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Senator Joe Negron
412 Senate Office Building
404 South Monroe Street
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1100
Via Email: Negron.joe.web@flsenate.gov

RE: Request for Water Storage Recommendations for the Indian River Lagoon and the Lake Okeechobee Basin

Dear Senator Negron:

Thank you for your leadership on the Senate Select Committee on Indian River Lagoon and Lake Okeechobee Basin.

Below are several suggestions in response to your request during the August 22 Committee Meeting to provide a list of short-term water storage opportunities to benefit both estuaries now being impacted.

Suggestions

- 1. The Florida Legislature should provide funding to implement proposed Water Farming and Northern Everglades Payment for Environmental Services (NE-PES) projects, once appropriately negotiated.**

There are currently 24 projects that have been ranked in the South Florida Water Management District's (SFWMD) Second Solicitation Request for Proposals. There are also project proposals submitted previously that could be considered. These projects have willing participants and could expedite storage of water that would otherwise flow to the estuaries. Collectively they will detain over 131,000 acre feet of runoff in the Okeechobee, Caloosahatchee and St. Lucie basins.

Many of these water storage project proposals are not moving forward due to lack of funding. For example, the Rafter T Ranch project was one of the original pilot projects under the Florida Ranchlands Environmental Services Program. Taxpayers have invested over \$1 million in its infrastructure, and it would not

require additional funding in capital costs to continue operations. It was listed fifth in the NE-PES second solicitation, and as a result, funding is not readily available for the project. According to Rafter T's Jimmy Wohl, unless funding is made available immediately, the project will be terminated August 31, 2013. Evans Properties, Alico, and Adams Ranch are some other notable projects that could expedite water storage if funding were made available.

2. Contact public entities who own lands and who operate drainage districts within the SFWMD and lower east coast area of the St. John's Water Management District to explore opportunities to optimize water storage in the near term, in an environmentally sensitive manner.

A variety of public entities own lands throughout the region, including the State of Florida, SFWMD, Federal Government, and various counties and cities- including Martin, St. Lucie, and Palm Beach, among others. These entities should be contacted and requested to survey their lands for short and/or long-term water storage potential. Please see the Appendix for a sampling of maps from the SFWMD Land Assessment Land portfolio to see the locations of some of these lands. Water control districts throughout the region, formed under the authority of Florida Statute 298.01, should also be contacted and requested to offer solutions to reduce drainage within their boundaries.

The Select Committee should contact the United States Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service to explore opportunities to expedite storage on conservation easements in the Northern Everglades watershed. In particular, there may be potential for short term storage on the Fisheating Creek Wetland Reserve Project, which encompasses approximately 26,000 acres in Highlands County. The Select Committee should also contact Charlie Pelizza, the manager of the Everglades Headwaters National Wildlife Refuge to discuss other opportunities for water storage. Please see the Map 1 of the Everglades Headwaters Conservation Partnership in the Appendix.

3. Expedite water storage on public lands currently used for agriculture.

There are significant areas of land owned by the State of Florida in the Everglades Agricultural Area currently leased for agricultural use. For example, the Board of Trustees for the Internal Improvement Trust Fund (TIITF) currently leases over 13,000 acres to Florida Crystals and Duda for sugarcane farming in the EAA. TIITF and the lessees should be contacted to explore opportunities to provide additional storage in the short term.

- 4. Conduct an assessment of the potential basin-wide storage and water quality benefits associated with Dispersed Water Management (DWM) and Water Farming expansion.**

The assessment should calculate the amount of surface water storage that would be reasonably expected to be stored if the DWM Program were expanded in the Kissimmee, Caloosahatchee and St. Lucie river basins. The assessment could include a cost comparison between the costs of expanding the DWM Programs against the costs of using a more traditionally engineered surface water reservoir systems, ASR wells, and/or Stormwater Treatment Areas to capture the same amount of water. Plus, the assessment could estimate the benefits of an expanded DWM program.

- 5. Expedite benefits from projects on public-private partnerships listed in the St. Lucie River and Caloosahatchee River Watershed Protection Plans.**

These plans offer a variety of water storage projects that could be expedited. For example, the 2012 St. Lucie River Watershed Protection Plan Update includes the Lake Point Restoration Project, a 2,260-acre site is in Martin County, with its northern boundary fronting the C-44/St. Lucie Canal and its eastern boundary next to DuPuis Management Area (See Map 2 in Appendix). Your committee should speak with Lake Point Restoration representatives to explore storage opportunities in the short term. In the Caloosahatchee Protection Plan, the projects associated with Lake Hicpochee, as well as other projects listed in the plan, may have potential for short-term storage. The committee should discuss opportunities for storage with the project directors and the local 298 district. We believe there may be an opportunity to install a sheet pile diversion structure on the south end of Lake Hicpochee to store tens of thousands of acre feet of water.

- 6. Explore opportunities to move water from the Caloosahatchee Basin south to Big Cypress Preserve to benefit the ecosystem.**

Transforming harm from one ecosystem to benefit another is an ideal solution. Explore projects that would move Caloosahatchee Basin wet season water south into the Big Cypress Preserve to restore the ecosystem.

- 7. Visit ranches and speak with agricultural interests that are either currently participating in, or have demonstrated interest in participating in public-private partnerships.**

Outreach to Evans Properties, Adams Ranch, Lykes Brothers, Rafter T Ranch, and King Ranch, among others, would be useful to gain understanding of the prospects of water storage and challenges.

8. Obtain a deviation from Lake Kissimmee's regulation schedule to allow it to reach full pool on October 1, rather than November 1.

Lake Kissimmee is not allowed to reach full pool until after the rainy season is over and as a result, rarely fills to capacity. Allowing it to fill while the wet season is active will maximize storage in the Kissimmee Chain of Lakes region, keep 2-3 inches of equivalent depth out of Lake Okeechobee (about one week's worth of harmful discharges), and provide more dry season flows for the Kissimmee river.

Senator Negron, while pursuing short term fixes may help temporally alleviate some of the impacts from this rainy season, we must maintain our focus on longer term solutions. Everglades restoration is the ultimate resolution, and we need to continue to push the United States Congress to pass a Water Resources Development Act bill to get these critical projects moving, especially the Central Everglades Planning Project, C-44, and C-43 projects. Because what happens in Washington DC is unpredictable, it makes it even more important to advance bold funding at the state level to expedite restoration progress. Jumpstarting water quality improvements in the Northern Everglades watershed with increased funding for implementation and monitoring of cost-share best management practices programs will also help stem the tide of destruction of your cherished Lagoon.

Thank you for your consideration. Please let me know if there is further information I can provide.

Sincerely,



Eric Draper
Executive Director

Cc:

Members of the Select Committee on Indian River Lagoon and Lake Okeechobee Basin