

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

March 18, 2013

The Honorable Jeffrey Zients  
Acting Director, Office of Management and Budget  
Executive Office of the President  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Acting Director Zients:

We respectfully write in support of the Everglades Headwaters National Wildlife Refuge and Conservation Area, and ask that you include robust funding for conservation easements and land acquisition for the refuge and conservation area in the Fiscal Year 2014 budget request. This funding is integral to protecting Florida's ranches, forests, and wetlands, which have a direct impact on our economy.

Maintaining open land north of Lake Okeechobee is by far the most efficient and effective method of bettering water quality and increasing water storage to help satisfy Florida's ever-present water needs. Conservation easements allow ranchers and farmers to continue to own and manage their property while keeping it on the tax rolls and in agriculture production. From the Panhandle to the ranchlands south of Orlando, landowners are taking advantage of easement and land acquisition programs to support their agriculture operations.

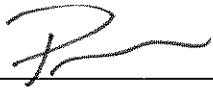
Ranchers, farmers, sportsmen, and conservation groups have worked closely with state and federal agencies to develop the Everglades Headwaters plan covering 150,000 acres with 100,000 acres to be protected with conservation easements and 50,000 acres to be acquired in fee title. Agricultural communities are able to preserve their way of life that make these communities special, all while achieving conservation goals. Sportsmen will also be given increased access for hunting and other outdoor pursuits in the refuge. Each of these constituencies support this funding because of the positive impacts it will have at home.

This funding will help preserve agriculture in the region, safeguarding a vital industry that employs thousands and contributes to our nation's food supply. Agriculture is second to tourism as an economic driver in our state, so it is critical that we take the necessary steps to protect its future. Further, sportsmen, birdwatchers, and wildlife tourism participants generate an average of four dollars to the local economy for every one dollar invested, and the economic impacts from these user groups are significant. All of these interests will benefit from the Everglades Headwaters National Wildlife Refuge and Conservation Area.

We also ask that you support funding initiatives for the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP). CERP's objective is to capture fresh water that now flows unused to the ocean and the gulf, which can have negative impacts on salt water estuaries, and redirect it to areas that need it most, such as the environmentally critical Everglades region.

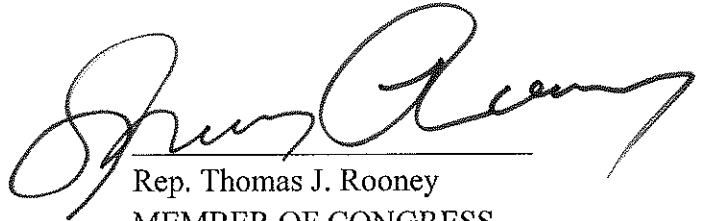
We urge you to support vital and robust funding for conservation easements and land acquisition for the Everglades Headwaters Refuge in the Fiscal Year 2014 budget, and also support CERP's important initiatives. Thank you for considering this important request.

Sincerely,



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Rep. Patrick Murphy  
MEMBER OF CONGRESS



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Rep. Thomas J. Rooney  
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

Cc: Denis McDonough, White House Chief of Staff  
Ken Salazar, Secretary of the Interior  
Tom Vilsack, Secretary of Agriculture  
Nancy Sutley, White House Council on Environmental Quality  
Sally Ericsson, Office of Management and Budget  
John Conger, Department of Defense  
Dan Ashe, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
Jason Weller, Natural Resources Conservation Service