



Everglades Coalition

January 21, 2016

1000 Friends of Florida
Arthur R. Marshall Foundation
Audubon Florida
Audubon of Southwest Florida
Audubon of the Western Everglades
Audubon Society of the Everglades
Backcountry Fly Fishers of Naples
Caloosahatchee River Citizens Association/
Riverwatch
Center for Biological Diversity
Clean Water Action
Conservancy of Southwest Florida
Defenders of Wildlife
“Ding” Darling Wildlife Society
Earthjustice
Environment Florida
Everglades Coordinating Council
Everglades Foundation
Everglades Law Center
Everglades Trust
Florida Conservation Voters Education Fund
Florida Defenders of the Environment
Florida Keys Environmental Fund
Florida Native Plant Society
Florida Oceanographic Society
Friends of the Arthur R. Marshall
Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge
Friends of the Everglades
Hendry-Glades Audubon Society
International Dark-Sky Association,
FL Chapter
Izaak Walton League of America
Izaak Walton League Florida Division
Izaak Walton League Florida Keys Chapter
Izaak Walton League Mangrove Chapter
Last Stand
League of Women Voters of Florida
Loxahatchee River Coalition
Martin County Conservation Alliance
Miami Pine Rocklands Coalition
Miami Waterkeeper
National Audubon Society
National Parks Conservation Association
National Wildlife Refuge Association
Natural Resources Defense Council
Ocean Research & Conservation Association
Reef Relief
Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation
Save It Now. Glades!
Sierra Club
Sierra Club Florida Chapter
Sierra Club Broward Group
Sierra Club Calusa Group
Sierra Club Central Florida Group
Sierra Club Loxahatchee Group
Sierra Club Miami Group
Snook and Gamefish Foundation
South Florida Audubon Society
Southern Alliance for Clean Energy
The Florida Wildlife Federation
The Institute for Regional Conservation
The National Wildlife Federation
The Urban Environment League of
Greater Miami
Tropical Audubon Society

The Honorable Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama:

On behalf of the 61 members of the Everglades Coalition committed to the protection and restoration of America’s Everglades, we greatly appreciate the strong support you have shown for Everglades restoration over the past seven years. Strong funding levels have allowed federal agencies to plan, design, and begin construction on key restoration projects, several of which are nearing completion. As you prepare the final budget of your Administration for fiscal year (FY) 2017, we hope you will continue to build on your legacy to protect and restore the Everglades for the benefit of future generations.

We want to thank you for last year’s Earth Day trip to Everglades National Park, where you quoted the words of Marjory Stoneman Douglas, “[t]here are no other Everglades in the world,” recognizing that climate change is threatening the Everglades and action is needed now. We could not agree more, and we are committed to working with federal and state partners to ensure that much needed restoration projects stay on track.

The Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) was passed in 2000 as a 30-year plan to restore, protect, and preserve 18,000 square miles of land over 16 Florida counties. Fifteen years later, we have accomplished a lot but still have a long way to go to restore the Everglades ecosystem. The National Academy of Sciences noted in its *Fifth Biennial Review* in 2014 that “[d]espite exceptional project planning accomplishments, over the past two years progress toward restoring the Everglades has been slowed by frustrating financial and procedural constraints.”

In December 2015, the Florida Legislature introduced the “Legacy Florida” bill, which would provide a dedicated, sustainable funding source of \$200 million annually, including \$100 million for 10 years for planning, design, engineering, and construction of CERP. This legislation, which has leadership support, combined with sustained federal commitment through strong funding levels, could advance key Everglades restoration progress.

In order to build on the accomplishments made during your Administration, we ask that your FY 2017 budget consider the following Everglades restoration projects and priorities for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Department of the Interior.

Committed to full protection and restoration of America’s Everglades

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U.S. Army Corps of Engineers: CERP Projects

In the FY 2017 budget, funding will be needed for CERP planning and design. These funds are important for adaptive assessment and monitoring and program-level activities such as interagency modeling, information data management, public outreach, and programmatic oversight.

The Indian River Lagoon-South project needs funding in FY 2017 to continue building the C-44 Reservoir. When completed, the C-44 Reservoir and the state's Stormwater Treatment Areas will cleanse much of the runoff from the St. Lucie basin that is a major contributor to the frequent pollution of the St. Lucie River and the Indian River Lagoon. The entire Indian River Lagoon-South project and its C-44 component represent a major cooperative effort between the Army Corps, the State of Florida and Martin County, Florida – with Martin County contributing \$75 million from its citizens to buy land for the project.

The Picayune Strand Restoration project is nearing completion and will need funding in FY 2017 to complete the Miller Pump Station. When completed, the Picayune Strand Restoration project will restore 72,000 acres of wetlands and habitat in southwest Florida in prime Florida panther habitat by removing over 260 miles of roadway and 48 miles of canals associated with a failed real estate development.

After waiting years due to congressional delays with WRRDA for the four CERP Generation Two Projects to be authorized, these projects now need to move forward as expeditiously as possible. The Biscayne Bay Coastal Wetlands, Broward County Water Preserve Area, C-111 Spreader Canal, and C-43 Reservoir projects are all critical to the restoration of America's Everglades. These projects will clean and redirect freshwater flows south to Everglades and Biscayne National Parks and relieve the damaging discharges from Lake Okeechobee that are plaguing the coastal estuaries. We need to ensure sustained momentum in moving projects through the design, planning, and construction process, while hastening the completion of prior projects, like the Modified Water Deliveries Project for Everglades National Park. Now that these four projects are authorized, we need leadership from the Army Corps to ensure that Project Partnership Agreements (PPAs) are signed this year, which will allow the Army Corps to continue forward on a path towards project completion to realize the significant ecological benefits envisioned in CERP.

Finally, the Central Everglades Planning Project (CEPP), a CERP project that promises to be one of the most important Everglades restoration projects, will provide an increased supply of clean water to Everglades National Park and Florida Bay by bundling elements of existing CERP projects including “decompartmentalization,” water storage, seepage management, and operational changes. CEPP will deliver an average of 67 billion gallons of water per year to the Everglades Protection Area and will provide a 28 percent improvement in habitat quality across the entire project area of nearly two million acres, while creating 20,000 jobs. CEPP just missed receiving its Chief of Engineer's Report in time to be authorized in WRRDA 2014, which made it ineligible for funding in FY 2016. However, the Chief's Report and the Record of Decision have been signed, signifying the end of administrative review. We anticipate CEPP will be authorized when Congress passes WRRDA 2016. Therefore, it is vital that, upon being congressionally authorized, CEPP receive funding in FY 2017 to initiate design and execute a PPA.

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U.S. Army Corps of Engineers: Non-CERP Projects

In addition to CERP projects, there are two non-CERP projects that require funding for construction in FY 2017 – Kissimmee River Restoration and C-111 South Dade. Kissimmee River Restoration is a project that reverses an ill-advised decision made decades ago to channelize this beautiful and meandering river. Great progress has been made in returning the river to its natural state and wildlife is rapidly returning to the restored areas of the river, which will slow the flow of water into Lake Okeechobee and reduce impacts to the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee estuaries from high-volume discharges from the lake. It is scheduled for completion in FY 2019.

The C-111 South Dade project involves a series of detention basins that will counteract seepage out of Everglades National Park and increase ecological benefits of ongoing efforts to restore more natural hydrology in the Everglades. Thanks to FY 2016 funding, the groundbreaking for the North Detention Area (Contract 8) of C-111 South Dade was in January 2016. To continue progress towards completion in FY 2019, the FY 2017 budget should include necessary construction funding.

U.S. Department of the Interior

The Department of the Interior is a vital federal partner for Everglades restoration. We are very pleased that the National Park Service (NPS) is working closely with the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) and has funding committed to begin construction on the 2.6-mile bridge segment of the Tamiami Trail Next Steps project in spring 2016 – making this an NPS centennial project. This bridging will enable long-blocked water flow under this highway to bring badly needed water to Everglades National Park and Florida Bay. NPS intends to use funds from the Federal Lands Transportation Program to fulfill its commitment, in addition to \$90 million committed from FDOT and \$20 million from DOT's Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) competitive grant program.

We respectfully ask that funding be included in the FY 2017 budget for land acquisition of easements for the Everglades Headwaters National Wildlife Refuge and Conservation Area. The Department of the Interior also needs additional funds for the removal of invasive and exotic species at the Arthur R. Marshall Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge and for monitoring and assessments.

In summary, we would like to see that the FY 2017 budget request include funding for the following projects:

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

- CERP Planning and Design
- CERP: Indian River Lagoon-South (C-44 Reservoir)
- CERP: Picayune Strand Restoration
- CERP: Biscayne Bay Coastal Wetlands
- CERP: Broward County Water Preserve Area
- CERP: C-111 Spreader Canal
- CERP: C-43 Reservoir

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- CERP: Central Everglades Planning Project
- Kissimmee River Restoration
- C-111 South Dade

U.S. Department of the Interior

- Everglades Headwaters National Wildlife Refuge
- Invasive species eradication
- CERP monitoring and assessment

Your Administration understands that investing in a healthy environment is good business—as shown by the Mather Economics study, which projected that restoration will produce and increase in economic benefits from \$45 billion to \$123.9 billion based on an investment of \$11.5 billion. In short, for every dollar spent on Everglades restoration, we will get at least four dollars in return, in the form of higher home values, increased tourism and stronger fishing and boating industries.

Mr. President, we deeply appreciate the support you and your Administration have given to Everglades restoration and greatly value your attention to our requests.

Sincerely,

Cara Capp

Cara Capp
National Co-Chair



Jason Totoiu
State Co-Chair

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