



Everglades Coalition

1000 Friends of Florida
Arthur R. Marshall Foundation
Audubon of Florida
Audubon Society of the Everglades
Audubon of Southwest Florida
Caloosahatchee River Citizens
Association/ Riverwatch
Clean Water Action
Clean Water Network
Collier County Audubon Society
Conservancy of Southwest Florida
Defenders of Wildlife
Ding Darling Wildlife Society
Earthjustice
Environment Florida
The Environmental Coalition
Everglades Coordinating Council
Everglades Foundation
Everglades Law Center
Florida Conservation Alliance
Florida Defenders of the Environment
Florida Keys Environmental Fund
Florida Native Plant Society
Florida Oceanographic Society
Florida Wildlife Federation
Friends of the Arthur R. Marshall
Loxahatchee Wildlife Refuge
Friends of the Everglades
Hendry Glades Audubon Society
Izaak Walton League Florida Division
Izaak Walton League Florida Keys
Chapter
Izaak Walton League Mangrove Chapter
Izaak Walton League of America
Last Stand
League of Women Voters of Florida
Loxahatchee River Coalition
Martin County Conservation Alliance
National Audubon Society
National Parks Conservation Association
National Wildlife Federation
National Wildlife Refuge Association
Natural Resources Defense Council
The Ocean Conservancy
The Pegasus Foundation
REEF RELIEF
Sanibel-Captiva Conservation
Foundation
Save It Now, Glades!
Sierra Club
Sierra Club Broward Group
Sierra Club Calusa Group
Sierra Club Central Florida Group
Sierra Club Florida Chapter
Sierra Club Loxahatchee Group
Sierra Club Miami Group
The Snook and Gamefish Foundation
South Florida Audubon Society
Tropical Audubon Society
The Urban Environment League
World Wildlife Fund

June 10, 2013

Chairman Daniel O'Keefe
3301 Gun Club Road
West Palm Beach FL 33406

RE: Biscayne Bay Coastal Wetlands, Phase 1 Rule Making

Dear Chairman O'Keefe:

The Everglades Coalition, an alliance of 57 local, state and national conservation and environmental organizations committed to the full restoration of the Greater Everglades Ecosystem, welcomes the South Florida Water Management District's (SFWMD's) recent focus on improving the health of Biscayne Bay. An ecologically vibrant Biscayne National Park and Biscayne Bay Aquatic Preserve is important to Florida's economy. Biscayne Bay-related recreation generated a calculated \$2.1 billion of income to Miami-Dade County residents in 2004 (a value of \$2.5 billion in 2012 dollars). Small business owners, such as dive boat operators, anglers, boat charter captains, marina owners, and hoteliers, among others, depend on flourishing ecosystems in Biscayne National Park and Biscayne Bay Aquatic Preserve for their livelihoods.

There is a strong need to move ahead with broad protections for Biscayne Bay through rulemaking and through enhancements in operations to increase beneficial flows to Biscayne Bay. The Biscayne Bay Coastal Wetlands (BBCW) Phase 1 Project proposed reservation does not account for existing, environmentally beneficial *groundwater* flows into Biscayne Bay; its focus is on protection of existing beneficial *canal* flows into the Bay. Existing groundwater flows are significant, and important to the health of the Bay and its fish and wildlife communities. Without a reservation that quantifies these beneficial groundwater flows, they will remain insufficiently protected, and the benefits of the BBCW Phase 1 project – in terms of increasing diffuse groundwater flows into the Bay by diverting canal flows – may be adversely affected by the reduction of existing groundwater flows as a result of future regional consumptive use permitting.

The June Governing Board meeting in Miami is the right opportunity for the Board to direct SFWMD staff to move forward with a second phase of rulemaking to protect existing groundwater flows to Biscayne Bay, including articulating a desired timeline for completion. We believe that

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the SFWMD should develop a reservation to protect such groundwater flows into Biscayne Bay both as part of its mandate to protect flows made available by this project and its responsibility under state law to protect fish, wildlife, public health and safety. A second phase of rulemaking could also provide a mechanism to allow the reallocation of terminated or reduced uses of permitted water to the environment.

The recent operational changes to provide flows of excess water from the Water Conservation Areas to Biscayne Bay have had a beneficial impact on the resource's salinity. Continuing this project next year would be a worthwhile investment, as would further exploration of other opportunities to maximize environmental benefit from operational changes. We believe that the SFWMD Governing Board should allocate adequate funds in the 2013-2014 budget to support these endeavors.

Our goal is to continue to work with the SFWMD to find every opportunity to prevent harm to Biscayne Bay and to protect the fish and wildlife within Biscayne National Park, an Outstanding Florida Water. Based on National Park Service data, we know that maintaining the salinity below 35 parts per thousand in the nearshore area, with a salinity target in the mesohaline range even in the dry season, will allow for the projects included in a future Phase 2 to be more successful in the protection of fish and wildlife. We look forward to working with the SFWMD to help to develop a viable plan to protect the ecological health and economic sustainability of Biscayne National Park and Biscayne Bay as the BBCW Phase 1 Project is completed and planning begins for Phase 2 of the BBCW Project.

Sincerely,



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State Co-Chair
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Final Statement of Estimated Regulatory Costs associated with a Water Reservation for the Biscayne Bay Coastal Wetlands CERP Phase 1 Project April 16, 2013, pg. 1-9. *See also* "Biscayne National Park Creates \$34.3 Million in Local Economic Benefit," Biscayne National Park News Release, February 28, 2013. Biscayne National Park brings over \$34 million in visitor spending to the communities around the park.

See Stalker, J C, R. M. Price, P.K. Swart, Determining Spatial and Temporal Inputs of Freshwater, including Submarine Groundwater Discharge, to a Subtropical Estuary using Geochemical tracers, Biscayne Bay, South Florida, Estuaries and Coasts, 32(4): 694-708, 703 (2009).

SFWMD has the authority to "reserve from use by permit applicants, water in such locations and quantities, and for such seasons of the year, as in its judgment may be required for the protection of fish and wildlife or the public health and safety." Fla. Stat. § 373.223(4).