete restoration of 20,000 acres of wetlands and 44 miles of the historic Kissimmee River to its natural state. The project will reduce the amount of pollutants flowing down the Kissimmee River into Lake Okeechobee. It will also provide for more water storage on 40 square miles of the Kissimmee River floodplain. The Corps estimates the project will be completed by 2017. The Committee recommends appropriating \$5 million to support the project.
2. The C-111 South Dade Project will aid the restoration of Taylor Slough, which experienced ecological damage when water was directed away from the slough due to the construction of the C-111 canal. It will also help improve sheetflow into the Everglades by preventing groundwater seepage to the east. The Committee recommends appropriating \$5 million for the project.
3. Land/Ocean Biogeochemical Observatory (LOBO) monitoring units are being used in the Caloosahatchee River and Estuary and the St. Lucie River and Indian River Lagoon to monitor water quality at several sites. Similarly, the Ocean Research and Conservation Association's (ORCA) Kilroy monitoring devices are deployed in the Indian River Lagoon to monitor water quality. The Committee recommends appropriating \$2 million for Kilroy devices and an additional \$2 million for LOBO devices to support research in areas not currently covered by monitoring units.
4. Water stored during Florida's wet season reduce flows sent to the estuaries. The Dispersed Water Management Program is designed to manage water retained on public and private lands. Private landowner involvement typically includes cost-share cooperative projects, easements, or payment for environmental services. Private ranchlands provide more than 60,000 acre-feet of storage. The Committee recommends appropriating \$3 million to support the Dispersed Water Management Program under the Northern Everglades and Estuaries Protection Program.
5. BMPs are the most effective methods to limit the release of nutrient pollution into groundwater and surface water from agricultural lands. The Committee recommends appropriating \$3 million to DACS to support the BMP program.
6. At the September 12, 2013, Legislative Budget Commission meeting, the DEP requested \$2.7 million in funding authority to provide operational and structural changes to existing pump stations in order to move excess water in the WCAs south to Everglades National Park and to tide. These pumps are typically only used for flood protection. The request also provided for funding to cut a gap in Old Tamiami Trail and vegetation clearing to remove barriers to the southward flow of water. The Committee recommends continued funding of these and similar short-term projects, as determined by the DEP and SFWMD, to provide continued short-term relief from excessive lake discharges.
7. The Picayune Strand Restoration Project is designed to restore 55,000 acres of wetlands and uplands between Tamiami Trail and Alligator Alley in southwest Florida. Construction responsibilities are shared between the Corps and the SFWMD. The Committee recommends the Florida Legislature appropriate \$2 million to support the SFWMD's construction efforts in order to complete the project.
8. Healthy oyster populations and seagrass beds are vital to the health of estuarine ecosystems. The Northern Estuaries Resource Recovery pilot program seeks to re-establish oyster populations and seagrass beds in the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee Estuaries. The Committee recommends appropriating \$500,000 for each estuary to support the program.

9. A significant portion of the water flowing into Lake Okeechobee from the north comes from Lake Kissimmee via the Kissimmee River. Holding more water in Lake Kissimmee would aid in reducing the flow of water down the Kissimmee River. Lake Kissimmee water level is controlled by its own regulation schedule that allows the lake to reach its full capacity on November 1, after the wet season has ended. The Committee recommends seeking a deviation from the schedule, allowing it to reach full capacity on October 1, rather than in November.
10. LORS 2008 was designed to regulate levels in Lake Okeechobee based on the condition of the dike as it existed in its degraded state. A 21-mile cutoff wall was completed in the most vulnerable area and replacement or removal of 7 of 32 water control structures is ongoing. Work on all 32 structures will be completed by 2018. The risk assessment used to develop LORS 2008 did not account for future reductions in risk due to completed and ongoing projects. The Committee recommends urging Florida's Congressional representatives to support legislation or rulemaking in order to revisit the regulation schedule to update the risk assessment used to manage risk at certain lake level management bands.
11. The Committee has received numerous innovative solutions to reduce nutrient pollution, increase salinity and mixing zones, and reduce or eliminate toxic algal blooms in the estuaries. The Committee recommends establishing an advisory board at a state university to evaluate technologies and proposals that address one or more of the problems affecting the estuaries.
12. During public testimony and in written comments, the Committee heard many concerns about septic systems. Poorly maintained septic systems and areas where there is a high concentration of septic systems can be sources of pollutants in groundwater and surface water. The Committee recommends further evaluation of methods to reduce the impact of septic systems on ecologically sensitive areas.

### **Long-Term Solutions**

1. Tamiami Trail, completed in 1928, created a dam-like effect preventing water from moving south into what is now Everglades National Park. The first phase of the Tamiami Trail Modifications project to bridge one mile of the existing road has been completed. The second phase, a 2.6-mile bridge, will lead to greater and more dispersed water flow south of the bridge into the park. The Committee recommends appropriating \$90 million to the Florida Department of Transportation to expedite the next phase of the project.
2. The C-44 reservoir and associated stormwater treatment area will provide a place to store water during the rainy season and to release water during the dry season. The completion of the project will reduce the large fluctuations of water flow from Lake Okeechobee and the C-44 basin to the St. Lucie River and Estuary. The Committee recommends appropriating \$40 million to expedite construction of part the state's portion of the project.
3. Water storage in the Caloosahatchee basin is critical to capture wet season runoff from the basin and regulatory releases from Lake Okeechobee. The Caloosahatchee (C-43) West Basin Storage Reservoir project will improve timing, quantity, and quality of freshwater flows to the river and estuary. The project is included in the proposed WRDA bills of each house of Congress. The Committee recommends appropriating \$5 million to support construction of the C-43 basin project. Additionally, in anticipation of final passage of a WRDA bill, the state should include the C-43 reservoir project in Florida's Long-Range Financial Outlook to reduce any delay in funding this critical project once it is authorized and receives federal funding. Florida's share of the project cost is estimated at \$289 million.

4. Water Quality Restoration Strategies, the second phase of the Long Term Plan for Achieving Water Quality Goals, are designed to ensure that all surface water discharges into the Everglades Protection Area meet water quality standards. The Committee recommends appropriating \$32 million for Water Quality Restoration Strategies.
5. The Corps does not consider the widespread damage done to the estuaries when it releases large amounts of water from Lake Okeechobee to control lake levels. When rehabilitation of the 32 water control structures is complete in 2018, the Committee recommends urging Congress to remove the Corps' authority over regulatory releases and give that authority to the DEP and SFWMD.
6. Many of the projects necessary for Everglades restoration, including the Central Everglades Planning Project, are awaiting authorization by a federal WRDA bill. Two bills have passed their respective houses of Congress. The differences between the House and Senate versions will be negotiated in a conference committee and will be presented to the president. The Committee recommends urging Florida's Congressional representatives to support the quick passage of the bill.
7. Aquifer Storage and Recovery (ASR) systems north of Lake Okeechobee may aid significantly in the effort to store excess water during the wet season and return water to the system during the dry season. The Lake Okeechobee Aquifer Storage and Recovery Pilot project is exploring the suitability of the technology for use in the Okeechobee Basin. The Committee recommends continuing support of ASR pilot programs.