



November 18, 2015

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Commission**

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Mr. Michael Bean
Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks
Chairman, South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW, MS 7257
Washington DC 20240

Dear Mr. Chairman,

I would like to congratulate the South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force (SFERTF) and its Working /Science Coordination Group, along with the staff and leadership of the South Florida Water Management District and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, for their efforts to engage stakeholders on the development of the Integrated Delivery Schedule (IDS). The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) prides itself on our public engagement of stakeholders with regard to issues that affect them as residents and as visitors to the State of Florida. It has long been this Commission's belief that reliance on the North American Wildlife Conservation Model, which emphasizes public participation, is the most effective way to ensure conservation of and access to Florida's precious fish and wildlife resources. This approach has guided our Commission through many complex situations with competing interests; situations much like those affecting Everglades restoration. The process leading to the development of the IDS embodies this cooperative nature and provides a roadmap for restoration efforts into the foreseeable future.

As the agency tasked with the stewardship of fish and wildlife resources for the state, the Commission depends heavily on the cooperation and coordination of our State and Federal partners who control water supply and flood control operations for the region. While we have made great strides regarding restoration efforts over the past several years, most notably with the implementation of Governor Scott's Restoration Strategies projects and the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) Generation 1 projects, we still have much to do. Irrespective of funding and its effect on timelines, which we recognize as an issue of critical importance, the IDS itself provides for a sequencing of projects that are vital to restoring the south Florida ecosystem and enhancing our collective way of life.

The Commission sincerely appreciates the support from our partner agencies and stakeholders in this effort and is particularly pleased to see agreement on central Everglades activities early in the schedule. While water quality is undoubtedly critical to maintaining the health of such a complex ecosystem, the Commission

maintains that water quantity, timing and distribution are just as, if not more, critical to the near-term survival of this ecosystem and our ability to manage fish and wildlife resources for current and future generations. Under existing operational conditions, adverse impacts can be seen from the northernmost reaches of the historic Everglades landscape to the Florida Keys and everywhere in between. In the north, discharges to our estuaries from Lake Okeechobee compound impacts from regional basin flood control operations. In the Water Conservation Areas (WCAs), the recurrence of high water levels and the duration of those events have severely altered the area such that both game and non-game species have been forced to all but abandon thousands of acres of habitat that historically supported a healthy, well balanced population of fish and wildlife. While these areas suffer the impact of too much water, Everglades National Park and Florida Bay's fish and wildlife resources suffer a similar fate, but as a result of too little water. While Florida has been fortunate enough to rebound from the devastating economic crisis that hit our nation several years ago, Florida's recreational opportunities, commercial industries and overall economic recovery remain in jeopardy as long as an agreed upon roadmap to recovery remains elusive. Due to the efforts of the partner agencies and our stakeholders, the IDS has become that roadmap.

The Commission not only supports the stakeholder driven results laid out before the Task Force, but we remain a staunch supporter of swift action on the restoration vision shared by all and laid out in the IDS. It is our hope that the SFERTF will not only endorse the efforts undertaken by the agencies and stakeholders to develop this critical sequence of projects, but remain engaged through regular updates on implementation of the schedule, seek and support predictable recurring funding, take a lead role in working with member agencies to resolve any conflicts that arise, and to look for any and all opportunities to expedite the schedule.

The Everglades remains one of the most complex and unique ecosystems in our nation. While the IDS represents a shared vision between the agencies responsible for restoration and the stakeholders who depend on it for their future, it is our continued commitment to acting quickly upon the projects within that schedule that will secure a lasting relationship and the support from the many interests that depend on this ecosystem for both their cultural interests and basic needs. More importantly, the biggest endorsement will come from those stakeholders that don't have a voice, the fish and wildlife that depend on our stewardship for their very survival.

Again, our appreciation goes out to all of the participants involved in the development of the schedule and we look forward to the continued progress and involvement of the Task Force in moving these efforts forward. The Commission remains committed to achieving a restored Everglades, as personified by the tireless advocacy and perseverance of our own Commissioner Ron Bergeron. Commissioner Bergeron remains steadfast in his efforts to protect and restore America's

Everglades and is supported by the full Commission when it comes to this historical challenge. Please do not hesitate to contact Commissioner Bergeron at (954) 680-6100 or our Regional Director, Ernie Marks at (561) 625-5122, if there is anything the Commission can do to further support the global vision of restoring America's Everglades.

Regards,



Brian Yablonski
Chairman
Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

ec: Mr. Peter Antonacci, Executive Director, SFWMD
Col Jason Kirk, District Commander, USACOE
Ms. Shannon Estenoz, Director, DOI
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