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****PRESS RELEASE****

Is the EAA Reservoir Plan Designed to Fail?

Conservation Groups and Businesses Raise Alarm, Demand Answers and Fix

West Palm Beach, FL—The South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD), the agency taking the lead in implementing the project set to stop harmful Lake Okeechobee discharges to South Florida's coasts and restore freshwater flows to Everglades National Park and Florida Bay, has released plans that fall woefully short of meeting those goals, according to fishing outfitters, conservation groups, and businesses following the issue. Bay and Reef Company of the Florida Keys, Bullsugar Alliance, Florida Bay Forever, Florida Keys Fishing Guides, Florida Keys Outfitters, Florida Sportsman, Florida Wildlife Federation, Friends of the Everglades, Friends of the Arthur R. Marshall Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge, Guides Trust Foundation, Herman Lucerne Memorial Foundation, Mauri Flyfishing, Patagonia, Reef Relief, Sierra Club, and Stuart Flyrodders reviewed EAA Reservoir proposals from the SFWMD, and found that none of the presented options makes full use of the resources provided by state law to design a cost-effective reservoir project in the Everglades Agricultural Area that maximizes potential benefits.

The plan suggested by the SFWMD is a staggering betrayal of the legislation signed into law by Governor Rick Scott, and the expectation that Senate President Joe Negron had forged a sensible, cost-effective compromise with Florida's sugar industry. Although the Governor's office has been plied with the science that proves the need for additional land, and SFWMD has received nearly 500 public comments calling for the exploration of a larger footprint to boost the project's water treatment capacity, no alternatives have been presented that address the concerns that restricting the project's size limits its ability to achieve optimum performance.

The size restriction also makes it more difficult to limit reservoir depth and structure height to economical construction dimensions. Construction estimates will likely climb sharply as the water depths in the reservoir exceed 12-14 feet; the proposed designs near or exceed 20 feet. Despite confirming that thousands of additional acres of public land currently leased to commercial interests could be made available for the project, the SFWMD has resisted all requests to consider using this option to make a safer, more cost-effective, and better-performing reservoir. Without extensive changes, the plan is in serious jeopardy of not receiving the federal approval necessary for the cost of the reservoir to be split by the state and federal government, undermining the Florida legislature's passage of SB10 earlier this year.

The SFWMD is scheduled to present its EAA reservoir plan to the Florida state legislature on January 9, 2018, and then to submit the finalized plan for federal review on March 30, 2018. The success of the project depends on the leadership of Governor Rick Scott and his appointees on the SFWMD governing board. To ensure that SFWMD's plan is consistent with the intent and letter of the law, presents the optimal configuration to reduce discharges to Florida's coasts and deliver clean water to the Everglades and Florida Bay, and provides these benefits cost-effectively, **Governor Scott and SFWMD must answer these questions before the proposal is finalized:**

- SB 10 requires the District to analyze the “optimal configuration” (subparagraph (5)(b)(1) of Florida Statute 373.4598) of the reservoir; SFWMD is not limited to acreage already in public ownership. We know that more land will optimize the project. SFWMD staff has said that the District is indeed considering additional land and this includes approximately 18,000 acres held by the Trustees of the Internal Improvement Trust Fund, which are not included in the footprints proposed to date. **Why has the District refused to increase the footprint to optimize benefits and reduce costs? When will the public and lawmakers see alternative configurations that include additional land?**
- **What will this project cost?** This critical constraint has not been detailed in presentations to the public.
- Eliminating the A-1 Flow Equalization Basin (FEB), an existing critical and successfully operating water treatment structure, as proposed in three of the publicly presented alternatives, places the project in conflict with the state's Restoration Strategies Regional Water Quality Plan. **Why is the District proposing the elimination of A-1 FEB when that would significantly delay and/or jeopardize the project and further extend South Florida's exposure to the current system's damaging impacts?**
- **When will the cost-benefit analysis be updated to quantify the impact on the local economies and public health in communities affected by discharges?** Without these considerations, the analysis will be biased against providing relief to the estuaries and coasts--the explicit intent of SB10.
- **When will the cost-benefit analysis be updated to quantify the impact on South Florida communities that rely on a healthy central and southern Everglades ecosystem, which includes Everglades National Park and Florida Bay?** The District needs to ensure that the entire range of the ecosystem, from Lake Okeechobee to Florida Bay, is included in the project benefits analysis.
- **How will the final project meet federal and state water quality standards?**
- **Why is the District not considering opportunities that provide the water South Florida needs for a sustainable future?** The current model scenarios only explore the bare minimum that matches what was modeled under the Central Everglades Planning (CEP) Project. While we do not expect this project to recover the historical additional average annual water flows (the central Everglades used to get 700,000

additional acre-feet per District's natural systems modeling), the District has failed to explore alternatives that could increase average annual water flows beyond just 300,000 acre-feet, which is only 90,000 acre-feet above what CEP was already envisioned to provide without the EAA Reservoir. Alternatives should be explored that maximize opportunity to increase flows to the central Everglades, reduce harmful discharges to the northern estuaries and increase the overall project benefits.

“State law directs the South Florida Management District to include enough public land in a water storage and treatment plan to cut discharges and deliver clean water to the Everglades. By arbitrarily confining its design to an undersized footprint, the district delivered an insufficient plan with potentially astronomical costs,” Alex Gillen, director of policy for Bullsugar Alliance said.

Sierra Club Organizing Representative Diana Umpierre stated: “The state has not fulfilled its obligation to find the best option. We cannot support a proposal that leaves out the best alternatives. Governor Scott signed SB10 with ceremony--where is he now?

"Does the Governor work for SFWMD or does SFWMD work for the Governor? Why these people can't get the job done as the law provides is criminal" said Sandy Moret of Florida Keys Outfitters.

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