RA BRIEF
FLORIDA ASSUMPTION OF STATE 404 PROGRAM

Date Updated: 03/13/2020 **Date Original Prepared:** 8/8/2018 **Priority:** 3

EPA Goal Supported: Cooperative Federalism, Rule of Law and Process

Issue: 404 Assumption by the State of Florida

Location: State of Florida

Context:

1. Involved Parties: EPA, Corps, USFWS, NMFS, FDEP.
2. Interested parties: Florida Governor, the White House, other states, media, and various stakeholders (mining, developers, Tribes, environmental NGOs).
3. Florida is working on an official request to assume administration of a CWA section 404 program. Before making their request, Florida must pass a rule that will set up the required program elements. The Florida rulemaking timeline and possible legal challenges to that rulemaking, resolution of ESA coordination processes, and finalizing the Corps/FDEP MOA which identifies which waters the state will assume and which waters the Corps will retain, are currently driving the timeline.
4. There are 6 required components of Assumption Package, which are listed below with corresponding estimates (by percentage) of the degree to which EPA staff understands Florida has completed these components.
   - Letter from Governor requesting program approval (0%)
   - Complete program description (30%)
   - Attorney General's statement (80%)
   - EPA/DEP MOA (85%)
   - Corps/DEP MOA (75%)
   - Copies of all applicable state statutes and regulations, including those governing applicable state administrative procedures (70%)

Critical Messages:

1. EPA continues to assist Florida with understanding the federal requirements for 404 assumption and is communicating with them regularly regarding their development of a 404 program.
2. The EPA has not yet seen/reviewed, in final or draft, several components of what Florida will ultimately need to submit as part of a complete assumption package.
3. Key outstanding issues include: Ex. 5 Deliberative Process (DP)

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Considerations:

1. FDEP staff sent EPA staff a copy of their revised proposed rule on 2/12/20. FDEP published Notices of Proposed Rule for the State 404 Program on 2/19/20. The 21-day comment period for the rule will end 3/11/20. In the in-person meeting on 3/4/20 FDEP staff informed EPA staff there will be a public hearing. The public meeting is scheduled for April 2, comments are accepted by FDEP until the end of the public meeting. FDEP staff also indicated there may be a Notice of Change to the rule which would reset the 21-day comment period.
2. FDEP submitted a draft Biological Assessment (BA) to EPA and the Services on 2/25/20 for review. They have asked EPA to submit comments within one month which will be compiled and incorporated by the contractor, GHD. After discussions on 3/4/20 FDEP staff informed EPA the BA requires edits and FDEP will send the edited draft back to EPA for additional comments as soon as possible. FDEP also plans to implement weekly calls with EPA until the BA is really for submission to the Services.
3. Ex. 5 Deliberative Process (DP)
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5. EPA staff had an in-person meeting with FDEP 3/4-5/20 to discuss BA, rules, and components of the program description. The next in-person meeting was scheduled for 4/15-16/20 but due to conflicts, FDEP is planning to reschedule sometime in May 2020.
6. EPA staff provided notification to the Poarch, Seminole, and Miccosukee tribes that Florida DEP has published their Notice of Proposed Rulemaking on 3/4/2020.