



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

November 6, 2013

The Honorable Sylvia Mathews Burwell
Director, Office of Management and Budget
Executive Office of the President
725 17th Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20503

Dear Director Burwell,

We are writing to ask that funding for the second phase of the C-44 project, a critical water treatment project in Florida which will provide relief to a region devastated by pollution, be included in the President's Fiscal Year 2015 budget request.

Nutrient heavy freshwater from Lake Okeechobee and local runoff have inundated the waterways of the St. Lucie River and its estuary. The Army Corps of Engineers' current management of the aging Herbert Hoover Dike around Lake Okeechobee entails sending billions of gallons of polluted freshwater into the St. Lucie River. These discharges have a direct and serious impact on these waterways, dramatically threatening public health, the environment, and the economy of the Treasure Coast of Florida.

This summer, the river contained such high levels of enteric bacteria that local officials posted public health warnings, urging local communities to avoid contact with the water. Toxic algae blooms were also declared throughout the waterway, and many residents reported infections resulting from their interaction with the water. The situation has reached such critical levels that our polluted waters were recently covered in the national news.

The environment of the area has been impacted in ways many fear may not be reversible. When the normally brackish waters of the St. Lucie Estuary are pummeled with contaminated freshwater, marine life crucial to the entire ecosystem dies off completely. This estuary is part of the Indian River Lagoon, the most biodiverse estuary system in the United States; yet, these harmful water discharges are severely damaging this rare and precious habitat. Beyond the serious risks to public health and ecological damage, the local economy depends on tourism dollars, and the success or failure of small businesses in the area is directly connected to the quality of the waterways. When the river is devastated by pollution, the economy suffers.

The federal government responded to this situation in 2007 by authorizing the first stages of the Indian River Lagoon South Central Everglades Restoration Project. Once completed, the project will reduce the damaging effects of watershed runoff and discharges from Lake Okeechobee by

providing an area of 170,000 acres for water storage and treatment. Currently the C-44 reservoir and stormwater treatment areas, the most vital component of the entire project, are under construction. However, there is currently no funding available for this project to move forward into its next and most important phase.


The Everglades region is unique in the world for the variety of rare species of plants and animals that inhabit the area. However the area is also uniquely threatened by urban growth, pollution, and storm systems. It is because of these distinct and precious characteristics that the United States has made protecting the Everglades an environmental priority.

We urge in the strongest possible terms that your office and the Administration allocate the maximum amount that can be expended in the President's Fiscal Year 2015 budget for the completion of Phase Two of the C-44 Project. We cannot understate the importance of this project to the Treasure Coast of Florida. C-44 must move forward as quickly as possible to prevent dangerous pollutants and nutrients from destroying our nation's most biodiverse estuary. The region's health and safety depend on it.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent issue.

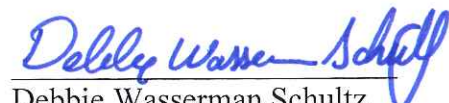
Sincerely,


Patrick E. Murphy
Member of Congress

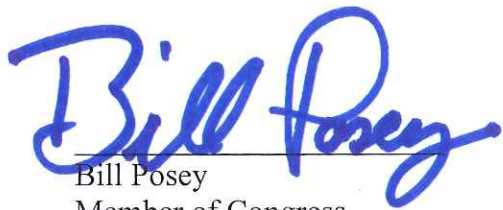

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United States Senator


Steny H. Hoyer
Member of Congress



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Member of Congress



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Lois Frankel
Member of Congress


Frederica Wilson
Member of Congress


Kathy Castor
Member of Congress

Cc: Assistant Secretary Jo-Ellen Darcy, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

Brigadier General Donald E. Jackson, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, South Atlantic Division

Colonel Alan Dodd, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Jacksonville District