

Written testimony submitted to:
**House Appropriations Subcommittee on
Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies**
in support of restoring America's Everglades



by

Eric Eikenberg, CEO of the Everglades Foundation

Chairman Calvert, Ranking Member Moran, and Members of the Committee. Good morning and thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Eric Eikenberg and I am the CEO of the Everglades Foundation who has one mission, one priority, to Restore America's Everglades.

I had the great honor of serving as Chief of Staff of your late colleague Clay Shaw during his 26 year tenure in Congress who understood, as all of you do, that protecting America's Everglades is an issue that is supported by Americans without regard to partisan politics.

We greatly appreciate your committee's support for America's Everglades over the past years. I am happy to report that Everglades restoration is working! All authorized projects are underway. Several significant projects are in the final stages and we are already seeing the return of Florida Panther in the Picayune Strand and scientists report that the C-111 Western Project is already exceeding expectations and restoring freshwater prey fish and habitat for the American Crocodile and Roseate Spoonbill just one year into operations. The 2013 completion of a one-mile bridge along Tamiami Trail has already begun to increase water delivering water flow into and a breathtaking new view of Everglades National Park.

These examples remind us that nature will rebound when we take steps to undo the damage caused by the Central & Southern Florida Project. With your sustained commitment largest ecosystem restoration project ever undertaken is poised for success in protecting 68 endangered species, a World Heritage Site in Danger, International Biosphere Reserve and the third largest National Park in the United States.

As you consider fiscal year 2015 appropriations for the Department of the Interior (DOI), we ask that you invest in restoring America's Everglades at the level included in the President's budget request of \$62.4 million. This funding will allow key projects under the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP). Everglades' restoration is a wise investment that has a 4:1 return and will continue to employ thousands of workers and return millions of dollars back to the local economy.

The Everglades Ecosystem is an enormous and unique watershed. Approximately the size of Connecticut and New Jersey combined, this special place encompasses numerous federal interests including 14 National Wildlife Refuges, National Parks, a National Preserve and a National Marine Sanctuary. Everglades National Park is a crown jewel of the National Park Service that draws more than one million visitors and

generates more than \$146 million in visitor spending annually. We applaud the leadership of Director Jon Jarvis' commitment of \$90 million to allow Tamiami Trail bridging to move forward expeditiously so it can be a centennial project for NPS. The Everglades Foundation supports the increase in the Federal Lands Transportation program to pay for nationally significant transportation infrastructure within federal or tribal lands.

Agencies within DOI are taking a lead role and working closely with the State of Florida to fulfill the goals of CERP. As a former Chief of Staff under Governor Charlie Crist's administration I can assure you that the state-federal partnership remains strong. The strength of this partnership is reflected in Florida Governor Rick Scott's matching \$90 million commitment to cover 50% of the cost of elevating the next 2.6 miles of bridging along Tamiami Trail.

Our progress is strong, but crisis this past summer resulting in toxic algal blooms and decimated Caloosahatchee and St. Lucie estuaries highlight the urgent need to advance projects that will send water south. Tourists left angry, fishing guides and it was unsafe for children to swim along beaches impacted by the polluted Lake Okeechobee discharges.

Sustained funding to keep restoration projects on schedule is critical to avoiding collapse of the ecosystem, economy, and water supply of 7.9 million South Floridians. We appreciate your continued support and commitment to Everglades restoration as we move forward with this monumental restoration effort, fulfilling our promise to future generations.