



THE EVERGLADES COALITION

September 13, 2004

1000 Friends of Florida
Arthur R. Marshall Foundation
Audubon of Florida
Audubon Society of the Everglades
Broward County Audubon Society
Clean Water Action
Clean Water Network
Collier County Audubon Society
The Conservancy of Southwest
Florida
Defenders of Wildlife
Earthjustice
Environmental & Land Use Law
Center
The Environmental Coalition
Environmental Defense
Everglades Coordinating Council
Florida Defenders of the
Environment
Florida Keys Chapter of the
Izaak Walton League of America
Florida Keys Environmental Fund
Florida Public Interest Research
Group
Florida Sierra Club
Florida Wildlife Federation
Friends of the Everglades
Izaak Walton League of America
Last Stand
Legal Environmental Assistance
Foundation
League of Woman Voters of
Florida
Loxahatchee River Coalition
Mangrove Chapter of the Izaak
Walton League of America
Martin County Conservation
Alliance
National Audubon Society
National Parks Conservation
Association
National Wildlife Federation
Natural Resources Defense Council
North Carolina Outward Bound
School
The Ocean Conservancy
The Pegasus Foundation
The Redland Conservancy
Sierra Club
Sierra Club Broward Group
Sierra Club Loxahatchee Group
Sierra Club Miami Group
Tropical Audubon Society
The Urban Environment League
The Wilderness Society
World Wildlife Fund

Mayor Alex Penelas
Stephen P. Clark Center
111 N.W. 1st Street
Miami, Florida 33128

RE: Opposition to Lakebelt Ordinance #042266

Dear Mayor Penelas:

The Everglades Coalition, an alliance of 45 national, state and local environmental organizations, urges you to veto Ordinance #044226. This ordinance rezones the area around Miami-Dade County's Northwest Wellfield for rock-mining uses, thereby removing the "unusual use" designation of rock-mining in this area. As a result, this ordinance restricts public involvement in mining approvals and hampers the County's ability to provide a safe, secure and affordable drinking water supply.

Over the last year, concern has been escalating that mining near the County's Northwest Wellfield threatens to contaminate the County's water supply. Both the County's Department of Environmental Resources Management and the United States Geological Survey, expressed strong concern regarding contamination of the wells by microbial pathogens from the adjacent mining. Such pathogens, like cryptosporidium, which causes severe intestinal illness, are resistant to chlorination and filtration and can be fatal.

To protect the drinking water supply, the County Manager stated in a memorandum on February 10, 2004, that the current ½-mile setback (adopted in the ordinance) between mining activities and the wells is not "realistic" and will need to be expanded to be "more protective." The County Manager detailed steps the County will take, by itself and in conjunction with other agencies, to scientifically calculate and implement a new expanded setback. Until that information is available, the County must highly scrutinize mining in this area and not allow for blanket permitting, as this ordinance allows.

Rockmining in this area clearly constitutes an "unusual use." It is a major, disruptive, unnatural use of the land that poses a drinking water contamination threat, creates noise and blasting impacts, and destroys significant wetlands acreage and wildlife habitat. Cumulatively, the 80-foot deep mining pits will encompass approximately 30 square miles, the size of the City of Miami. The suggestion that such a land use is the equivalent to constructing a housing unit is ridiculous and incomparable.



The current “unusual use” designation requires the approval of the Community Council/Zoning Board of the specific region and a County staff evaluation to identify compliance with the Comprehensive Master Development Plan, as well as hydrologic and environmental impacts. Without the “unusual use” designation, the public’s participation is limited because the rockmining permits would not come before this important public forum. In addition, the permits would not undergo a County zoning evaluation or be publicly debated before the Board of County Commissioners.

The Coalition holds that this effort to “streamline” the process represents an attempt by the mining industry to inflate their land prices. If and when the County needs to acquire that land to protect the county’s drinking water supply, this ordinance will further complicate and make more expensive this task.

This ordinance will limit public involvement and put at risk a safe, secure and affordable drinking water supply for the citizens of Miami-Dade County. We respectfully urge you to veto this ordinance.

Sincerely,

John Adornato, III
National Co-Chair, Everglades Coalition
Regional Program Manager
National Parks Conservation Association

Richard Grosso
State Co-Chair, Everglades Coalition
Executive Director
Environment and Land Use Law Center, Inc.