



SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

August 3, 2016

The Honorable Jo-Ellen Darcy
Assistant Secretary of the Army
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
108 Army Pentagon
Washington, DC 20310-0108

Dear Assistant Secretary Darcy:

The South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) received a copy of your July 26, 2016 letter to U.S. Rep. Patrick Murphy that suggests reordering planning studies for Everglades restoration that are part of the U.S. Corps of Engineers Integrated Delivery Schedule (IDS).

The SFWMD has a long and productive relationship with the Corps. Through this relationship SFWMD and the Corps developed the IDS, the roadmap for Everglades restoration. The IDS brings predictability to project budgeting and decision-making. This schedule has proven to be a steady, reliable compass that guides projects and maximizes the benefits of all Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) efforts.

The Everglades Agricultural Area planning study is currently slated to begin in 2021. Your suggestion to Rep. Murphy to deviate from that carefully developed schedule and embark on that study sooner is a distraction from the IDS and could prove harmful to ongoing restoration efforts.

The schedule was thoughtfully developed through an extensive public process with participation of the South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force and its Working Group as well as major environmental groups. The schedule acts as a traffic control device, helping to guide the billions of taxpayers' monies that are dedicated to Everglades restoration. The projects and planning undertakings are organized so that the beginning of one element of the schedule coincides with progress or completion of others.

More water storage and treatment is needed system-wide to achieve restoration. The schedule as developed is working and has yielded significant Everglades restoration progress. Water quality benefits are well recognized in the Everglades Protection Area and Everglades National Park. Today, the SFWMD and the Corps are engaged in three

scheduled, consequential planning efforts that will bring even greater restoration benefits to the Everglades. These include:

- The Lake Okeechobee Watershed Study, which began this month. This study will identify at least 200,000 acre-feet of storage opportunities north of Lake Okeechobee to reduce discharges to coastal estuaries, improve lake ecology and improve flexibility in operating the water management system in South Florida during both excessive rainfall conditions and drought.
- The Loxahatchee River Watershed Restoration Study, which began in January. This study will reconnect and restore natural areas to improve the flow of water to the "National Wild and Scenic" Northwest Fork of the Loxahatchee River.
- The Western Everglades Restoration Project, which will begin next month. Its goal is to alleviate over-drainage, improve water storage and distribution to natural areas and improve the quality of water entering the Everglades from western areas.

The Everglades Agricultural Area planning study will be greatly enhanced by completing these ongoing planning efforts in their proper order. As such recognizing the important connection to the Central Everglades Planning Project (currently pending before Congress), current planning efforts should be completed before any Everglades Agricultural Area planning study is begun.

Much of the powerful, forward momentum Everglades restoration achieved these last few years can be attributed to reliance on IDS-driven certainty. It guides our Board and the Corps, provides budget predictability, and serves as a public roadmap to Everglades restoration. Our last Governing Board meeting emphasized the importance of engaging all communities when discussing CERP implementation. As the Corps has done over the years, proposed amendments to the IDS must be carefully considered and only in the context of a public process.

Our Governing Board is committed to CERP implementation with the Corps and looks forward to a continued productive relationship with the Corps in the critical job of restoring our Everglades.

Sincerely,



Dan O'Keefe

Chairman, SFWMD Governing Board

DOK/rb

c: Congressman Patrick Murphy, U.S. House of Representatives
Colonel Jason Kirk, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers