

June 23, 2017

Thad Cochran, Chairman  
US Senate Committee on Appropriations  
113 Dirksen Bldg.  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Patrick J. Leahy, Ranking Member  
US Senate Committee on Appropriations  
437 Russell Bldg.  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Cochran and Ranking Member Leahy:

As you contemplate the Fiscal Year 2018 budget, we write to you in support of increased funding levels to the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) and the Department of the Interior to expedite the completion of congressionally authorized Everglades and South Florida ecosystem restoration projects and the rehabilitation of the Herbert Hoover Dike.

The Everglades is a national treasure, but manmade alterations, primarily by the USACE, have created significant environmental effects that must be remedied. Restoring the historic southerly flow of clean water from Lake Okeechobee to Florida Bay (Bay) is critical to ensure public safety, maintain proper salinity in the Bay and to reduce the necessity for, and the frequency of, releases to the Caloosahatchee and St. Lucie Rivers. In recent years, these releases to the east and west of Lake Okeechobee into the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee Rivers have resulted in catastrophic algal blooms and seagrass die-offs that have dramatically impacted not only the environment, but the sportfishing and boating industries in south Florida.

Over 3 million of the nation's 46 million recreational anglers reside in or frequent Florida, with many focusing on the iconic fishing opportunities in the southern part of the state that has been most affected by the impacts of ongoing delays in Everglades restoration. In Florida, the Fishing Capital of the World, the sportfishing industry is a \$9.6 billion economic engine supporting over 128,000 jobs, making clean waters and abundant fisheries in the State of paramount importance to us.

Our industry is committed to expediting the restoration of the historic southern flow of freshwater through the Everglades into Florida Bay and the reduction of the damaging releases to our coastal estuaries. Everglades restoration needs to be completed more quickly, and this can only happen with additional federal funding. While the state of Florida has shown its commitment to restoration by establishing significant recurring funding and bonding options, its federal partner, the USACE, has been challenged in directing funds to these projects. Currently, the state of Florida is approximately \$1 billion ahead of the federal government in its expenditures on Everglades restoration under the established 50/50 cost share agreement.

Given the importance of the Everglades to our nation and our economy, we urge you to provide federal funding for restoration projects that have already been authorized by Congress, including Tamiami Trail bridging, the Central Everglades

Planning Project and repairs to the Herbert Hoover Dike so that they can be completed as quickly as possible to prevent further ecologic and economic damage.

We look forward to working with you to achieve timely restoration of this most unique ecosystem. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

American Sportfishing Association

Bass Anglers Sportsman Society

National Marine Manufacturers Association

Snook and Gamefish Foundation

Guy Harvey Ocean Foundation

National Professional Anglers Association

Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership

International Game Fish Association

BoatUS

Captains for Clean Water

Bonefish Tarpon Trust

Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation

Center for Sportfishing Policy

Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies

Fishing League Worldwide

Marine Industries Association of Florida

Marine Retailers Association of the Americas

Coastal Conservation Association

Recreational Fishing Alliance