

**Audubon Florida * Audubon Society of the Florida Everglades * Calusa Waterkeeper
Cape Coral Friends of Wildlife * Captains for Clean Water
Center for Biological Diversity * Conservancy of Southwest Florida *
Ding Darling Wildlife Society * Everglades Foundation * Everglades Law Center
Everglades Trust * Florida Bay Forever
Florida Division of the Izaak Walton League of America
Florida Keys Chapter of the Izaak Walton League of America
Florida Native Plant Society * Florida Oceanographic Society
Florida Wildlife Federation
Friends of Arthur R. Marshall Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge
Friends of the Everglades * Izaak Walton League of America * Last Stand
League of Women Voters of Florida * Martin County Conservation Alliance
National Audubon Society * National Parks Conservation Association
National Wildlife Federation * Peace River Audubon * Reef Relief
Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation * Sierra Club * Tropical Audubon Society
1000 Friends of Florida**

Florida Congressional Delegation

Sent via email

May 5, 2020

Dear Florida Congressional Delegation,

The undersigned representatives of organizations committed to the restoration of America's Everglades are **writing to oppose** the proposal to add language to the 2020 Water Resources Development Act that would make the "Savings Clause" found in section 601(h)(5) of Public Law 106-541 (WRDA 2000) applicable to the Lake Okeechobee regulation schedule and direct the Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) to use the lake regulation schedule in place in December 2000 as the base condition for such analysis. **We urge you to reject this proposal for the following reasons.**

Savings Clause analysis only applies to changes from date of enactment of WRDA 2000 that result from implementation of the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) and is to be conducted as CERP projects are brought online to ensure ecosystem benefits are realized while protecting water users as those ecosystem benefits are delivered to the Everglades. The Lake Okeechobee regulation schedule, however, is not a CERP project and predates CERP by decades. The effort currently underway by the Corps to develop a new lake regulation schedule was authorized in WRDA 2018 to address concerns about the integrity of the Herbert Hoover Dike, and is not part of CERP implementation for purposes of Everglades restoration. In addition, the Corps' Programmatic Regulations promulgated pursuant to WRDA 2000 which have been in force for over 10 years conclude that changes to lake regulation schedules as well as the issuance of consumptive use permits under state law are examples of "intervening non-CERP activities" which do not trigger Savings Clause analysis. The Corps has consistently applied this reasoning when evaluating the Savings Clause in the context of numerous project reports and analyses and there is no compelling reason that is consistent with the goals of Everglades restoration that would warrant changing directions.

The Lake Okeechobee regulation schedule requires the Corps to balance 5 congressionally authorized project purposes for flood control, water supply, navigation, recreation, and preservation of fish and wildlife resources. The proposed language expands the interests of consumptive users far beyond that contemplated in WRDA 2000 and puts an even larger thumb on the scale to the sole benefit of one, but to the detriment of all other stakeholder interests. Indeed, changing a founding principle of CERP after the fact to gain benefit for one party undermines the cooperative spirit of the entire endeavor.

Not only is applying the Savings Clause analysis to the lake regulation schedule without justification, reverting back to the regulation schedule in place in December 2000, the Water Supply and Environment (WSE) schedule, as the base line for such analysis would be disastrous. Under WSE, high water events in 2003, 2004 and 2005 created serious problems in the lake, including the loss of 45,000 acres of nutrient absorbing marsh vegetation and threatening the Herbert Hoover Dike with failure - placing surrounding communities at risk of catastrophic flooding. Fisheries crashed and it took almost a decade for the black crappie population to recover. Hurricanes stirred up the mud bottom in the center of the Lake which raised phosphorus levels and degraded water quality. Nutrient and sediment enriched discharges to the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee estuaries contributed to harmful algal blooms and damage to estuary ecosystems. By 2004, the Corps had to officially adopt deviations from the WSE schedule to help keep Lake levels lower to avoid these issues. WSE also had no provision to supply the Caloosahatchee Estuary with water during the dry season, even when the Lake was dangerously deep. It was a deeply flawed schedule that should not be returned to.

Lake regulation schedules should be adopted based on sound scientific data, improvements that have been made in weather forecasting, hydrological monitoring and modeling, and performance metrics that reflect optimal conditions for the lake and downstream ecosystems. Following that script is our best chance to manage toxic blue green algae, benefit the greater ecosystem and equitably balance the interests of all stakeholders. Peer reviewed studies and performance metrics that are currently part of the lake regulation schedule record demonstrate the folly of reverting back to the WSE schedule. Doing so condemns us to repeat the mistakes we are aware of and have the ability to avoid.

The proposed language would significantly undermine restoration efforts currently underway and jeopardize billions of dollars of taxpayer money allocated by the federal government and the state of Florida for Everglades and ecosystem restoration that is critical to the long-term well-being of Floridians and the Sunshine State Economy. We urge you to reject it.

Sincerely,

Doug Gaston
Northern Everglades Policy Analyst
Audubon Florida

Scott Zucker
Vice President and Co-Conservation Chair
Audubon Society of the Everglades

John Cassani
Calusa Waterkeeper
Calusa Waterkeeper

Lori Haus-Bulcock
Board of Directors
Cape Coral Friends of Wildlife

Jaclyn Lopez
Florida Director
Center for Biological Diversity

Mike Baldwin
President
Ding Darling Wildlife Society

Lisa Interlandi
Executive Director
Everglades Law Center

Emma Haydocy
Director
Florida Bay Forever

Michael F. Chenoweth
President
**Florida Keys Chapter of the Izaak Walton
League of America**

Mark D. Perry
Executive Director
Florida Oceanographic Society

Eve Samples
Executive Director
Friends of the Everglades

Dottie Moses
Board Member
Last Stand

Tom Bausch
Member of the Board of Directors
Martin County Conservation Alliance

Melissa E. Abdo, Ph.D.
Regional Director, Sun Coast
National Parks Conservation Association

Captain Daniel Andrews
Executive Director
Captains for Clean Water

Marisa Carrozzo
Everglades & Water Policy Manager
Conservancy of Southwest Florida

Geoffrey S. Mullins
Director of Policy and Partnerships
Everglades Foundation

Kimberly Mitchell
Executive Director
Everglades Trust

Michael F. Chenoweth
President
**Florida Division of the Izaak Walton
League of America**

Joan Bausch
FNPS Representative to Coalition
Florida Native Plant Society

Preston T. Robertson
President
**Friends of Arthur R. Marshall
Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge**

Jared Mott
Conservation Director
Izaak Walton League of America

Patricia Brigham
President
League of Women Voters of Florida

Julie Hill-Gabriel, Esq.
Vice President of Water Conservation
National Audubon Society

Jessie Ritter
Director, Water Resources and Coastal Policy
National Wildlife Federation

Bren Curtis
Board Member and Conservation Chair
Peace River Audubon

Rae Ann Wessel
Natural Resource Policy Director
Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation

Paola Ferreira
Executive Director
Tropical Audubon Society

Mill McCleary
Executive Program Director
Reef Relief

Dalal Aboulhosn
Deputy Legislative Director
Sierra Club

Jane West
Policy & Planning Director
1000 Friends of Florida

CC: Congressman Gus Bilirakis

Congressman Vern Buchanan

Congresswoman Kathy Castor

Congressman Charlie Crist

Congresswoman Val Demings

Congressman Ted Deutch

Congressman Mario Diaz-Balart

Congressman Neal Dunn

Congresswoman Lois Frankel

Congressman Matt Gaetz

Congressman Alcee Hastings

Congressman Al Lawson

Congressman Brian Mast

Congresswoman Debbie Murcarsel-Powell

Congresswoman Stephanie Murphy

Congressman Bill Posey

Congressman Francis Rooney

Congressman John Rutherford

Congresswoman Donna Shalala

Congressman Darren Soto

Congressman Ross Spano

Congressman Greg Steube

Congressman Michael Waltz

Congresswoman Debbie Wasserman-Schultz

Congressman Daniel Webster

Congresswoman Frederica Wilson

Congressman Ted Yoho