

Essential #8

Prevent development that undermines the Greater Everglades

The Problem

While billions of dollars of taxpayer money will be required to protect and restore the Everglades and estuaries, all of the results achieved by these expenditures will be at risk if we do not address new development pressures taking place on the perimeters of the system.

South Florida's growing economy will require more water and land—creating the connected demand for higher levels of flood protection and drainage. Forecast scenarios expect a population growth of 71 percent—a population of 11 million people by 2030 in South Florida. The amount of urban land needed for this growing urban population has been estimated at 1 million acres spread out over the four south Florida sub-regions. Forty-seven percent of this new urban land is expected to be necessary to meet the needs of the Lower West Coast sub-region population.



The Solution

The primary tool available to address this problem is strict compliance with Florida's Growth Management Act. As a key Florida planning law, the Act requires local county and city governments to prepare comprehensive land use plans. State approval of these local comprehensive plans provides important control over local land use decisions that may impact (or benefit) greater Everglades restoration efforts.

In collaboration with the requirements of the State's Growth Management Act, county commissions and local municipalities need to take shared responsibility for Everglades restoration by accommodating restoration goals with their local planning decisions. The Florida Department of Community Affairs (DCA) must require consistency with Everglades restoration objectives through its review of all local government plans and plan amendments. DCA should amend Rule 9J-5 to attain this goal if it deems such an amendment necessary.

DCA must also evaluate the use of the Area of Critical Concern program under FS 380.05 to provide focused protection of state infrastructure (Everglades Restoration) and establish *Principles for Guiding Development* that protect Everglades resources. Other mechanisms employed successfully by DCA in different locations such as the "Wekiva Task Force" model should be considered for deployment in areas where development confronts and threatens Everglades restoration objectives.

Even under the strictest of growth management approaches, existing land use rights and land use values will surpass restoration efforts unless the State acts quickly to permanently secure more natural lands. An increased focus on the State's *Florida Forever* land acquisition program is recommended to make this a billion dollar-a-year initiative.

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The Solution continued...

Rather than accommodating traditional urban sprawl, directives for new development should encourage the compact development and urban infill models of “Smart Growth.” Specific examples of actions that have been or should be implemented include:

- Develop habitat-based designation of local plans, such as the “tier maps,” in the **Florida Keys**.
- Maintain **Miami-Dade County’s** current Urban Development boundary (UDB) until at least 2025.
- Discourage adverse mining activities and fragmentation of natural areas by new roads or urban development in **Palm Beach County**.
- Incorporate a regional vision for sustainable development in the comprehensive plans of **Lee and Collier Counties** that includes an Urban Service Boundary.
- Provide technical assistance to encourage the rural interior counties of **Okeechobee, Glades, and Hendry** to develop a regional vision for environmentally responsible development.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of programs such as the Rural Fringe Transfer of Development Rights, the Rural Lands Stewardship Area, and Private-Public partnerships and determine effective models that will help limit sprawl and accommodate growth in other rural areas such as **Hendry and Glades counties**.
- The rural character of the Kissimmee Basin must be retained by limiting development to strict urban growth boundaries. Rural Stewardship Area proposals should be considered—provided that they result in compact functional nodes of development, and guarantee 80 percent of more preservation and permanent agriculture on tracts 50,000 acres or larger. Conservation of agricultural lands should be empowered by supporting Transferable Development Rights (TDR) systems that will allow density transfers from the rural area to within the designated urban growth boundaries and result in permanent conservation or agricultural easements protecting the rural area.