August 15, 2013

The Honorable Jo-Ellen Darcy
Assistant Secretary for Civil Works
108 Army Pentagon, Room 3E446
Washington, DC 20310

Dear Secretary Darcy:

On behalf of the Everglades Coalition’s 57 organizations that represent more than 6 million Americans we would like to thank the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for the tireless work of your staff in expediting the Central Everglades Planning Project (CEPP). We are now asking the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to expedite completion of a Chief’s Report by December 31, 2013 and ensure this project remains on schedule for congressional authorization. You have the opportunity to leave a legacy of restoration; however, time is of the essence.

As we face dangerously high water levels in Lake Okeechobee and damaging and costly discharges to the estuaries, we cannot afford to miss this chance to begin reconnecting the system to relieve the pressure on South Florida’s fragile ecosystem. CEPP provides a release valve to flow more than 200,000 acre feet of water into the Central and Southern Everglades and is important to long-term Caloosahatchee and St. Lucie estuary relief.

The U.S. Senate has already passed a Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) that would advance critical U.S. Army Corps projects that have signed Chief’s Reports, and the U.S. House of Representatives has indicated its desire to introduce a WRDA when it returns in September from recess. Given the need for public comment and final review, the PIR must be released immediately to be considered for authorization or risk years of delayed benefits throughout the ecosystem.

We know that President Obama has made this a priority and placed CEPP on his “It Can’t Wait” list and are now asking for your leadership to overcome any administrative obstacles or delay, including entertaining time extension requests which would delay the completion of a Chief’s Report by December 31, 2013. We must seize this once in seven year opportunity to bring meaningful Everglades restoration online before it is too late.
Sincerely,

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