

**Testimony by the Everglades Coalition to the
Senate Committee on Appropriations Subcommittee on
Energy and Water Development, and Related Agencies**

Regarding Fiscal Year 2018 Energy and Water Appropriations

Submitted by:

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RE: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers - South Florida Ecosystem Restoration

Members of the subcommittee. It is an honor to provide this testimony about one of our world's most prized natural and economic treasures – America's Everglades. On behalf of the 61 members of the Everglades Coalition committed to the protection and restoration of America's Everglades, we respectfully request the amount of \$180 million for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for South Florida Ecosystem Restoration for Fiscal Year 2018. The Everglades Coalition believes this amount represents the full capacity of the Army Corps to fulfill its role in Everglades restoration and allows critical water infrastructure projects to move forward that will restore federal lands in South Florida, reduce polluted water discharges from Lake Okeechobee to Florida's coastal waterways, and help ensure drinking water for 8 million Floridians.

Specifically this funding will advance key Everglades restoration projects under the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP), such as Picayune Strand Restoration, Indian River Lagoon-South, Broward County Water Preserve Areas, Biscayne Bay Coastal Wetlands, and CERP Design. It also would help advance the recently authorized Central Everglades Project, specifically the Army Corps' review of the Validation Report, which we hope will be expedited so that work can begin on the Project Partnership Agreement as soon as possible. In addition to CERP projects, there are two non-CERP projects that are very close to completion that would receive funding – Kissimmee River Restoration and C-111 South Dade.

Recognized as a World Heritage Site, an International Biosphere Reserve, and a Wetland of International Importance, America's Everglades is one of the world's most diverse and productive wetlands and is a tremendous economic generator for Florida. A recent report by Mather Economics found that every \$1 investment in Everglades restoration generates more than \$4 in return in ecosystem benefits such as drinking water supply, tourism, park visitation, recreation, and wildlife habitat. The Mather study estimates that Everglades restoration will create more than 442,000 jobs and produce more than \$46 billion in benefits over the next 50 years. Sustained funding to keep these projects on schedule is critical to avoiding collapse of the ecosystem and the dependent economy.

While the Everglades is an ecological treasure and economic engine, it is one of the most imperiled natural wetland ecosystems. The “River of Grass” has been drained and diverted through canals and no longer supports the web of life that depends upon it. Development, agriculture, and a massive water engineering and drainage project reduced this irreplaceable subtropical wilderness to half its former size. Wading bird populations in Everglades National Park have declined by over 90 percent and 68 species of Everglades plants and animals are threatened or endangered. In 2010, the United Nations put Everglades National Park back on its List of the World Heritage in Danger.

CERP is an unprecedented undertaking aimed at protecting and preserving the water resources of central and southern Florida and bringing the Everglades back to life. It is a federal-state partnership designed to improve natural water flow and water quality by removing levees, filling in canals, and reducing agricultural and urban runoff.

We greatly appreciate the Senate Committee on Appropriations Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development’s long-time support for Everglades restoration. Your ongoing leadership and support has kept restoration on a strong and steady path, and we hope to continue building on the many successes with more on the horizon as we fulfill our promise to future generations.