

Mitigation Banking – A Win-Win Solution

Permits Protect Water Resources

One way to protect our region's water resources is through the regulatory process. Those who initiate large land development and other construction projects are required to obtain state and federal permits to ensure that water quality and natural environmental systems are not harmed. Development plans must address issues such as: loss of flood storage areas, drainage and drawdown of water in wetlands and wellfields and water conservation. Projects must be designed to protect and maintain existing natural wetland functions, including fish and wildlife habitat. If impacts to wetlands are unavoidable, but the extent of environmental impact is minimized, then permit applicants must develop an acceptable mitigation proposal.



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Mitigation Banks – An Alternative

Where on-site mitigation is not appropriate to offset permitted impacts to wetlands, mitigation banking may be used as an alternative for meeting wetland regulatory criteria. Use of a mitigation bank is appropriate, desirable and a permissible mitigation option when the mitigation bank will offset adverse impacts of the project and



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- onsite mitigation opportunities are not expected to have comparable long term viability due to factors such as unsuitable hydrologic conditions or ecologically incompatible existing adjacent land uses or future lands uses or
- use of the mitigation bank would provide greater improvement in ecological value than on-site mitigation.

Use of a mitigation bank can help reduce risk and uncertainty, as well as temporal loss of resource functions and services. Since mitigation bank credits are not released and available to offset impacts until specific permitting criteria are met, the use of mitigation bank credits can also help reduce risk that the mitigation will not be fully successful. The bank site improvements must be sustainable and must be completed far enough in advance of anticipated impacts to achieve a regional “no net loss” of wetland function or acreage. Because larger sites are more beneficial for wetland and wildlife habitats than smaller, fragmented sites, mitigation banks are typically large-scale wetland protection and/or restoration projects and generally are subjected to more rigorous scientific and technical analysis, planning and implementation than permittee-responsible mitigation.

Water Management Involvement

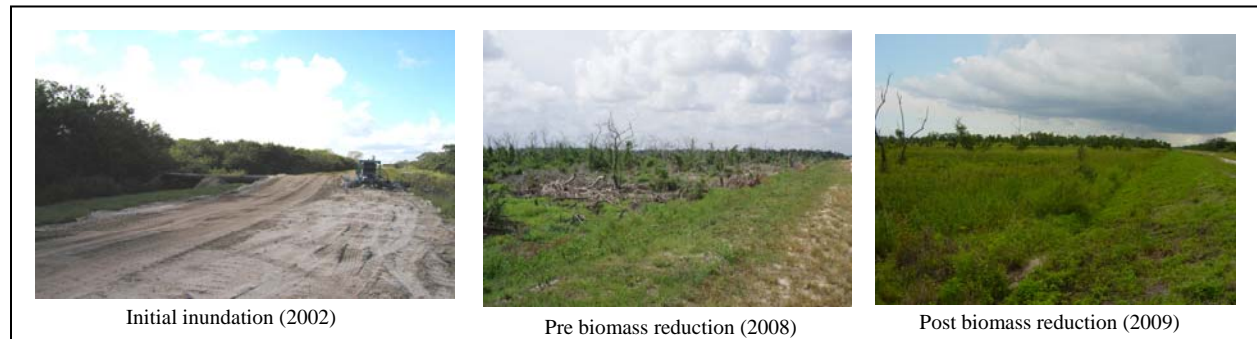
Because mitigation banks reduce wetland mitigation uncertainty, provide ecological benefits and generate revenue, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection and Florida's water management districts were directed by state legislation in 1993 to participate in and encourage establishment of mitigation banks. The South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) was one of the early pioneers in this effort. The SFWMD's mitigation banking program is designed to supplement funding of on-going land acquisition, restoration and management programs in order to achieve regional protection and restoration goals. Through effective site selection – locating banks in areas where restoration needs are the greatest – mitigation banking can generate both environmental and financial benefits. The **Loxahatchee Mitigation Bank** was established using a public/private contractual agreement with SFWMD.

The Loxahatchee Mitigation Bank

The **Loxahatchee Mitigation Bank** is owned and operated by [Tetra Tech EC, Inc.](#) The Loxahatchee Mitigation Bank site is a 1,256-acre parcel located in Palm Beach County adjacent to the environmentally sensitive Arthur R. Marshall Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge. The location of this site provides habitat connectivity that augments existing Everglades wetland systems. The goal of the Loxahatchee Mitigation Bank is to restore habitat values and provide enhancement of a degraded Everglades ecosystem through hydroperiod restoration, exotic vegetation removal, re-vegetation with desired species and controlled burn.

A Win-Win Solution

By using a public/private contractual agreement, targeted public land has been restored and endowed for perpetual management and revenues will be generated for both the SFWMD and Tetra Tech EC, Inc. Purchase of the mitigation bank credits reimburses the banker and the SFWMD for costs incurred and profits are then shared. Public revenues are used to further the SFWMD's regional land acquisition and stewardship responsibilities.



Conclusion

A mitigation bank gives permit applicants an approved mitigation alternative for permitted wetland impacts while contributing to the protection and restoration of Florida's valued wetland ecosystems. Mitigation banks enhance mitigation certainty, provide ecological value and consolidate expertise and mitigation in one area. Public/Private contractual arrangements provide an opportunity to create a revenue stream while ensuring the restoration of ecologically significant lands.

Submitted by: Kristin Bennett, TetraTech EC, Inc
Kristin.Bennett@tetratech.com.