

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

March 7, 2024

President Joe Biden
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

As you develop your Fiscal Year 2025 budget, we respectfully ask you to prioritize full funding for South Florida Ecosystem Restoration (SFER) to build upon the historic momentum we have achieved in recent years to restore America's Everglades. In order to meet the capacity of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to conduct ecosystem restoration efforts and to keep Everglades restoration on track in a manner consistent with the Integrated Delivery Schedule (IDS), we urge you to request no less than \$725 million for Everglades restoration in your forthcoming FY25 budget request to Congress.

The current conditions in the greater Everglades system demonstrate the need to expedite the completion of SFER. On February 17, 2024, the Jacksonville District of the USACE began discharging significant and damaging volumes of nutrient-laden water to the Caloosahatchee River, St. Lucie River, and Lake Worth Lagoon due to the unseasonably high level of Lake Okeechobee. El Niño conditions this winter have caused significant rainfall across the Florida peninsula, causing the level of the lake to rise nearly two feet higher than average for this time of the year and water levels in the water conservation areas which restrict the ability to send major volumes southward from the lake towards Everglades National Park (ENP). Despite the abundance of water, incomplete infrastructure acts as a bottleneck preventing much of it from reaching ENP where it would hydrate wetlands, balance salinities in the coastal zone, and recharge south Florida's aquifer. The completion of Everglades restoration projects will enable additional water management flexibility for beneficial management and use, lessen the volume and frequency of harmful and wasteful discharges to the estuaries that can kill wildlife and negatively impact quality of life, and prevent water shortages and restrictions across southern Florida.

Of funds made available for SFER, it is our expectation that substantial investments will be made available to finance the construction of the Everglades Agricultural Area (EAA) Reservoir, which is the single most important Everglades project for reducing the volume and duration of harmful discharges from Lake Okeechobee and for sending more water south. The EAA Reservoir requires approximately \$3 billion in timely and consistent federal investment to be completed expeditiously. This is particularly critical given previous postponements of the reservoir's anticipated completion date.

In addition to fulfilling our budget recommendation of \$725 million, we strongly urge you to direct the Army Corps of Engineers to authorize programmatic incremental funding

clause authority for the entire SFER program. We appreciate the approval of an incremental funding clause for the EAA Reservoir, which will help construction continue more seamlessly between the allocation of work plan funds. Doing so for the entire SFER program would likewise expedite the construction of Everglades restoration project components and reduce the overall cost of the program.

The State of Florida is more than willing and capable to continue fulfilling its role and share in the execution of SFER, as evidenced by the highly effective and professional work of the South Florida Water Management District as well as Governor DeSantis's strong state budget request for FY2025. We hope the Federal government under your leadership will strive to be a better partner in Everglades restoration by reciprocating financial investments, and expediting and directing funds to projects prioritized by the State of Florida such as the EAA reservoir. Federal obligations for SFER are expected to increase over the next several years due to forthcoming project authorizations. As such, fulfilling Army Corps construction capacity for SFER by including no less than \$725 million for Everglades restoration in your FY25 budget request must be a priority.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. We look forward to working with you on this important bipartisan effort.

Sincerely,



Marco Rubio
U.S. Senator



Carlos A. Gimenez
Member of Congress



Byron Donalds
Member of Congress



Brian Mast
Member of Congress



Gus M. Bilirakis
Member of Congress



Laurel Lee
Member of Congress



John H. Rutherford
Member of Congress



Michael Waltz
Member of Congress



Jared Moskowitz
Member of Congress



Bill Posey
Member of Congress