
**ALTERNATIVES FOR THE SOUTHWEST FLORIDA
ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT**

FINAL REPORT

December 1998

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by

Alternatives Development Group

with support from

Planning and Management Consultants, Ltd.

Report Submitted to

**U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
Jacksonville District**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Figures	v
List of Acronyms.....	vii
I. ADG Purpose, Membership, and Report	1
Background.....	1
Report Purpose and Organization	3
II. Process Overview	5
Controversy and Commitment	5
Issues, Evaluation, and Results	6
Available Information and Best Professional Judgment	7
Facilitation and Management of Meetings.....	7
III. Issues and Evaluation Factors.....	9
Issues Identification.....	9
Evaluation Factors by Issue Category	10
Property Rights	11
Water Management	12
Water Quality	13
Ecosystem Function, Wildlife Habitat, and Listed Species.....	14
Regulatory Efficiency and Effectiveness.....	15
Economic Sustainability.....	15
Local Land Use Policy.....	16
Avoidance of Wetland Impacts	16
Mitigation.....	17
Cumulative/Secondary Impacts.....	17
Restoration/Retrofit.....	18
Public Lands Management/Use	18
Summary.....	19
IV. Alternatives Developed	21
V. Evaluation of Issues: Themes and Direction.....	23
Property Rights	23
Water Management	24
Water Quality.....	24
Ecosystem Function, Wildlife Habitat, and Listed Species.....	25
Regulatory Efficiency and Effectiveness.....	25
Economic Sustainability.....	26
Local Land Use Policy.....	26
Avoidance of Wetland Impacts	27

Mitigation	27
Cumulative/Secondary Impacts.....	28
Restoration/Retrofit.....	28
Public Lands Management/Use.....	29
VI. Concluding Remarks.....	31
VII. Interpretation of Results.....	33
Examination of Alternatives: Areas of Agreement.....	33
Description of Alternative Families and Subfamilies	34
Development (100).....	34
Lehigh Acres (200).....	34
Golden Gate (300).....	35
Agriculture (400).....	35
Rural (500).....	36
Preserve (600).....	36
Permit Standards (700).....	37
Nonagreement (800).....	37
Agreement Map Structure	37
Implications for Permit Strategies.....	38
Potential Permit Implications: Zoom D	39
Potential Permit Implications: Zoom C	40
Potential Permit Implications: Zoom B (Hub)	40
Potential Permit Implications: Zoom A	41
Permit Generalizations.....	41
Appendix A: ADG Members, Alternates and Support Team	A-1
Appendix B: Reference List.....	B-1
Appendix C: Profiles and Maps of ADG Alternatives.....	C-1
Appendix D: Continuum of Alternatives by Issue Category.....	D-1
Appendix E: Family and Subfamily Designation	E-1

LIST OF FIGURES, LIST OF TABLES

Figure I-1	ADG Study Area.....	2
Figure II-1	ADG Process	6
Figure IV-1	Prospective Zooms.....	21
Figure VII-1	Overlay of Alternatives.....	39
Table III-1	Summary of Evaluation Factors by Issues Category.....	11

LIST OF ACRONYMS

Acronym	Description
ABM	Estero Bay Agency on Bay Management
ADG	Alternatives Development Group
ARF	Acquire, Restore, and Fix
BCACSC	Big Cypress Area of Critical State Concern
BMP	Best Management Practices
Corps	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
CREW	Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed
CRPA	Critical Resource Protection Area
DCA	Florida Department of Community Affairs
DEP	Florida Department of Environmental Protection
EIS	Environmental Impact Statement
EPA	U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
FWS	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
GFC	Florida Game and Freshwater Fish Commission
GIS	Geographic Information System
Hub	Zoom B of the study area
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
PMCL	Planning and Management Consultants, Ltd.
RPC	Southwest Florida Regional Planning Council
RRR	Restoration, Retrofit, and Redevelopment
SAIC	Science Applications International Corporation
SFWMD	South Florida Water Management District
SHCA	Strategic Habitat Conservation Area
Zoom	Section of the study area

I. ADG PURPOSE, MEMBERSHIP, AND REPORT

BACKGROUND

The Alternatives Development Group (ADG) was formed to support the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) in the drafting of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for a region that spans portions of Lee and Collier counties in southwest Florida (shown in Figure I-1). The increasing number, size, and complexity of development permit requests by the citizens and business interests of southwest Florida have created a condition where the Corps and other regulatory agencies are experiencing difficulty in, on a case-by-case basis, addressing their responsibilities under federal and state law. Thus, the Corps is at the point where permit processing is taking longer, permit denials become more frequent, and the environment may receive less protection than required by law. The subject EIS is designed to offer regulatory and planning-based remedies to these shortcomings, by seeking an effective balance between natural systems and economic stability through the examination of natural and social interactions that occur in the study area.

This EIS has many roots including (1) comments submitted by the public and community organizations on individual permit applications that expressed concerns on cumulative impacts, (2) other studies and work in region, and (3) initiatives to incorporate watershed and ecosystem-based principals into permit reviews. The Corps publicly shared some ideas on whether and how to perform a review of its regulatory program and received many letters and comments from the public, civic and industry associations, conservation organizations, and other agencies. Some supported and encouraged the review or aspects of the review, some advised of the potential detrimental effects of a change in the program or of the review itself, and most had questions or ideas on the scope of the review in relation to Corps authority. The Corps initiated and tailored the EIS process based on this input.

A unique dimension of this EIS is the formation of the ADG, which was tasked with the creation and evaluation of alternatives—a central component for the EIS. The nature of the EIS is to consider the range of important issues guiding the evolution of southwest Florida. Accordingly, the Corps initiated and sought participation from the ADG that consisted of key individuals representing the interests and vision of southwest Florida. The specific charge of the ADG as offered by the Corps was to:

Report on alternatives for improving the regulatory process to:

- *Protect natural environmental values*
- *Provide for sustainable economic growth*
- *Manage appropriate changes in water flows and quality*
- *Respect public involvement and private rights*

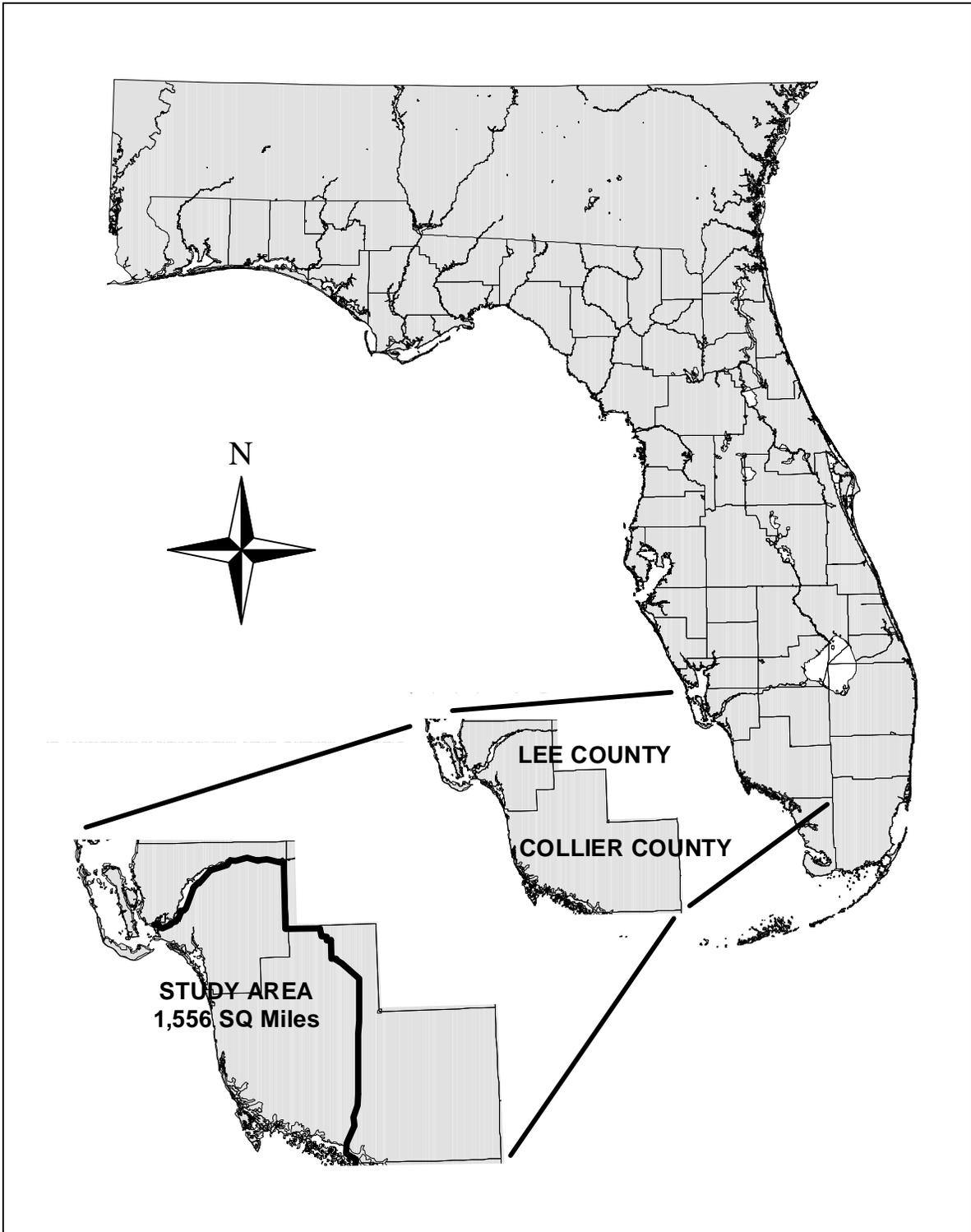


FIGURE I-1

ADG STUDY AREA

The ADG will collectively develop alternatives, evaluate the merits of each, and seek consensus on recommendations.

To effectively accommodate the charge and, more importantly, to create alternatives and evaluation factors that will bring added efficiency to regulatory activities in the future, it was imperative that this be a collaborative effort, drawing upon the perspectives of the key stakeholders in southwest Florida. The Corps worked closely with the Lee and Collier County Commissions and others in selecting, from a large number of interested persons, representatives to the ADG, which are listed in Appendix A. The list reveals a range of backgrounds and interest offering technical and political perspectives as well as interests that are driven by both environmental pursuits and economic development motivations. There was also representation of the general public on the ADG.

REPORT PURPOSE AND ORGANIZATION

This report summarizes the activities and results of the ADG. There was a significant amount of information—to include reports, data, presentations, maps—that was drawn upon during the ADG deliberations. Each of the ten core ADG meetings was documented with meeting notes that provided details of meeting activities. Supplemental process materials and data were provided in the attachments. These meeting notes and attachments and other materials numbered in the hundreds of pages of support materials provided to the ADG. While all of this information will be available to the Corps in the creation and management of the EIS, it was not practical or necessary to include all of that information in the ADG report. However, a listing of all the information presented to and utilized by the ADG is found in Appendix B.

The present document focuses on the results, summarizing the many hours of meeting activities and associated analyses embarked upon by the ADG. This report will be used directly within the EIS documentation to support the “alternatives” section of the EIS. The Corps will use the ADG report to support and guide the Corps in the development of EIS alternatives as required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The other portions of the EIS documentation are being developed in parallel with ADG activities. The entire EIS will be assembled to completion and will be worked through standard review channels and public comment.

Following this introductory chapter there are five chapters that describe details of the ADG process and results. The final chapter of this report offers an interpretation of ADG results as compiled by the Corps and the facilitation team. The following is a brief summary of the remaining chapters.

Chapter II - Process Overview. Describes the general activities, style, and rules that guided the ADG’s deliberations.

Chapter III - Issues and Evaluation Factors. Presents the key issues that were raised by the ADG and how they were used to evaluate alternatives.

Chapter IV - Alternatives Developed. Describes how the alternatives were developed making reference to Appendix C, which contains profiles of each alternative.

Chapter V - Evaluation of Issues: Themes and Direction. Offers discussion of key points and trends that were revealed through the development and evaluation of alternatives.

Chapter VI - Concluding Remarks. Closes the report with summary remarks and identification of where additional analysis could be used.

Chapter VII - Interpretation of Results. Offers commentary of how the alternatives were aligned with one another and implications of permit activities.