To: Council Members  
From: Staff  
Date: January 20, 2017 Council Meeting  
Subject: Update on Loxahatchee River Watershed Restoration Project by Ken Todd, Palm Beach County Water Resource Manager  

Introduction

Ken Todd is Palm Beach County’s water resource manager and is leading regional coordination efforts through a partnership of six affected local governments and special water improvement districts in developing a “locally preferred option” for the Loxahatchee River Watershed Restoration Project. Conceived as part of the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan, the project is intended to address regional water resource issues affecting Palm Beach and Martin counties, including: 1) restoration of the Northwest Fork of the Loxahatchee River (one of two nationally designated Florida Wild and Scenic Rivers); 2) restoration of the Loxahatchee Slough; 3) the reduction of damaging fresh water discharges to Lake Worth Lagoon by increasing surface water storage and conveyance; 4) restoration of the Grassy Waters Preserve and enhancement of water supplies for local governments in Palm Beach County; and 5) the provision of better flood protection for the western communities within the area.

Mr. Todd’s presentation will describe the regional partnership effort that led to development of the locally preferred option for the project. Additional background information about the project is provided with three attached exhibits. Council may want to discuss what if any actions it could take in support of the locally preferred option developed through this regional partnership.

Recommendation

For information only.

Attachments
The Loxahatchee River Watershed Restoration Project (formerly known as North Palm Beach County - Part 1) is a part of the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP). The project includes approximately 753 square miles located in central and northern Palm Beach County and southern Martin County. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), in partnership with the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD), is leading the planning process.

**PROJECT PURPOSE**
The Loxahatchee River Watershed Restoration Project aims to restore and sustain the overall quantity, quality, timing, and distribution of freshwaters to the federally designated “National Wild and Scenic” Northwest Fork of the Loxahatchee River for current and future generations. This project also seeks to restore, sustain, and reconnect the area’s wetlands and watersheds that form the historic headwaters for the river and its tributaries.

**PROJECT LOCATION**
The project area includes Palm Beach County and southern Martin County.

**PROJECT STATUS**
Planning efforts for the project were put on hold in 2011 and have now been restarted. Currently, alternative plans are being evaluated to develop a final plan, known as a Project Implementation Report and Environmental Impact Statement, to prepare for congressional authorization.

**PROJECT OVERVIEW**
The objectives for the Loxahatchee River Watershed Restoration project are to:
- Improve water distribution and timing to restore the natural system’s ecological function
- Rehydrate natural areas that have been hydrologically impacted by excessive draining and water diversion
- Re-establish connections among natural areas that have become spatially and/or hydrologically fragmented.
- Improve timing and distribution of water from the upstream watershed to increase the resiliency of freshwater riverine habitats to future sea-level changes

If implemented, these actions will:
- Help restore more natural water deliveries
- Promote improved health and functionality of wetland and upland areas
- Increase the quantity and quality of habitat available for native wildlife and vegetation
September 15, 2016

Peter Antonacci, Executive Director
South Florida Water Management District
3301 Gun Club Road
West Palm Beach, Florida 33416-4680

Re: Loxahatchee River Watershed Restoration Project

Dear Mr. Antonacci:

The local governments in the affected area of the Loxahatchee River Watershed Restoration Project ("Project"), including Palm Beach County, the City of West Palm Beach, Town of Jupiter, Seacoast Utility Authority, Indian Trail Improvement District and the Loxahatchee River Environmental Control District (collectively, "Parties"), have participated in regional planning activities to address the water resource needs in Northern Palm Beach County for at least twenty years, even prior to the inception of the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan in 2000 ("CERP"). This diverse group of responsible stakeholders recognizes the importance of regional water resource planning that balances ecological and public water supply needs. The Parties appreciate the opportunity to be represented through their participation in the ongoing Project planning efforts as part of the Project Delivery Team (PDT) led by the South Florida Water Management District ("SFWMD") and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers ("Corps"). The Parties urge the District and Corps to include in the selected alternative those broader regional objectives and locally preferred options that support and benefit the Project and that were previously acknowledged during the planning for the 2010 North Palm Beach County – Part 1 CERP Project ("NPBC Project").

The original elements of the NPBC Project included five goals that were designed to be consistent with comprehensive restoration that addressed water resource issues on a regional level. The goals included: 1) restoration of the Northwest Fork of the Loxahatchee River (one of two nationally designated Florida Wild and Scenic Rivers); 2) restoration of the Loxahatchee Slough; 3) the reduction of damaging fresh water discharges to Lake Worth Lagoon by increasing surface water storage and conveyance; 4) restoration of the Grassy Waters Preserve and enhancement of water supplies for local governments in Palm Beach County and; 5) the provision of better flood protection for the western communities within the County. These goals remain important to the region and participating stakeholders, particularly in light of the harmful discharges that have occurred over the past several months. Local governments have contributed time and financial assistance in implementing the NPBC Project plan, including participation in the pilot testing of the L-8 Reservoir, purchase and restoration of wetland areas for connectivity, construction of G-160 and G-161 structures, the ITID Pilot Pump Project, and increasing the capacity of the City of West Palm Beach Control 2 structure. However, the NPBC Project was placed on hold by the Corps in 2010.
When the PDT process was restarted in early 2015 the NPBC Project had been rebranded the Loxahatchee River Watershed Restoration Project and the Corps had revised the goals for the Project. The L-8 Reservoir had been repurposed to provide water deliveries south to the Everglades and was no longer available to provide water for the MFL of the Loxahatchee River. The five goals agreed upon in 2010 by the local participants, the SFWMD, and the Corps were no longer the goals for the Project. Instead, the Corps indicated they would only focus on the first two goals stated above in the new planning effort. The Parties believe that it is in the best interests of the general populace of Palm Beach County and the region to continue to plan for the original five goals. With that in mind, the Parties developed a conceptual “Locally Preferred Option” that has been included in 2 of the 5 alternative plans that are being modeled and studied in detail as part of the development of a Tentatively Selected Plan (“TSP”) for the Project.

The Parties believe the Locally Preferred Option offers a more balanced planning approach than any of the other alternative plans to be studied. The Locally Preferred Option equally emphasizes restoring the environment, providing for future and existing water supplies and improving flood control systems while preventing harmful discharges to coastal waters as provided in the original 2010 NPBC Project and the CERP plan. A regional holistic Project planning approach decreases the risk of project implementation delays, increased costs and inefficiencies of competing plans that may be at cross purposes.

As such the Locally Preferred Option includes all of the following features/components:

- Completion of a reservoir on the Mecca Property for storage of excess water for restoration flows;
- Completion of the C-51 Reservoir for deep-water storage within the L-8 basin to replace capacity lost when the L-8 Reservoir was repurposed for Restoration Strategies;
- Utilization of the Moss property to assist in additional storage as part of the system in meeting restoration goals;
- Construction and/or improvements of conveyance features to move water and recharge the surficial aquifer within the region from the L-8 Basin to the Mecca Reservoir, M Canal, to the Loxahatchee Slough, and to the Northwest Fork of the Loxahatchee River;
- Construction of infrastructure required to deliver sufficient water to the M Canal and Clear Lake to compensate the City of West Palm Beach for water that moves north from Grassy Waters (through G-161) to the Northwest Fork of the Loxahatchee River;
- Construction of C-17 back pumping facilities to capture water from the C-17 Canal that otherwise would be lost to tide and thus, decrease the damaging fresh water discharges to the Lake Worth Lagoon.
- Construction of a control structure within the L-8 Canal that prevents flows from Lake Okeechobee with high concentrations of nutrients from entering the Lake Worth Lagoon or Grassy Waters Preserve.
The Parties will continue working through the Project Delivery Team in the hopes of finalizing the selection of a TSP that can be timely implemented and meets the objectives of the Loxahatchee River and the Loxahatchee Slough, as well as the larger region affected by Project implementation. Regardless of the final outcome of the PDT process, the Parties encourage the SFWMD to take the lead on water resource development for the North County area as the regional agency of the state responsible for flood control and water resource protection. The Parties request that SFWMD prioritize the remaining regional objectives to increase storage and conveyance of surface water, provide adequate present and future water supplies, insure protection of water quality and flood protection as well as restoration of the Lake Worth Lagoon and expedite their completion through inclusion of the additional components as priority water resource development projects for the region in the Lower East Water Supply Plan and other District planning processes. The Parties additionally recommend that SFWMD undertake measures to expeditiously implement the additional components including the provision of cooperative funding, pursuit of state and federal grants and appropriations, and active cooperation and project partnerships. The Parties remain committed to partnering with SFWMD and other regional partners to take the steps necessary to achieve the desired regional benefits beyond the PDT efforts stated as the Corps' goals of the Loxahatchee River Watershed Restoration Project. As part of that partnership, the Parties request that the SFWMD take the lead as the local sponsor for the Locally Preferred Option should it not be selected by the Corps as the TSP.

Yours Sincerely,

Palm Beach County
Shannon LaRoeque, P.E., Assistant County Administrator
James C. Stiles, Director, Water Utilities
Kenneth S. Todd, Jr., P.E., Water Resource Manager
Robert Robbins, Director, Department of Environmental Resources Management

City of West Palm Beach
Scott D. Kelly, P.E., Assistant City Administrator

Loxahatchee River District
Dr. Aldean Arrington, PhD., Executive Director
Town of Jupiter
David L. Brown, Utilities Director

Indian Trail Improvement District
Jay G. Foy, P.E., District Engineer