



EVERGLADES COALITION

April 9, 2021

The Honorable Jeff Merkley, Chair
Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski, Ranking Member
Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
Washington, DC 20510

RE: Restoring America's Everglades – FY 2022 Interior Appropriations

Dear Chairman Merkley and Ranking Member Murkowski:

On behalf of the Everglades Coalition and its 61 members committed to the restoration of America's Everglades, we greatly appreciate the Interior Appropriations Subcommittee's continued support. As we navigate unprecedented times due to the pandemic and work together to "Build Back Better," we look to your leadership to help galvanize momentum for restoring the Everglades, given the importance of this resilience-building water infrastructure program for South Florida.

We respectfully request the following funding levels in the Interior Appropriations bill in FY 2022 to advance Everglades restoration:

Agency – Program	Amount Requested
DOI Everglades programs at NPS, FWS, USGS, and BIA	Minimum of \$75 million, with at least \$8.3 million for USGS
EPA South Florida Geographic Program	Minimum of \$6 million
EPA National Estuary Program	\$50 million, with at least \$1 million allocated to each NEP \$7.5 million for the NEP competitive program

U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI)

We respectfully request at least \$75 million for the four DOI bureaus working together to restore the Everglades ecosystem – the National Park Service (NPS), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) and the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). This funding will advance critical water

The Everglades Coalition is a 501(c)3 alliance of local, state, and national conservation organizations dedicated to the full protection and restoration of America's Everglades.

infrastructure projects under the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) and non-CERP projects that will help build climate resiliency and restore federal and tribal lands in South Florida, combat invasive species, protect endangered species, reduce polluted water discharges from Lake Okeechobee to Florida's coastal waterways and help ensure clean drinking water for more than 8 million Floridians.

At a time when we are seeking a multi-year funding investment from the Biden administration for Everglades construction funding, we must ensure DOI has the necessary funding and resources to keep up the pace on endangered species biological opinions; environmental assessments and reviews; research, modeling, and monitoring; and other necessary actions for responsible federal and tribal land management. However, in recent years, proposed budget cuts to DOI have threatened to jeopardize restoration goals, with proposed cuts going so far as to zero out USGS. USGS provides research, science, and data to address the quality, quantity, timing and distribution of freshwater throughout the ecosystem – this is the core of what Everglades restoration is about. Given this important work, we request at least **\$8.3 million for USGS Integrated Research, Planning and Interagency Coordination**. We are grateful the Interior Subcommittee recognized the important role USGS plays and increased funding levels; otherwise, agencies would not have the data necessary to know if informed investments are being made.

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)

We respectfully request at least **\$6 million for the EPA South Florida Geographic Program**. This program helps ensure clean water flows through Everglades National Park and Arthur R. Marshall Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge by monitoring and enforcing the pollution limit. Through the South Florida Geographic Program, EPA works jointly with federal and state agencies to provide extensive information about hydrological conditions and changing water quality levels in Everglades National Park and monitor reef and seagrass health at the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary.

In addition, we request funding for the **EPA National Estuary Program (NEP) at \$50 million, which will ensure that at least \$1 million is allocated to each of the 28 NEPs, and \$7.5 million for the NEP competitive program**. Two of the four Florida NEPs serve the Greater Everglades ecosystem: the Coastal and Heartland National Estuary Partnership and the Indian River NEP, which help protect the Caloosahatchee and St. Lucie Rivers and Estuaries, respectively. These coastal estuaries have been plagued with nutrient-laden water from Lake Okeechobee, leading to recurring algae blooms that harm water quality levels, wildlife and the dependent tourism economy. The NEP non-regulatory consensus-based approach of working with governmental, industry and non-governmental partners to implement projects addressing water quality, fisheries, seagrasses and other exceptional natural resources is very effective and is a wise investment. For every federal dollar spent on this program, it enables \$19 worth of restoration to be done.

Restoring America's Everglades continues to be a unifying issue for Americans and has consistently received bipartisan, bicameral support. Last month, every member of the Florida congressional delegation supported a Presidential budget request of \$725 million for South Florida Ecosystem Restoration construction funding in FY 2022 and to maintain this level for a multi-year, federal investment of \$2.9 billion over the next four years. This is the funding needed to accomplish the restoration milestones in the Everglades Integrated Delivery Schedule and deliver benefits to America's Everglades and the American people as soon as possible. Based on the Army Corps' calculations, approximately 65,000-70,000 jobs

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could be created over the next four years should Everglades restoration receive the necessary funding to carry out authorized construction projects in the Integrated Delivery Schedule.

Everglades restoration is a resilience-building water infrastructure program for South Florida that, when complete, will result in 442,000 jobs over the next several decades. Everglades restoration delivers a 4:1 return on investment and investing immediately in restoration will provide environmental benefits sooner while saving money in the long run. According to the federal government's own estimates, by investing more now, the federal government can save the American taxpayers over \$2 billion on the overall cost of Everglades restoration. As Congress works on FY 2022 spending packages alongside investments for infrastructure, we encourage you to ensure that job-creating investments also increase the resiliency and sustainability of critical infrastructure systems with a focus on nature-based solutions for restoring watersheds and ecosystems.

We have a national responsibility to preserve America's Everglades for future generations. DOI and EPA play lead roles fulfilling restoration goals and are committed to managing these resources in the federal interest. We greatly appreciate the Interior Subcommittee's long-standing support and commitment to Everglades restoration as we move forward with this monumental restoration effort.

Sincerely,



Mark Perry
Co-Chair



Marisa Carrozzo
Co-Chair

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