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August 22, 2012

Senator J.D. Alexander
Chair, Joint Legislative Budget Commission
412 Senate Office Building
404 South Monroe Street
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1100

RE: FY 13 Proposed South Florida Water Management District Budget

Dear Senator Alexander:

South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) has submitted its proposed FY 13 budget for review by the Governor's office and the Joint Legislative Budget Commission. We applaud the SFWMD for prioritizing Everglades water quality projects in the budget submission. We accept that there probably will not be an increase in funding this year but we want to ensure that the budget is moving forward rather than backward. We look forward to seeing more funds available in subsequent years to allow the sustainable management of south Florida's water resources in the future.

To effectively manage and maintain the water resources for the region's 7.7 million people, the SFWMD will need to spend more money in the future on water supply management, the Everglades Water Quality Plan, Everglades restoration, science and monitoring, and resource and land management.

As the population of south Florida grows and the pressure on public water supply increases, the development of alternative water supplies and the implementation of aggressive water conservation programs are essential. In the last two years, there has been a decrease of funding for water supply programs by over 30%. By investing in alternative water supply development, water conservation programs and water supply planning, the SFWMD will be able to ensure a sustainable water future for south Florida.

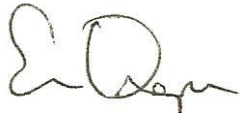
We are pleased to see funding in the FY13 budget for the Everglades Water Quality plan, which will build infrastructure to help clean water for the Everglades. Right now progress on this plan is heavily dependent on funding from SFWMD reserves. As this money is depleted in a next few years it will be crucial to continue the investment to finish this monumental project. To maximize the benefits of this plan, an increase in funding for source control programs in the Northern and Southern Everglades is necessary to limit the amount of phosphorus from agricultural areas entering into Lake Okechobee and the Everglades.

With adequate funds the benefits of Everglades restoration could be achieved more rapidly. Everglades restoration projects capture and store water to increase the amount of clean water available for the environment and for Floridians. To achieve the most out of the public's investment in these projects, it is also important to restore funding for the RECOVER program as well as modeling and scientific support to supply the data and information necessary to make informed decisions and adapt as new information is analyzed.

Finally, adequate funding for resource and land management activities is needed to allow the SFWMD to carry out its statutory duty to manage and maintain lands to ensure a balance of public access, recreation purposes, and the protection of the land's natural state and condition. There have been significant reductions in funding for land stewardship programs in the last two years and restoring funding is necessary for the continued stewardship of these vital lands.

We think it was a mistake to roll back the millage rates when in fact we will have to increase spending in years to come to take care of the water resources for 41% of Florida's population. It is crucial to increase investment in these key projects and programs to realize the vision of a sustainable water future for south Florida.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Eric Draper". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "E" and "D".

Eric Draper
Executive Director
Audubon Florida