April 22, 2024

The Honorable Patty Murray
Interim Chair
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Energy and Water
Development, and Related Agencies
142 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable John Kennedy
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Energy and Water
Development, and Related Agencies
188 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Chuck Fleischmann
Chair
House Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Energy and Water
Development, and Related Agencies
2362B Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Marcy Kaptur
Ranking Member
House Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Energy and Water
Development, and Related Agencies
1036 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chair Murray, Ranking Member Kennedy, Chair Fleischmann, and Ranking Member Kaptur,

On behalf of the undersigned environmental and conservation groups dedicated to restoring America's Everglades, thank you for the Subcommittee's longstanding support for Everglades restoration. These investments, combined with dollar-for-dollar matching support from the State of Florida, are driving historic restoration progress and projects decades in the making are coming across the finish line. **In order to maintain this momentum and keep restoration on track, we respectfully request $725 million in funding for the United States Army Corps of Engineers under the South Florida Ecosystem Restoration (SFER) construction account in your Fiscal Year 2025 Energy and Water Development and Related Agencies Appropriations bill.**

The bipartisan Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) to restore America's Everglades is a 50/50 partnership between the federal government and the State of Florida. It involves constructing and maintaining a complex framework of resilience-building water infrastructure projects that remove barriers to water flow. Restoring America's Everglades is a national example for large scale restoration to support water management that will mimic the historic flow of water across South Florida and support a wide range of benefits for the economy, ecology, and drinking water supply for millions. The Integrated Delivery Schedule (IDS) is the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' implementation plan for restoration projects designed to deliver numerous benefits to the Greater Everglades and to Florida's communities. The lessons learned and best practices from Everglades restoration can be harnessed and applied elsewhere for other large-scale ecosystem restoration projects across the country.

Completing the restoration milestones outlined in the IDS will safeguard the economic, cultural, ecological, and community resilience benefits of this national treasure. A healthy Everglades produces a 4:1 return on investment, sustaining Florida's fishing, boating, tourism, real estate, and outdoor recreation economies that all rely on clean water. Florida's $52 billion outdoor recreation economy, driven by fishing, boating, hunting, and other outdoor pursuits, has a robust impact on both jobs and GDP. Hydration through restoration recharges the aquifer that provides drinking water for millions of Floridians and tourists alike. Restored Everglades wetlands serve as an effective carbon bank, sequestering and storing carbon in massive quantities and restoration infrastructure projects provide the flexibility needed to allow water managers to respond in times of extreme weather events like hurricanes and drought.

We are already seeing demonstrable returns from recent investments. Long awaited construction has begun on the Everglades Agricultural Area (EAA) Reservoir and water is flowing through the project's Stormwater Treatment Cell 1 for the first time. Once complete, this critical project will reconnect Lake Okeechobee to the Central Everglades, Everglades National Park, and Florida Bay. This, combined with existing and future projects, will reduce harmful discharges of polluted water from the lake to Florida's east and west coasts, protect drinking water supplies, enhance wildlife habitat, and make Florida more resilient in the face of climate change.

This progress comes at a time that highlights the dire need for the Everglades ecosystem. In February, the Army Corps began releasing high volume discharges of water from Lake Okeechobee into the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee Rivers and estuaries to lower lake levels. Although these discharges were paused on March 29, the coastal estuaries are already beginning to experience the ramifications of the unnatural volumes of polluted water damaging water quality, and endangering vital oyster, seagrass, and fish spawning habitats. Water levels in the lake remain high heading towards warmer months, threatening to produce another "lost summer" of toxic blue-green algae for Florida's coastal communities, including communities still recovering from Hurricane Ian. We must maintain the current momentum for restoration to advance the critical

infrastructure projects necessary significantly reduce these tragic scenarios in the future.

Thank you again for the Subcommittee's longstanding bipartisan support for efforts to restore America's Everglades. We appreciate your consideration of $725 million in funding for the Army Corps under the SFER line in your respective Fiscal Year 2025 Energy and Water Development Appropriations bills. We look forward to working with you to achieve this monumental effort and apply the lessons learned here to other ecosystem restoration efforts across the country.

Sincerely,

Audubon Florida
Conservancy of Southwest Florida
Everglades Foundation
Everglades Law Center
Everglades Trust
Florida Oceanographic Society
National Audubon Society
National Parks Conservation Association
National Wildlife Federation
Sanibel Captiva Conservation Foundation
Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership
Tropical Audubon Society