

LTG Robert B. Flowers
Remarks (as prepared)
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Sean, thank you for your introduction. Ladies and gentlemen, good evening. It's a privilege for me to be here, and to have a chance to thank the Everglades Coalition for its commitment to the most ambitious restoration project ever attempted.

Your theme, 'providing the leadership, renewing the partnership,' is particularly fitting and reminds us that we must have both to ensure we provide the right stewardship for our bold, complex and enormous endeavor.

As you may know, this summer the 2004 Olympic games will take place in Athens, Greece. It was the ancient birthplace of the games, and also where the games were revived in 1896. The Olympics are returning home, to its heritage.

And that's what we are doing here with the Everglades; we are returning it back to its heritage -- its biological heritage.

To use Olympic terms, we are not running the 100-yard dash. Restoring south Florida's ecosystem is a marathon event, one of unprecedented scope and scale. And it will take great feats of engineering, sound science and collaboration to cross that finish line.

You heard from Mr. Woodley on Thursday evening. I echo his commitment to the Everglades. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is enormously proud to be part of the team, and we pledge that we will move forward with the knowledge that ecosystem restoration is the primary purpose of the plan.

Throughout two centuries of service, the Corps' work has reflected the nation's preferences as expressed through our leaders and elected representatives. As you know, in 1948, the Corps responded when Congress said to 'drain that swamp' after massive flooding devastated the region.

Now we've galvanized the right tools and talent to undo the damage, while also providing for other water related needs such as water supply and flood protection.

And we are making progress. Interagency teams are already working on more than twenty-five projects and restoration activities.

In November, we reached a significant milestone after the programmatic regulations became final.

The framework to establish processes and procedures is now a better product because of the many comments we received. The commitment to use sound science, independent review and to develop interim restoration goals will keep us moving in the right direction.

And in mid-February, we will reach a milestone with the Indian River Lagoon South project, the first report of about 40 to go forward for administration review and congressional authorization. It took longer to complete than many would have liked, but I'm convinced the time we spent to do this first report right will help the implementation of future projects.

These accomplishments are keeping us on firm ground. As we proceed, there will no doubt be hurdles, but we have to stay the course. Our success will do more than restore the Everglades; it will serve as a beacon of possibility, a model for ecosystem restoration to the world.

And I want to thank all of you for your efforts, and not just because of what we are accomplishing. Because of the partnership among the Everglades restoration team, the Corps has become better – and as a result can better address water resources needs at home and abroad.

The Corps' other partnerships have changed us as well. I understand you heard about the Pantanal on Thursday, and the partnership the Corps has with the Nature Conservancy. I greatly value that partnership and what we have learned by collaborating on the restoration and protection of the Green River.

As the Corps continues get better due to our many partnerships, some things have not changed. As an Army organization supporting the nation and the Armed Forces, we remain proud of our national security role.

Our dual military and civil works missions have given us a unique capability. Corps employees quickly respond to wartime needs because of their daily experience on civil works projects.

Most recently, Corps employees were working on water resources projects here in the U.S., and just days later were in Afghanistan and Iraq, supporting military operations and reconstruction efforts.

So, how *have* we changed? Well, today's Corps has a broader perspective, and I attribute that in part to our work here in south Florida with you.

We've come to understand that national security includes having communities that are economically, environmentally and socially healthy. And now the

science is good enough for us to find environmentally sustainable answers.

And the Environmental Operating Principles we adopted serve as our guide and written declaration to pursue our work in environmentally sustainable ways.

We've also learned that to meet our nation's needs, we must take a watershed approach to solving water challenges. Solving problems for a single area can lead to problems in another location.

And finally, we learned that the only way to find sustainable solutions is through true collaboration. If we press science and bring in all stakeholders, we can create synergy and develop those win-win solutions that are essential for long-term success.

Right now the Corps is in 91 countries, providing a wide range of support. In addition to our work on repairing Iraq's infrastructure, the Corps is supporting the U.S. Agency for International Development by helping to train Iraqi Engineers, and to prepare a water management model that may assist in the potential restoration of Iraq's marshes.

In my role as commander, I've visited many countries and have seen first hand some of the water and environmental-related challenges other nations face.

After attending the third World Water Forum in Japan last year, I can tell you the world is looking for a large-scale success. And together, all of us working on restoring America's Everglades can deliver it. We can show that through sound science and strong collaboration, long term, large-scale regional solutions will work.

It's a lofty goal, but our nation has a history of setting and reaching lofty goals.

In 1961, when President Kennedy set a monumental goal to send a man to the moon and return him safely to earth, no one knew just how America would accomplish such a remarkable goal. But it happened.

The Corps played a part in this historic effort by helping to design and build NASA facilities at Cape Canaveral.

Today, once again, we have no precedent for our monumental project. And some may wonder if we will be able to restore 'the river of grass.'

Enormous effort, time, heart and sweat went into making the moon landing a reality. The Everglades Restoration requires no less.

Let me close by saying, We Are Up To The Task. Our marathon is gaining momentum. We have the purpose and resolve, the tools and the talent. Now it's up to us to stay the course.

Together, with the right engineering, science and collaboration, we will heal an ecosystem -- and create some history in the process. And the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is enormously proud to be on the road with you. Thank you.