

United States Senate

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COMMITTEES:
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SMALL BUSINESS AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP
SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING

July 25, 2018

The Honorable R.D. James
Assistant Secretary of the Army – Civil Works
Department of the Army
108 Army Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20310-9198

Dear Assistant Secretary James:

Over the last year and a half, restoration of our Everglades has served as the common thread between the hope born from the development of a consensus plan to construct an Everglades Agricultural Area (EAA) Storage Reservoir and the despair of Hurricane Irma's near-catastrophic and historic flooding throughout South Florida. It has also brought us together amid the brewing concerns of another toxic algae induced "Lost Summer" along the Treasure Coast and the Caloosahatchee. These events clearly demonstrated that the December 2016 Update of the Integrated Delivery Schedule (IDS) is no longer viable.

I am encouraged that the Corps has recognized the importance of revising the IDS through today's release of an updated plan at the South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force meeting. However, I have significant concerns with the July 2018 Update as presented. Besides a number of project delays throughout the revision, the proposed plan does not best reflect a realization of the system conditions that plagued progress in meeting the timelines in the previous IDS. I urge you to work with the South Florida Water Management District, in consultation with the Secretary of the Interior, to develop an updated IDS in 2018 that prioritizes the following focal areas for restoration progress:

1. **Herbert Hoover Dike rehabilitation** – The draft IDS revision importantly reflects the expedited rehabilitation of the Dike following the allocation of all necessary funds for its completion. I also commend the Corps for expediting a study of the Lake Okeechobee Regulation Schedule (LORS) relative to the timeline established in the previous IDS. However, a revised LORS reflecting enhanced flexibility to manage water levels to optimize the ecological health of both the Lake and downstream habitats should be completed within three years and ready to be immediately implemented upon completion of the Dike rehabilitation.
2. **Closing out nearly completed construction** – Nearly completed construction should be closed out as soon as possible. The completion of long-running projects, including the Kissimmee River Restoration, Tamiami Trail Next Steps, and C-111 South Dade, are as important to meeting the ecological goals of Everglades restoration as they are to demonstrating measurable progress to help sustain long term political and financial support.

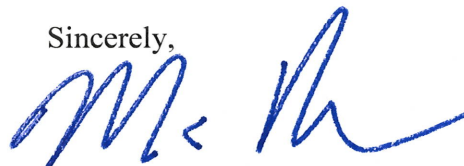
3. **Central Everglades Planning Project (CEPP)** – Extending the delivery timeline for CEPP Validation Reports is simply unacceptable. CEPP, along with the dynamic storage and treatment capacity of the soon-to-be authorized EAA Storage Reservoir project, is the key to improving largescale water management in South Florida. The Corps must rapidly scale up its efforts to design and construct all CEPP features authorized in 2016 to be ready to manage the enhanced flows that will result from the operation of the EAA Storage Reservoir, which the State is committed to completing in 7 to 9 years. To improve flood mitigation within the Water Conservation Areas and improve wet season flows to Everglades National Park and Florida Bay, the Corps should prioritize the construction of water flow and distribution features from south to north.

4. **Lake Okeechobee Watershed Restoration Project and Aquifer Storage and Recovery** – The Lake Okeechobee Watershed Restoration Project is critical to managing the quantity and quality of inflows to Lake Okeechobee. Additionally, the development of reliable Aquifer Storage and Recovery options around Lake Okeechobee are long overdue and deserve enhanced attention towards realization.

5. **Continuation of peripheral projects with direct benefits to coastal water quality** – More attention should be given to storage and treatment features within the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee Basins and features designed to provide enhanced freshwater flow to Biscayne Bay and Florida Bay. These projects are essential to providing restoration benefits to coastal ecosystems within the Greater Everglades region. While such benefits accrue at the periphery of the system, they are perhaps the most obvious to the residents of South Florida. These projects are disproportionately important to maintaining public confidence in the federal-state partnership for Everglades restoration.

Once again, I urge you to work with the South Florida Water Management District, in consultation with the Secretary of the Interior, to address my concerns with the July 2018 Update of the Integrated Delivery Schedule. When combined with the increased federal commitment I have urged the President to make beginning with his 2020 budget, an updated IDS conforming to the priorities outlined above could truly prove to be a “watershed” moment for the State of Florida and America’s Everglades. Thank you for your continued attention to Everglades restoration.

Sincerely,



Marco Rubio
U.S. Senator

cc: Mr. Frederico Fernandez
Chairman
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The Honorable Ryan Zinke
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