



February 22, 2012

Representative Nuñez
1003 The Capitol
402 South Monroe Street
Tallahassee, FL 32399

RE: Lease of Bird Drive Basin Conservation Lands

Dear Representative Nuñez:

We have learned of your support of legislative language mandating the lease of conservation lands in the Bird Drive Basin to Florida International University (FIU) for relocation of the county fair. We ask that legislative action be postponed until the proposed lease is discussed by local affected parties. The Board of Trustees of the Internal Improvement Trust Fund purchased 302.79 acres in Bird Drive in 1999 for \$3.5 million with Preservation 2000 funds under the Conservation and Recreational Lands program for the benefit of the Everglades. Leasing conservation lands for a non-conservation purpose prior to a comprehensive analysis is premature and in conflict with the legal basis for the original purchase of the lands.

The Bird Drive Basin is located in Miami-Dade County and is part of the East Coast Buffer, a proposed 72,000 acre network of conservation lands in Palm Beach, Broward and Miami-Dade Counties that function as marshes, reservoirs and groundwater recharge areas. These undeveloped lands help protect urbanized areas from flooding and play important roles in water supply. The state of Florida, South Florida Water Management District and the U.S. Department of Interior collaborated on the acquisition of East Coast Buffer lands, including those in Bird Drive, to provide Everglades restoration and water resource benefits. The proposed lease lands also provide foraging for protected wading birds including the federally endangered Wood Stork.

We oppose legislative action to require transfer of important conservation land to other uses in the absence of a meaningful analysis and effort toward realizing the conservation purposes of the land. The attached document explains the rationale for purchase of these lands, their ecological value and relation to Everglades restoration goals. We welcome the opportunity to discuss ways these valuable wetlands can be protected, while FIU's goals are considered.

Sincerely,

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