

Highlights of [GAO-03-518T](#), a report to the Chairman and Ranking Minority Member, Subcommittee on Interior and Related Agencies, House Appropriations Committee

Why GAO Did This Study

Restoration of the South Florida ecosystem is a complex, long-term federal and state undertaking that requires the development of extensive scientific information. GAO was asked to report on the funds spent on scientific activities for restoration, the gaps that exist in scientific information, and the extent to which scientific activities are being coordinated.

What GAO Recommends

To improve the coordination of scientific activities for the South Florida ecosystem restoration initiative, GAO recommends that as chair of the South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force (Task Force), the Secretary of the Interior

- clarify the plans and documents the Science Coordination Team (SCT) needs to complete and the time frames for completing them;
- evaluate staffing needs of the SCT and allocate sufficient staff to carry out its duties; and
- take measures to improve the working relationship between the Task Force and the SCT.

In commenting on the draft report, the Department of the Interior agreed with the premises of the report that scientific activities need to be better coordinated and that the SCT's role needs to be clarified. Interior stated that the Task Force would ultimately review GAO's recommendations and approve actions, as warranted.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-518T.

To view the full report, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Barry T. Hill at (202) 512-3841.

SOUTH FLORIDA ECOSYSTEM RESTORATION

Improved Science Coordination Needed to Increase the Likelihood of Success

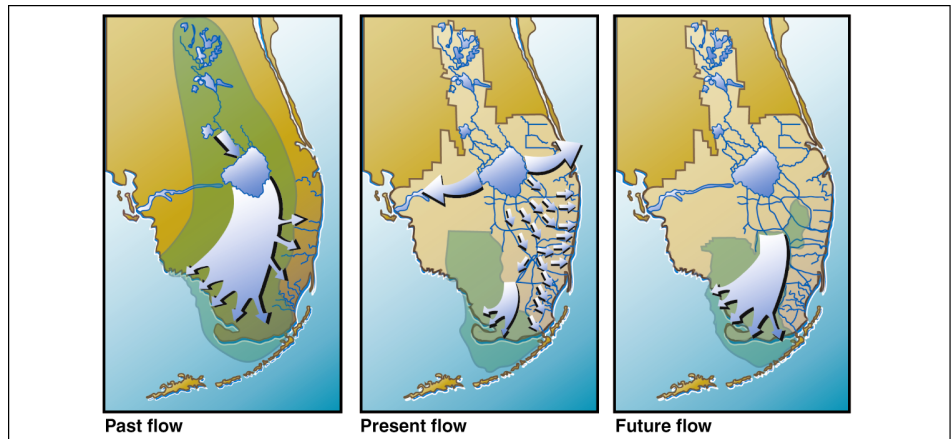
What GAO Found

From fiscal years 1993 through 2002, eight federal agencies and one state agency collectively spent \$576 million to conduct mission-related scientific research, monitoring, and assessment in support of the restoration of the South Florida ecosystem. With this funding, which was almost evenly split between the federal agencies and the state agency, scientists have made progress in developing information—including information on the past, present, and future flow of water in the ecosystem—for restoration.

While some scientific information has been obtained and understanding of the ecosystem improved, key gaps remain in scientific information needed for restoration. If not addressed quickly, these gaps could hinder the success of restoration. One particularly important gap is the lack of information regarding the amount and risk of contaminants, such as fertilizers and pesticides, in water and sediment throughout the ecosystem.

The South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force—comprised of federal, state, local, and tribal entities—is responsible for coordinating the South Florida ecosystem restoration initiative. The Task Force is also responsible for coordinating scientific activities for restoration, but has yet to establish an effective means of doing so. In 1997, it created the SCT to coordinate the science activities of the many agencies participating in restoration. However, the Task Force did not give the SCT clear direction to carry out its responsibilities in support of the Task Force and restoration. Furthermore, unlike the full-time science coordinating bodies created for other restoration efforts, the SCT functions as a voluntary group with no full-time and few part-time staff. Without an effective means to coordinate restoration, the Task Force cannot ensure that restoration decisions are based on sound scientific information.

Past, Present, and Future Flow of Water in South Florida



Source: South Florida Water Management District.