

**PALM BEACH COUNTY  
BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS**

**AGENDA ITEM SUMMARY**

**Meeting Date:** April 30, 2019

Consent       Regular  
 Ordinance       Public Hearing

**Department:** Administration

**Submitted By:** Administration

**I. EXECUTIVE BRIEF**

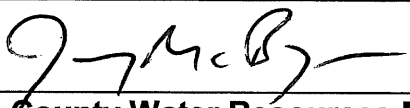
**Motion and Title: Staff requests board direction:** regarding the development and submittal of comments on the Draft Integrated Project Implementation Report and Environmental Impact Statement for the Loxahatchee River Watershed Restoration Project to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps).

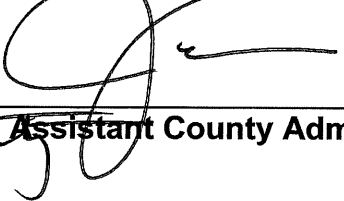
**Summary:** The purpose of the proposed Loxahatchee River Watershed Restoration Project is to improve the quantity, quality, timing and distribution of water flows to the Northwest Fork of the Loxahatchee River and restore hydrologic conditions and connectivity of wetlands and watersheds that form the historic headwaters of the river. Key features of the proposed project include an above-ground reservoir on the Mecca site, four (4) aquifer storage and recovery wells and improved connections between the river and watershed. The project is expected to achieve river restoration flow targets 91 percent of the time in the dry season and 98 percent of the time in wet season. The estimated cost is \$473 million and design and construction is estimated to require 9-15 years. Staff recommends continuing to support state and federal efforts to achieve ecosystem restoration goals for the Loxahatchee River watershed while communicating key concerns, such as the Mecca reservoir embankment height and questionable or unjustified assumptions, and expressing interest in collaborating with the Corps and the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) to optimize the Mecca reservoir to be more compatible with adjacent lands. The deadline to submit comments on the draft report is May 6, 2019. Countywide (MJ)

**Background and Policy Issues:** The Northwest Fork of the Loxahatchee River was designated a National Wild and Scenic River by the U.S. Department of the Interior in 1985. A plan to restore the river was approved in 2000 by the U.S. Congress as part of Everglades Restoration. Joint state/federal project planning began in 2003, was put on hold in 2011 and re-started in 2015. In 2013, SFWMD purchased Mecca from Palm Beach County. SFWMD is planning to re-initiate design of the Mecca reservoir in 2019.

**Attachments:**

- 1) Notice of Availability of the Draft Integrated Project Implementation Report and Environmental Impact Statement for the Loxahatchee River Watershed Restoration Project
- 2) Loxahatchee River Watershed Restoration Project Fact Sheet

**Recommended by:**  4-15-2019  
County Water Resources Manager      Date

**Approved By:**  4/15/19  
Deputy Assistant County Administrator      Date

**II. FISCAL IMPACT ANALYSIS**

**A. Five Year Summary of Fiscal Impact:**

Fiscal Years	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Capital Expenditures					
Operating Costs					
External Revenues					
Program Income(County)					
In-Kind Match(County)					
NET FISCAL IMPACT					
#ADDITIONAL FTE POSITIONS (CUMULATIVE)					

Is Item Included in Current Budget?                      Yes      No  
 Does this item include the use of federal funds?      Yes      No

**Budget Account No:**

Fund                      Dept                      Unit

**B. Recommended Sources of Funds/Summary of Fiscal Impact:**

No fiscal impact

**C. Departmental Fiscal Review:**

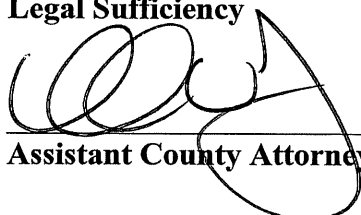
**III. REVIEW COMMENTS:**

**A. OFMB Fiscal and/or Contract Dev. and Control Comments:**

  
 OFMB  4/15 4/15/19

  
 Contract Dev. & Control 4/15/19

**B. Legal Sufficiency**

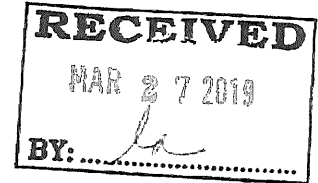
  
 Assistant County Attorney 4/17/19

**C. Other Department Review**

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Department Director



DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY  
CORPS OF ENGINEERS, JACKSONVILLE DISTRICT  
701 SAN MARCO BOULEVARD  
JACKSONVILLE, FLORIDA 32207-8915



Planning and Policy Division  
Environmental Branch

MAR 22 2019

To Whom It May Concern:

Pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) Regulations (33 CFR 230.11), this letter constitutes the Notice of Availability of the Integrated Draft Project Implementation Report (PIR) and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Loxahatchee River Watershed Restoration Project (LRWRP). The project area includes approximately 753 square miles located in central and northern Palm Beach County and southern Martin County. Within that area are Jonathan Dickinson State Park, Pal Mar East/Cypress Creek, Dupuis Wildlife and Environmental Management Areas, J.W. Corbett Wildlife Management Area, Grassy Waters Preserve, Loxahatchee Slough, the last remaining riverine cypress stands in Southeast Florida in the Loxahatchee River, and the Loxahatchee River Estuary. The purposes of LRWRP are to restore and sustain the flow of freshwater to the federally designated "National Wild and Scenic" Northwest Fork of the Loxahatchee River (NWFLR), and to provide flows to enhance hydroperiods in Loxahatchee Slough; increase connectivity of hydrology, flora, and fauna between natural areas; and improve seasonal timing and distribution of water to improve hydropatterns in drained areas throughout the historic headwaters for the river.

The Corps is proposing a tentatively selected plan (TSP), Alternative 5R, that includes a surface storage reservoir, aquifer storage and recovery wells, and other structures to capture and store water that is currently lost to tide, and redistributes it to increase volume and improve timing of water deliveries to the NWFLR. The TSP is proposed to achieve 91% of the dry season restoration target flows and 98% of the wet season restoration target flows.

The TSP also includes new pump stations and canals, ditch plugs, new and modified culverts and weirs, and other measures to rehydrate over-drained wetlands in the watershed. These will restore more natural water deliveries to the Loxahatchee River, promote improved health and functionality of wetland and upland areas, restore hydrologic and ecological connectivity among natural areas, and provide increased quantity and quality of habitat available for wildlife and native vegetation. The TSP will restore approx. 17,000 acres of former wetlands that had been converted to agriculture and an additional 10,000 acres of existing but disturbed wetlands in the J.W. Corbett Wildlife Management Area (WMA), Loxahatchee Slough, Cypress Creek Natural Area, and Kitching Creek. The proposed restored wetlands will connect with 51,000 acres of other wetland communities in the area, resulting in 78,000 acres of connected habitat. Implementation of the project will provide multiple benefits by helping to restore more natural water deliveries, promoting improved health and functionality of wetland and upland areas, and increasing the quantity and quality of habitat available for native wildlife and vegetation. The TSP is located within Martin and Palm Beach Counties, Florida.

The Draft PIR and EIS is available for your review on the Corps Environmental Planning website under Martin and Palm Beach Counties and the project website:

<http://www.saj.usace.army.mil/About/DivisionsOffices/Planning/EnvironmentalBranch/EnvironmentalDocuments.aspx>

<https://www.saj.usace.army.mil/Missions/Environmental/Ecosystem-Restoration/Loxahatchee-River-Watershed-Restoration-Project/>

A copy of the report is also available at the following libraries:

Blake Library  
Martin County Library System  
2351 SE Monterey Rd  
Stuart, FL 34996

Gardens Branch Library  
Palm Beach County Library System  
11303 Campus Drive  
Palm Beach Gardens, FL 33410

Any comments you may have must be submitted in writing to the letterhead address or to [LoxahatcheeWatershedRestoration@usace.army.mil](mailto:LoxahatcheeWatershedRestoration@usace.army.mil) within 45 days of the date of this letter. If you have any questions regarding the information in this letter you may contact Dr. Ann Hodgson at 904-232-3691 or by email at [Ann.B.Hodgson@usace.army.mil](mailto:Ann.B.Hodgson@usace.army.mil).

Sincerely,



Angela E. Dunn  
Chief, Environmental Branch

## LOXAHATCHEE RIVER | Watershed Restoration Project

### FACTS & INFORMATION



JANUARY 2019

The Loxahatchee River Watershed is part of the Greater Everglades Ecosystem. Historically, the study area comprised an expansive network of uplands & wetlands of diverse habitat. Its rain-driven hydrology that maintained natural communities throughout the watershed and provided unobstructed freshwater flows to the Loxahatchee River and to the Everglades. The Loxahatchee River is a blend of freshwater and estuarine environments. It was originally connected to the Everglades via the Loxahatchee Slough, where freshwater was freely exchanged with the Everglades based on water levels in the river and slough. Over time, natural areas across the watershed were converted to agricultural and urban uses, and roadway, canals, and levees infrastructure, and urbanization created barriers to freshwater flows, disconnecting the river and slough from the Everglades.

### PROJECT PURPOSE

The Loxahatchee River Watershed Restoration Project aims to restore and sustain the overall quantity, quality, timing, and distribution of fresh waters to the federally designated “National Wild and Scenic” Northwest Fork of the Loxahatchee River. This project also seeks to restore, sustain, and reconnect the wetlands and watersheds that form the historic headwaters for the river and its tributaries:

Jonathan Dickinson State Park

Pal Mar East / Cypress Creek

Dupuis Wildlife and Environmental Management Areas

J.W. Corbett Wildlife Management Area

Grassy Waters Preserve

Loxahatchee Slough

### PROJECT OBJECTIVES

Objective 1: Restore wet & dry season flows of water to the Northwest Fork of the Loxahatchee River and the river floodplain.

Objective 2: Restore estuarine communities in the Loxahatchee River Estuary.

Objective 3: Increase spatial extent & function of remaining natural areas.

Objective 4: Restore connections among the Loxahatchee River headwater natural areas to improve hydrology, sheetflow, hydroperiods, natural storage, & vegetation communities.

Objective 5: Restore native plant & animal species abundance & diversity.

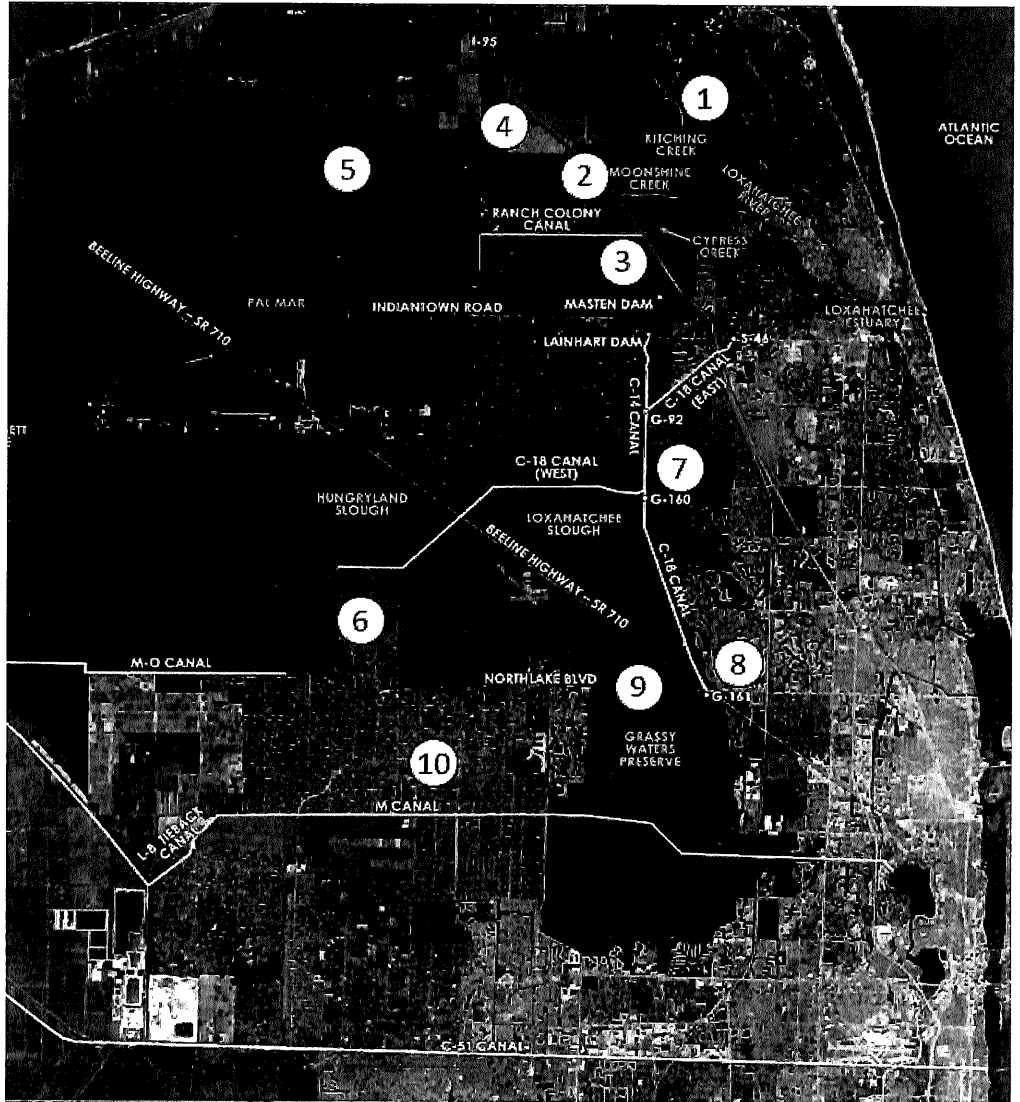
### PROJECT STATUS

After going on hold in 2011, project planning efforts were restarted in January 2016. USACE approved the tentatively selected plan on 31 July 2018. The Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works approved a request for additional time and budget to complete the Project Implementation Report (PIR) and the associated Environmental Impact Statement by March 2020. The project delivery team is incorporating revisions to the draft PIR, which is scheduled for public review by February 2019.

# LOXAHATCHEE RIVER | Watershed Restoration Project

## TENTATIVE SELECTED PLAN FEATURES

1. Kitching Creek (Hydration): spreader canal; weir/plug (Jenkins Ditch)
2. Moonshine Creek (MC) & Gulfstream East (GE) (Restoration): connect Hobe-St. Lucie Conservancy District (HSLCD) ditch to MC; clear MC vegetation; weir in Hobe Grove Ditch; regrade adjacent area to historic topography
3. Cypress Creek Canal (CCC) (Reduce Over-drainage): replace CCC weir to raise control elevation; raise berm at Ranch Colony; automate twin 84" culverts; pump and spreader swale; regrade Cypress Creek southern forks;
4. Gulfstream West (Restoration & Reduce Over-drainage): partial backfill & relocate southern end of HSLCD canal; small pump; construct flow through marsh to attenuate flow
5. Palmar East (Restoration & Connectivity) plug ditches; remove pipes; improve northern berm; construct western berm; improve eastern berm; pumps at Thomas Farm; redirect drainage to groundwater flow-through marsh via north Nine Gems canal
6. C-18W Reservoir (9,500 ac-ft & 4 ASR Wells): aboveground reservoir; inflow pump; discharge structure; seepage control; M-O Canal Connector and pump
7. G-160 Structure (Reduce Over-drainage): improve hydroperiod in Loxahatchee Slough
8. G-161 Structure (Connectivity): Grassy Waters Preserve (GWP) water to Loxahatchee Slough
9. GWP Triangle (Connectivity)
10. M-1 Pump Station (Conveyance): Deliver Lower M-1 Basin water to M-Canal, GWP, and G-161



## FOR MORE INFORMATION



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904-232-1662



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<http://www.saj.usace.army.mil/Missions/Environmental/Ecosystem-Restoration/Loxahatchee-River-Watershed-Restoration-Project>

US ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS

