

Addressing Restoration Projects Impacts to Cultural Resources

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers plans, designs, constructs, and operates civil works projects, including the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP). CERP projects are constructed in an area occupied by humans for thousands of years, leading to potentially irreparable damage to irreplaceable cultural heritage. This includes impacts to sites with ancient burials, the disturbance of which is unacceptable to the descendent community. Disturbance includes both impacts from restoration projects, as well as excavation and reburial in a secure location to mitigate construction effects. An established process exists on paper to discuss this issue when avoidance of effects is not possible, but it has never been needed in the past. The construction of a major pieces of CERP infrastructure have brought focus on this process. These issues are sensitive, and involve overlapping federal laws, deeply held cultural and religious beliefs, and a history of forced displacement and survival. The application of NRLI tools and strategies identified a need to focus on process, and not resolution, of conflict brought mutual recognition to limitations on the understanding of existing agreements and procedures. As part of an ongoing consultation process, new issues were mutually identified regarding how discussions were occurring, what the decision points were, and how they were documented. The intentional application of NRLI techniques and perspective has shaped this ongoing coordination, which will be reviewed in general and respectful terms given the sensitivity of the issue.