

Congressman Brian Mast
Florida -18th District

Chairwoman Kaptur, Ranking Member Simpson, and members of the Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development, I'm here to advocate for fully funding Everglades restoration and water quality infrastructure projects, and specifically for \$200 million for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Construction Account for Environmental Restoration or Compliance where South Florida Everglades Restoration can compete for additional funding.

The Everglades is the drinking water source for one in three Floridians and a source of jobs and economic livelihood for hundreds of thousands more. Restoring America's Everglades is not a choice between fiscal responsibility and environmental protection. In fact, it is both.

In my Florida Congressional District which spans St. Lucie, Martin, and Palm Beach Counties, the most pressing issue for folks is the massive, harmful and unnatural discharges – sometimes up to 7 million gallons of freshwater per minute – out of Lake Okeechobee and into the heart of our coastal community. This massive infusion of freshwater loaded with nutrients turns the St. Lucie River and our nation's most species-diverse saltwater estuary – the Indian River Lagoon – into an algae-infested toxic waterway that surrounds hundreds of thousands of residents. The resulting algal blooms kill beloved wildlife like manatees and dolphins. The toxins released by the blooms creates a public health crisis that hurts people through the water and air – children can't go swimming or play near the water, and elderly residents must stay locked in their homes. These blooms also destroy our economy because you can't sell a house that sits next to toxic water, and no one wants to vacation near, or boat or fish on, a giant stew of algae.

This problem was created by the Federal government in the last century when it created the Herbert Hoover Dike and artificial canals to send water where nature never intended and

away from where it is desperately needed; the result being that my community is being inundated with water we don't want while the Everglades are dying from a lack of water.

Congress committed itself to a solution to this problem in 2000 when it authorized the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) as a framework for restoring, protecting, and preserving the Everglades. CERP's dozens of components are essential to correcting the Federal government's engineering mistakes of the 20th century. Such components include (a) the C-44 Reservoir, a CERP project that will attenuate the freshwater flow and improve the water quality flowing into the St. Lucie Estuary, (b) the Restoration of the Kissimmee River that will return flow to 44 miles of the river's historic channel and restore about 40 square miles of river/floodplain ecosystem, and (c) the Everglades Agricultural Area (EAA) Reservoir, a key component that will help the water from Lake Okeechobee to be treated as it flows south to replenish the dying Everglades instead of flowing to the west and east to devastate our coastal communities with harmful algal blooms.

While I appreciate everything that this Subcommittee has done for Everglades restoration, the Federal government needs to do more to match the financial commitment from the State of Florida. The Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan was envisioned as a 50-50 partnership with the State of Florida; however, Florida's funding commitment has far outpaced the federal government's in the two decades since the plan was approved – and the gap is getting wider. The federal government's inability to match Florida's financial commitment has led to massive delays to the components of the CERP plan resulting in the prolonged erosion of the Everglades ecosystem and my community's ongoing exposure to harmful algal blooms.

The Federal government needs to step up to the plate, honor its commitment under CERP, and match the State of Florida in funding the Everglades restoration initiative. In 2016,

the Florida State Legislature committed \$200 million in annual state funding over 20 years for planning, design, engineering and construction of Everglades restoration project components. The Integrated Delivery Schedule—which provides the sequencing strategy for CERP’s individual components—is based upon the assumption that both the state and Federal governments will appropriate \$200 million for the plan each year. For these reasons, I am advocating for \$200 million for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers’ Construction Account for Environmental Restoration or Compliance. Florida has demonstrated their commitment to tackle this enormous problem, the Federal government needs to honor its commitment and meet my state halfway.

I also must ask that we not delay any of the components of the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan. This Subcommittee was put in a difficult spot when the earmark ban went into effect and had to get creative to invent a system to direct funding to individual Army Corps projects that does not violate this ban. However, the “New Start” procedures have become a self-inflicted wound that is needlessly delaying projects around the nation from advancing to the next phase of completion. Moreover, the “New Start” standard should never have been applied to the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan, which was authorized almost two decades ago. Completion of this authorized project should not – and must not—be delayed by this Subcommittee unilaterally determining that a “New Start” is needed for each of the 68 components of CERP. Components of CERP—like the EAA Reservoir, the Kissimmee River Restoration, and the C-44 Reservoir—must be allowed to advance to the next phase based solely on completion of a viable study, engineering realities on the ground, and availability of funding.

Again, I thank you for everything this Subcommittee has done to help the people of South Florida, and for the opportunity to testify before you today.