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May 3, 2024

South Florida Water Management District  
3301 Gun Club Road  
West Palm Beach, FL 33406

Dear Governing Board of the South Florida Water Management District,

I am writing to you on behalf of the Bonefish & Tarpon Trust (BTT) in support of the Lower Kissimmee Basin Stormwater Treatment Area (LKBSTA).

BTT works to conserve bonefish, tarpon and permit – the species, their habitats, and the larger fisheries they comprise throughout the U.S., Gulf of Mexico, and Caribbean. In Florida, these iconic species support the state's \$13.8 billion recreational fishery and are important tourism drivers.

The LKBSTA is one example of a science-backed approach that can make a lasting difference in water quality for the fisheries that depend on healthy waterways. This project is critical to the restoration and long-term health of Lake Okeechobee and Everglades restoration. Our organization urges the South Florida Water Management District to advance this project.

Currently, Lake Okeechobee has harmful levels of phosphorous in the water. As these nutrients accumulate, they become algal blooms that are poisonous to the wildlife who rely on these waters. The blooms also extract vital oxygen from the water, making it even more difficult for the survival of fish and other aquatic life.

The LKBSTA is a proven solution to extract bulk tons of phosphorous at a time, drastically improving the water quality of the lake and other connected waterways. The Basin Management Action Plan from the Florida Department of Environmental Protection shows that this project is a tangible way to drastically decrease the presence of the blooms impacting our natural resources.

BTT urges the South Florida Water Management District to advance this stormwater treatment area project at each stop ahead. This project is a catalyst in making a lasting difference in the quality of our waterways, helping to restore healthy and plentiful fish populations. Your support of the LKBSTA is critical.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kelli Ralston".

Vice President of Conservation and Public Policy