



Audubon FLORIDA

# State of the Everglades

Fall/Winter 2016





Everglades National Park. Photo: R. Munguia

## Florida Senate President Joe Negron Champions Smart Solution For Water Storage South Of Lake Okeechobee

Incoming Florida Senate President Joe Negron answered the call of Everglades advocates and scientists across the state by announcing a plan to store water south of Lake Okeechobee in the Everglades Agricultural Area (EAA). Audubon Florida's top Everglades priority this year is to advance the timeline for the EAA Reservoir project. Senate President Negron's proposal, announced in August, is to use bonds and funding from the Water and Land Legacy Amendment to purchase land and build a 360,000 acre/foot reservoir. This bold action has solidified President Negron as a champion who is willing to find science-based solutions despite numerous political challenges.

The shocking impacts of toxic blue-green algae on Florida's east coast received international attention, and Floridians are desperate for long-term solutions that will help prevent health concerns, massive fish kills and closed beaches. The St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee Estuaries, for example, are damaged when freshwater is discharged from Lake Okeechobee to the east and west when rising Lake levels threaten the aging Herbert Hoover Dike. These freshwater discharges threaten the delicate balance of freshwater and saltwater that make the surrounding estuaries so productive and the excess nutrients found in



Lake Okeechobee. Photo: WPS/WB Perry

the water compound the impacts. But the harm from the discharges is not limited to these areas. In the natural ecosystem, this water flowed south through the Central and Southern Everglades, ultimately ending in another estuary- Florida Bay. Without restoration projects in place to more closely replicate these natural conditions, Florida Bay continues to suffer an ecological collapse because not enough freshwater can reach the Bay. In a restored ecosystem, the natural freshwater flow between Lake Okeechobee and Florida Bay needs to be reconnected. Sending Lake Okeechobee's discharges south is key to moving towards a more ecologically sound solution for Florida's water management challenges.

Efforts like the Central Everglades Project, bridging Tamiami Trail and the C-111 project are all critical to begin moving water south and to improve the health of Florida Bay. But these projects need an upstream source of freshwater to achieve their maximum benefits. With the Central Everglades Project moving forward, many of the barriers to water flow between Lake Okeechobee and the Southern Everglades will be removed, opening up the more natural path for freshwater to flow south. The water will also flow through the world's largest network of treatment marshes and associated infrastructure to make sure that it is clean before flowing south. As President Negron presents his proposal to the Florida Legislature, Audubon looks forward to working with partners to advance this solution for reducing and redirecting discharges from Lake Okeechobee.

Dear friends,

The story of Everglades conservation has always been about celebrating progress while taking on new challenges.

In this State of the Everglades report, I am happy to share some success stories and to thank you for your ongoing support for our work.

Sadly, this report includes some aggressive new assaults on Everglades habitat. It is important that we face these threats head on. I am dismayed that Governor Rick Scott's appointees have proposed closing the popular and ecologically important Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge.

I hope you will join Audubon in standing against this bad idea. Together, we will continue making a difference.

Eric Draper  
Executive Director



## Cape Sable Restoration To Benefit Local And Migratory Wildlife

Everglades National Park has recently committed to advancing an important project that will help Everglades wading birds. Cape Sable, at the tip of the Florida mainland, was historically characterized by freshwater lakes and an extensive interior freshwater marsh. But the region has suffered from saltwater intrusion as a result of canals put in place over a century ago to accommodate agricultural development. The canals drain freshwater from the land, devastating the surrounding ecosystem. With a more saline and unstable environment, the number of small forage fish decreases and birds are left with a diminished food source. Everglades National Park's proposal to dam some of the canals will help reverse this saltwater intrusion. This project, long championed by Audubon Florida, builds upon a successful first phase of restoration for Cape Sable.



A plug in the Cape Sable canal allows water to flow more naturally.  
Photo: Mac Stone

Audubon scientists have studied the impact of the manmade canals in Cape Sable for more than 25 years, and now there is new hope for the birds and wildlife that call this part of the Everglades home. By restoring Cape Sable, Roseate Spoonbills, Bald Eagles, and White Pelicans will be able to thrive once again. Audubon's combination of science and advocacy continue to play an important role in the approval and completion of Cape Sable's restoration.



Learn more about Cape Sable and hear from Audubon Florida scientists by visiting [SaveCapeSable.org](http://SaveCapeSable.org) today.

## Central Everglades Project And Picayune Strand Included In Federal Water Resources Legislation

The most recent Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) has passed both the U.S. Senate and U.S. House of Representatives and includes two key projects for the Everglades. The bill will authorize the Central Everglades Project, making it eligible for federal funding, and allow work to continue on Picayune Strand restoration. The Senate and House need to reconcile differences in their respective bills before this WRDA can be sent to the President's desk for final approval.

The Central Everglades Project is the highest impact restoration project developed to date. Once built, the restoration will finally begin to reconnect the River of Grass between Lake Okeechobee and the Southern Everglades and Florida Bay. WRDA will also make it possible to continue construction on the Picayune Strand project. By removing roads and filling in canals on 55,000 acres of a failed housing development, important wetland and upland habitat will be restored for species like Wood Storks, Little Blue Herons, and Florida Panthers.

Authorizing projects through federal WRDA legislation is a key step in the process of completing Everglades restoration projects. When the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) was passed in 2000, the program was built on the assumption that these WRDA bills would pass every other year. Unfortunately, the only WRDA bills to pass since 2000 were in 2007 and 2014, leading to delays in implementing restoration plans. Once this congressional approval is finalized, work on these projects must begin as soon as possible to help bring life back to the Everglades.



Little Blue Heron  
Photo: R. Munguia

# Everglades Partnerships For Biscayne Bay And Expanding Broward Wetlands Clear The Way For Construction

In the latest sign of Everglades restoration progress, the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) Governing Board unanimously approved partnership agreements with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for two Everglades restoration projects: the Biscayne Bay Coastal Wetlands and the Broward County Water Preserves Areas.

The Biscayne Bay Coastal Wetlands project will increase much needed freshwater deliveries to Biscayne Bay during the dry season, limit unwanted freshwater releases during the wet season, and recreate the overland flow that historically fed the estuarine waters of Biscayne Bay and Biscayne National Park.

The Broward County Water Preserves Areas project will increase the spatial extent of wetlands in Broward County, reestablishing natural hydropatterns within existing natural areas and providing water storage to enhance regional water supply in lower east coast urban areas. The Everglades has lost about half of its historic size. Reestablishing lost wetland habitat for birds through projects like the Broward County Water Preserves Areas project is a central goal of restoration. This significant milestone clears the way for construction on these two important components of the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP).



Everglades restoration progress benefits Biscayne Bay and improves wetland habitat. Photo: Mac Stone

## Expanding The Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed

Audubon and the Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed (CREW) Trust are proposing to expand the Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed by 2,800 acres. Funding under the Florida Forever program is being sought to purchase citrus groves and wetlands north of Audubon's Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary. If expanded, this area would serve as "CREW Headwaters" and would grow the total conservation area to more than 70,000 acres dedicated to birds and wildlife. Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary has been adversely impacted during the last decade from wastewater originating from land north of the Sanctuary. Similar impacts are occurring from groves to the north of the Corkscrew Marsh – a CREW preserve unit just east of Corkscrew Swamp. This CREW Headwaters project aims to stop harmful drainage dumps and restore the groves and wetlands to habitat for wading birds, Florida Panthers and Black Bears. The proposal's success relies on many partners, including Audubon, local farms, state agencies, and local government.

Audubon scientists and policy staff describe this non-traditional project as a new model for the Florida Forever program. It revitalizes habitats and creates vital buffers from increasingly harmful nearby land uses. The Florida Forever Acquisition and Restoration Council (ARC) voted to add the CREW Headwaters to its priority list in October 2016, and Audubon Florida will continue advocating for this project's full approval and acquisition.



The CREW Headwaters project would expand conservation areas adjacent to Audubon's Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary. Photo: Mac Stone

Wood Stork  
Photo: R. Munguia





Arthur R. Marshall Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge.  
Photo: Lolan Shive

## South Florida Water Management District Takes Steps To Evict The Arthur R. Marshall Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge

The Sunshine State is known as the birthplace of the National Wildlife Refuge System in the United States. But without continued cooperation between the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, it could soon be known as home to the largest loss of National Wildlife Refuge land in U.S. history.

The Arthur R. Marshall Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge was established in 1951 under the Migratory Bird Conservation Act via a lease agreement between the SFWMD and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. But now, in an effort that has long been encouraged by the sugar industry, the SFWMD has begun the process of evicting the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and cutting off federal resources to the Refuge. Florida may lose this important habitat for birds and wildlife in as little as six months.

The 144,000 acre Refuge is some of the best remaining natural Everglades habitat. Home to 250 species of birds, like the endangered Everglade Snail Kite and the threatened Wood Stork, the Refuge also hosts about 300,000 human visitors per year.

The Refuge lease agreement sets 13 land management performance measures for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to meet in cooperation with the SFWMD. However, the SFWMD wants to eliminate the Refuge even though the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is currently meeting 12 ½ of those 13 performance measures.

The SFWMD claims the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is failing to control Maleleuca and Old World Climbing Fern (*Lygodium microphyllum*), two invasive exotic plant species that have spread aggressively throughout South Florida (including outside of the Refuge). Combating invasive exotic species is crucial to protect the integrity of the Greater Everglades Ecosystem, but it presents a significant challenge for all land managers.

Kicking out the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will not solve the challenge of controlling and combating invasive species in the Refuge. Maintaining the partnership between the SFWMD and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service not only makes conservation sense; it also makes fiscal sense. By continuing to collaborate with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, SFWMD can leverage the maximum possible resources and manpower necessary to keep the invasive species in the Refuge in check.

The Refuge's mission of wildlife conservation, management and protection will no longer apply if the SFWMD takes back control, and hundreds of species of birds and other wildlife may be in danger. Continuing the successful cooperation is the best path forward for wildlife and Floridians alike.



Everglade Snail Kite. Photo: R. Munguia

# Congressman Daniel Webster Honored As Audubon Florida's Champion Of The Everglades

In recognition of his outstanding efforts on behalf of the Greater Everglades Ecosystem, Audubon Florida honored Congressman Daniel Webster as the 2016 Champion of the Everglades. The award was presented before 300 statewide conservation leaders during the 2016 Audubon Assembly in St. Petersburg, Florida.

Through his leadership on the U.S. House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, Congressman Webster helped usher two Water Resources Development Acts (WRDA) through the U.S. House of Representatives since 2014. This legislation has paved the way for the Central Everglades Project, Picayune Strand, Broward County Water Preserve Areas, Biscayne Bay Coastal Wetlands, C-43 West Basin Caloosahatchee Reservoir and the C-111 Spreader Canal- all critical Everglades restoration components.



Audubon's Eric Draper and Julie Hill-Gabriel present the Champion of the Everglades Award to Congressman Webster. Photo: Charles Lee

## Audubon Assembly Attendees Rally For The Everglades



Audubon Assembly attendees and the Everglades Foundation Rally for the Everglades. Photo: Everglades Foundation.

More than 100 attendees at the 2016 Audubon Assembly participated in a Rally for the Everglades. During a stop on the Everglades Foundation's Roadtrip to Restoration, participants joined together and surrounded its #NoworNeverglades bus to listen to inspiring leaders fighting for conservation and lend their voices for the need to move water south from Lake Okeechobee.

Join the fight to save the Everglades by texting "Water" to 66866 today!

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