

**Audubon of Florida * Everglades Foundation * Everglades Trust
Florida Wildlife Federation**

April 5, 2011

Honorable Mike Haridopolos
409 The Capitol
404 South Monroe Street
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1100

Dear Senate President Haridopolos:

The Senate Appropriations Bill, ably crafted by Budget Committee Chair Alexander, takes a new approach to the budgets of the state's five water management districts. We write out of concern that the approach may have the effect of limiting South Florida Water Management District funds for Everglades restoration projects. We do not disagree that the water management districts may be able to tighten their operating budgets. Our request is that the Senate authorize \$394 million in ad valorem spending for the South Florida Water Management District and \$50 million from state sources.

Our concern is focused on those projects that improve water quality under the Everglades Forever Act or the Consent Decree; projects that create water storage or conveyance as part of the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan; projects that help manage freshwater flows into coastal estuaries; and projects that help with water quality and water management in the Lake Okeechobee watershed now referred to as the Northern Everglades.

Everglades restoration contributes to securing water resources that help South Florida's economy prosper while conserving a unique ecosystem and recreation destination. In past years, restoration funds have come from state appropriations and the South Florida Water Management District's budget and have been matched, if somewhat unevenly, with federal funds. Partnership of leadership and resources is essential to all facets of Everglades restoration moving forward.

The South Florida Water Management District should continue to underwrite the costs of projects that will improve Everglades and Lake Okeechobee water quality as well as improve timely delivery of fresh water to the Everglades and estuaries. The South Florida Water Management District should also continue to provide for the science and planning

that help ensure that project dollars produce the right results. Projects (along with planning and science) for which there is a demonstrated urgent need include:

Improving Everglades Water Quality with Stormwater Treatment Areas

The South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) operates under a consent decree that commits to delivering clean water to the Everglades. To meet this commitment the SFWMD must invest in building additional Stormwater Treatment Areas (STAs). Land for STAs is available for use on the former A-1 Reservoir site in the EAA and on recently purchased land in the EAA and C-139 basin. Everglades water quality goals are significantly compromised by poor water quality coming from Lake Okeechobee. STAs north of the lake will greatly improve Everglades water quality and move the effort closer to meeting state water quality standards.

Water Storage in the Northern Everglades (Lake Okeechobee Watershed)

As Florida enters a severe drought and experiences water shortages, the importance of maintaining adequate water levels in Lake Okeechobee for water supply and the environment becomes more urgent. An innovative partnership with landowners in the Northern Everglades will store water on private lands at a low cost to the SFWMD. Known as Dispersed Water Management, these projects can re-hydrate wetlands, remove pollution and replenish ground water levels, while benefiting fish and wildlife.

Freshwater for Estuaries

The estuaries surrounding the Everglades are some of the most productive estuarine habitats in the nation and form the basis of their respective local economies. As one example, the Caloosahatchee estuary is severely impacted by the lack of proximate storage and water quality treatment, which leaves it at the mercy of Lake Okeechobee flood control and water supply decisions. Construction of the C-43 Reservoir will store excess water that can be released to the Caloosahatchee estuary in the dry season when flows are needed, balancing the estuary needs and preventing algal blooms that have caused serious health and economic impacts.

Restoration Science and Planning

Following the planning process agreed to by the federal and state partners in restoration requires continued investment in planning and scientific understanding of the results being sought. Completing restoration planning already underway is the only way to ensure that significant investments reap their benefits. Specifically, while all costs for the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan are to be shared equally by the state and federal government, the SFWMD has invested \$1.4 billion

in Everglades restoration that will only be eligible for the federal match when projects complete the planning process.

In closing, we understand that there is both an imperative to balance scarce state budget resources and a desire by elected officials to establish more accountability for the water management districts. Our goal in writing is to encourage continued investment in the activities and projects that will deliver real and urgently needed restoration benefits.

It is with this in mind that we ask that adequate funds be appropriated for Everglades restoration and that the South Florida Water Management District's budget capacity be leveraged toward urgent restoration projects.

Sincerely,
(Signatures waived to expedite delivery)

Eric Draper
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Audubon of Florida

Kirk Fordham
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