



SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

STATEMENT

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Re: Federal funding announced to protect 26,000 critical acres in Northern Everglades ecosystem

Statement by Eric Buermann, SFWMD Governing Board Chairman:

"The South Florida Water Management District is extremely grateful for such significant support to protect and restore the Northern Everglades. Our partnership with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service and The Nature Conservancy — plus four landowners on the property — is a national model of collaboration to protect America's Everglades. This effort vividly demonstrates that public, private and advocacy organizations together can achieve what some think impossible: environmental protection and productive agriculture coexisting side by side."

Statement by Joe Collins, SFWMD Governing Board member representing central and southwest Florida:

"This outstanding investment builds on decades of stewardship and generations of appreciation for Florida's natural areas by our state's ranchers and growers. Thanks to the innovation and commitment by our many partners, vast tracts of agricultural land will now support Northern Everglades restoration while continuing to contribute much-needed value to Florida's economy."

Statement by Carol Ann Wehle, SFWMD Executive Director:

"We look forward to working with our partners to develop onsite activities that will achieve restoration goals: improving water quality in the greater Everglades; protecting and expanding wetlands; preserving important habitats, such as longleaf pine uplands; and connecting natural areas that can support Florida's diverse array of wildlife, including the bald eagle, Florida panther, black bear and whooping crane."

"The District deeply appreciates the federal support and collaboration of the many partners that led to this special project for Fisheating Creek. We are fully committed to

demonstrating the value of this outstanding, collaborative model for Everglades restoration but, more importantly, to delivering environmental results that will permanently help to protect one of America's national treasures."

Background

U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Deputy Secretary Kathleen Merrigan today announced \$89 million in financial assistance for a special Florida project in the national Wetlands Reserve Program. The project, located at Fisheating Creek in the Northern Everglades watershed, brings conservation easements to almost 26,000 acres of critical wetland habitat within the greater Everglades ecosystem.

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About the Everglades

America's Everglades once covered almost 11,000 square miles of south Florida. Just a century ago, water flowed down the Kissimmee River into Lake Okeechobee, then south through the Everglades to the Florida Bay – the ultimate destination of the pure sheetflow. Because of efforts to drain the marshland for agriculture, development and flood control, the Everglades is today half the size it was a century ago. Dubbed the River of Grass for the sawgrass that flourished throughout the marsh, the Everglades is a mosaic of freshwater ponds, prairies and forested uplands that supports a rich plant and wildlife community. Renowned for its wading birds and wildlife, the Everglades is home to dozens of federally threatened and endangered species, including the Florida panther, American crocodile, snail kite and wood stork. The mix of salt and freshwater makes it the only place on Earth where alligators and crocodiles exist side by side.

About the South Florida Water Management District

The South Florida Water Management District is a regional, governmental agency that oversees the water resources in the southern half of the state – 16 counties from Orlando to the Keys. It is the oldest and largest of the state's five water management districts. The agency mission is to manage and protect water resources of the region by balancing and improving water quality, flood control, natural systems and water supply. A key initiative is cleanup and restoration of the Everglades.