

Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Kaptur, and members of the Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development, I'm here to advocate on behalf of robust funding for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to advance and expand their river and harbor maintenance, flood and storm damage reduction, shore protection, and environmental restoration missions.

In my Florida Congressional District which spans Martin and St. Lucie Counties, and portions of Palm Beach County, folks are counting on Congress and the Trump Administration to once and for all “get the water right”.

By far and away, the most pressing issue for my community is the harmful and unnatural, massive discharges directed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers out of Lake Okeechobee and into the St. Lucie River.

These discharges turn the nation's most species-diverse saltwater estuary – the Indian River Lagoon – into algae-infested “fresh” waters that are not just harmful to local wildlife, but also threaten human health through toxins in the air and water, and impact our economy through sharp dips in tourism and real estate values.

In all, over one trillion gallons were quite literally flushed out to sea from Lake Okeechobee – much of it right through the heart of my district in Stuart.

That's hundreds of millions of gallons of water less for future drought reduction,

hundreds of millions of gallons less for agriculture,

hundreds of millions of gallons less for aquifer replenishment for the sole drinking water source of 8 million South Floridians,

and hundreds of millions of gallons less for ecologically-, economically- and recreationally-vital natural landscapes like the Everglades and Florida Bay, and the plants and animals that live there.

People in the Treasure Coast understand the critical need for flood protection for the communities south of Lake Okeechobee that prompt the water releases.

However, what my constituents back home will not accept is that despite a scientifically-sound, decades-old action plan and the State of Florida fulfilling many of its responsibilities, federal attention and resources to our water woes don't seem to respond regardless of how large the problem grows at either end of the Everglades ecosystem.

This lack of responsiveness from the federal government on Everglades restoration stem from one of three different processes that all feed into one another: project administration, authorization, and appropriation.

Delays in any one process impose further delays on the other processes, and over the course of more than 60 individual Comprehensive Ecosystem Restoration Plan projects, believe me, it really adds up!

Administratively, for whatever reason, the Army Corps is reluctant to marry their flood control mission at Lake Okeechobee with their ecological restoration mission in the Everglades, but that is exactly what South Florida needs.

Coordinating these missions will help to ensure that more water is directed to Everglades National Park and away from lakeside and coastal communities.

As Vice Chair of the Water Resources and Environment Subcommittee on the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, my priority will be pass a Water Resources Development Act that includes more CERP project authorizations.

And from an appropriations standpoint, more funding is needed to allow the Corps to quicken the pace of the rehabilitation of the Herbert Hoover Dike around Lake Okeechobee.

More funding is also needed to accelerate the construction of already-authorized CERP projects including Indian River Lagoon- South, the Caloosahatchee C-43 Reservoir, the Central Everglades Project, and Tamiami Trail Bridging, among others.

There are also a number of CERP projects that are still awaiting authorization, in part, because of funding and legal limitations on the Army Corps with respect to study investigations.

I would respectfully ask the Subcommittee to consider increasing the appropriations for Army Corps investigations, and to raise the cap on the number of study starts for environmental restoration projects the Secretary can greenlight each Fiscal Year – one per year is simply insufficient.

Ultimately to be successful, Everglades restoration must be conducted efficiently and cost-effectively.

That requires close coordination between the Corps, and authorizers and appropriators here in Congress.

I look forward to working closely with all of you in support of completing the most ambitious ecological restoration project in human history.

And I'd like to welcome the Chairman and Ranking Member down to the Treasure Coast to witness firsthand the devastating impacts Lake Okeechobee discharges and harmful algal blooms have on my district.

Thank you all again for your time and for your important efforts to craft an Energy and Water Development appropriations bill that reflects the concerns and priorities of the American people.