

Implementation & Financing

Implementing the plan

This chapter describes how the Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan (CCMP) for Tampa Bay will be implemented by local governments, agencies and other bay stakeholders, and discusses financing mechanisms to ensure that the goals of the Plan are achieved.

Action Plans

Charting the Course presents a comprehensive slate of actions to assist TBEP's partners in selecting bay improvement strategies that are the most cost-effective and environmentally beneficial for their communities. The original *Charting the Course* document included action plans for five key areas: Water & Sediment Quality, Bay Habitats, Fish & Wildlife, Dredging & Dredged Material Management and Spill Prevention & Response. A sixth action plan outlined strategies for continued Public Education and Involvement.

This updated version of *Charting the Course* features revised strategies for many of the 41 original actions in the Plan, reflecting progress toward implementing the original objectives of the action or, in some cases, a recognition that a different approach is needed. Some similar actions with common themes, strategies or target audiences have been merged and a few have been eliminated altogether – either because they are now considered complete as originally written or because they are no longer deemed necessary or feasible.

Two additional action plans were added to this update of *Charting the Course*: Invasive Species and Public Access. These additions reflect new or emerging issues not identified as priorities during the development of the original Plan.

Action plans for Tampa Bay identify a range of strategies that allow local communities to maximize return on their investment in bay recovery and protection. Many actions also achieve multiple objectives, such as pollution prevention and water conservation. Each action plan summarizes the topic and its present status, presents specific management objectives, and includes Next Steps to guide implementation of the action over the next five years.

The Interlocal Agreement

In 1998, local government and regulatory partners of the Tampa Bay Estuary Program formally affirmed their commitment to implementing the goals of *Charting the Course* through the adoption of a precedent-setting Interlocal Agreement.

The agreement, the first of its kind among the nation's 28 NEPs, represents a binding pledge by TBEP's major partners to work together to achieve bay recovery targets.

Key highlights of the landmark agreement include:

- Participation by 13 local governments, regulatory agencies and other organizations with a vested interest in the bay's health. The six largest local governments in the Tampa Bay region – the counties of Hillsborough, Pinellas and Manatee and the cities of Tampa, St. Petersburg and Clearwater — are parties to the agreement, along with the Southwest Florida Water Management District, and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection. The Tampa Port Authority, Environmental Protection Commission of Hillsborough County, Florida Game and Freshwater Fish Commission, Florida Marine Research Institute and Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council were also signatories. Separate agreements were signed by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, defining their support for implementing the Plan.
- The adoption of measurable and achievable goals for nitrogen management and habitat restoration and protection. Progress in achieving these goals will be assessed every two years, with a formal update of the CCMP every five years.
- Identification of specific projects, through detailed action plans that each signatory pledges to undertake to achieve the goals of the management plan.
- Incorporation of bay management goals into local government comprehensive plans and specific action plans into local Capital Improvement Programs.
- A commitment by regulatory agencies to allow permitting flexibility, when appropriate, to achieve maximum environmental benefit for the bay in the most cost-effective manner.

The Interlocal Agreement also establishes the Tampa Bay Estuary Program as an Independent Special District under Florida Statutes; spells out the governance structure of the program, and establishes funding contributions by the signatories based on population.

The Tampa Bay Nitrogen Management Consortium

One of the Tampa Bay Estuary Program's most prominent initiatives addresses controlling the bay's nitrogen intake in order to restore vital underwater seagrass beds. Facilitating this effort is a unique alliance of public and private sector institutions known as the Nitrogen Management Consortium.

Established in 1996, the Consortium brought together local governments, regulatory agencies and key industries impacting the bay to develop an equitable and cost-effec-

tive plan for achieving the recommended nitrogen reduction goal for Tampa Bay. The Nitrogen Management Action Plan adopted by the group includes estimates of expected reductions associated with various nitrogen-decreasing projects. Additionally, the Action Plan outlines the responsibilities of TBEP and other Consortium members for monitoring and tracking the impact of nitrogen management efforts on seagrass recovery and associated water quality.

Because of population growth and related development in the Tampa Bay region, nitrogen loading to the bay is expected to increase seven percent from 1995 to 2010, an amount equal to about 17 tons per year. Consequently, local governments and industries must reduce or preclude annual loadings to the bay by this amount to maintain water quality sufficient to promote seagrass recovery.

The Nitrogen Management Action Plan adopted by the Consortium spells out specific projects each participant has completed or plans to complete to help meet the nitrogen management goals.

The Plan adopted by the Consortium seeks to ensure that the combined amount of nitrogen entering the bay through stormwater, wastewater, smokestack and vehicle emissions and other sources does not increase in the future — even with the continued growth expected in the region. Commitments made by the government and industry partners participating in the Consortium resulted in a reduction of 135 tons of nitrogen from 1996-2000 – far exceeding the 5-year cumulative reduction goal of 85 tons. The Plan was revised again in 2005 to reflect new sources and nitrogen management projects necessary to “hold the line” on nitrogen loadings to the bay to facilitate seagrass recovery.

Member governments of TBEP’s Management Committee implement a significant portion of the Consortium Action Plan through the Interlocal Agreement (IA) via individual action plans for the achievement of the CCMP goals. Private sector members of the Consortium have pledged to implement nitrogen reduction plans for which they are solely or jointly responsible through an accompanying Resolution. From 1995-2000, half of the load reduction goal was achieved by the public sector partners, and an equal amount by the private sector partners of the Consortium.

Action Plan Database

The adoption of measurable and achievable goals is a critical component of *Charting the Course*. An important new tool for tracking progress in reaching the benchmark goals of the Plan – especially for nitrogen loadings – is a customized computer database developed specifically for the Tampa Bay Estuary Program.

The Action Plan Database, a searchable Microsoft Access-based program, documents partner contributions toward implementation of the major goals of the CCMP, as well as the individual actions within the Plan. Partners periodically submit action plans detailing bay-related projects, programs and strategies to TBEP’s database manager, who enters the information in the database. Reports can be produced in a variety of formats to assist TBEP in assessing collective progress toward bay restoration.

A unique aspect of the database is its ability to calculate nutrient reduction loads based on land use type, location and treatment method. The database assigns a reduction value (estimated from local research and monitoring data) for various land uses and nutrient reduction methods, allowing TBEP to estimate annual nutrient loadings baywide and by specific bay segment. This capability will help to provide regulatory agencies with reasonable assurance that the Tampa Bay nitrogen management strategy is meeting water quality goals.

The database is expected to be fully operational in 2005.

Financing The Plan

TBEP has historically and will continue to pursue at least eight separate avenues to secure funding or in-kind support to finance operation of the base program and to advance implementation of the CCMP. The updated financing plan includes a balance of both dedicated and variable funding sources at federal, state, and local levels as well as private and non-profit sources.

The major objectives of the financing strategy are:

- Developing dedicated sources of funding to sustain the base operations of the TBEP, including personnel, administrative cost, community outreach, environmental monitoring, and technical support.
- Securing dedicated and variable sources of funding that enhance implementation of the CCMP and maintain adequate progress toward bay restoration goals.

DEDICATED FUNDING SOURCES

Currently, the following four funding sources provide dedicated or reasonably secure funding to support the base program and/or enhance CCMP implementation.

Federal NEP Funding. Congress has authorized a spending level in Sec. 320 of the Clean Water Act of up to \$35-million each year to support the National Estuary Program. The amount appropriated by Congress for each of the last three years has been level at about \$24.5-million, equating to about \$520,000 for each of the 28 NEPs. For several years prior to that, federal funding for NEPs was about \$310,000 per program. In view of the popularity of the NEP within Congress, it is reasonably safe to expect that TBEP will not receive less than \$300,000 each year in federal funding through Sec. 320 CWA.

Funding Commitments in Interlocal Agreement. The Interlocal Agreement through which the CCMP is implemented obligates local government and agency partners to fund all TBEP costs approved by the Policy Board in the annual program budget. One-third of the cost is allocated to the Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD) and two-thirds to the six local government partners. The SWFWMD share is paid equally from five separate river basin boards. When coupled with the federal NEP allocation administered through EPA, local government and agency cash contributions have met or exceeded the amount required to operate the program at the full-service level.

Specialty License Plate. Revenue from the Tampa Bay Estuary specialty license plate generated a total of \$145,305 in calendar year 2003, of which \$116,305 was allocated to TBEP for CCMP implementation. Total annual revenue from license plate sales has steadily climbed from \$50,265 in 2000, the first full year of plate sales. Although the TBEP Policy Board has thus far allocated its share of the revenues for Bay Mini-Grant projects, the Board is authorized under the state law that created the Tampa Bay Estuary plate to use those funds for any types of projects that contribute to CCMP implementation. Bay Mini-Grants generate tens of thousands of dollars in matching funds and in-kind services.

Pinellas County Environmental Fund. PCEF is a partnership of Pinellas County and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, created to raise funds for projects that help advance implementation of the CCMP. From 2000-2005, PCEF awarded more than \$7.2 million in grants for projects throughout the bay area that contribute to CCMP implementation. These projects were leveraged with \$10.8 million in matching funds. PCEF officials are actively exploring opportunities to increase contributions to the Fund from public and private entities in the Tampa Bay region.

VARIABLE FUNDING SOURCES

The following funding sources supplement CCMP implementation through local action plans of TBEP partners, grants, cooperative agreements, and other mechanisms. While variable from year to year, they represent significant funding sources for TBEP and its partners.

Local Action Plans of TBEP Partners. The TBEP Interlocal Agreement calls on each of the 13 signatory parties to develop and periodically update local action plans describing projects they propose to undertake that will help advance CCMP goals. The countless monetary and in-kind expenditures by TBEP's local government and agency partners in the course of implementing their local action plans represent by far the largest source of contributions to CCMP implementation. Habitat restoration and protection projects alone conducted by TBEP partners from 2001 to 2003 enhanced or preserved more than 14,000 acres of habitat at a cost of \$100 million. Sustaining the partners' commitment made in the Interlocal Agreement to achieving the goals of the CCMP through local action plans is arguably the most critical element of this financing strategy.

Contracted Grant Writing Services. Beginning in 2003, TBEP contracted with a professional grant writer to assist TBEP staff and its partners in preparing grant applications for projects that help implement the CCMP. In her first two years, the grant writer has assisted TBEP partners in securing over \$3 million in 319(h) grants for stormwater management projects. TBEP plans to continue offering these services to its local government and agency partners.

Other Grants and Cooperative Agreements. TBEP staff has partnered with federal, state and local agencies to secure hundreds of thousands of dollars in grants for developing management tools and for research and environmental monitoring projects as called for in the CCMP. TBEP has teamed with local government environmental management departments, EPA, USGS, NOAA, and the ACOE to leverage TBEP funds for priority plans and studies ranging from a dredged material management plan with the ACOE to atmospheric deposition monitoring with EPA to developing an

online information atlas of Tampa Bay with the USGS. TBEP will continue to pursue these opportunities as a means of financing priority research, monitoring, and resource management needs.

Non-Federal Overmatch Fund. TBEP maintains a Non-Federal Overmatch Fund that provides a source of matching funds for grants helping to implement the CCMP and serves as a contingency fund for continuing program operations in the event a major funding source is lost. Expenses which cannot be paid for with federal money such as the program's dues to the Association of National Estuary Programs are also funded from the Overmatch Fund. The fund balance as of May 2004 was about \$224,000.