

Rep. Debbie Mucarsel-Powell  
Testimony before Energy and Water Appropriations Subcommittee  
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Thank you, Chairwoman Kaptur and Ranking Member Simpson, for the opportunity to appear before you today. One of my top priorities in Congress is to make significant progress in the effort to restore the Everglades. Congress authorized the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) in 2000, which is now the largest ecological restoration project in the world. Although the plan was originally expected to take many years given its immensity, it has moved along unpredictably slow. Unfortunately, almost two decades later, we have made very little progress. This must change – and that means we need to properly fund it.

I, along with my many of our colleagues, have urged your committee to provide the maximum funding possible for CERP. We have also called for a significant increase in the Army Corps Construction account for Additional Funding for Environmental Restoration or Compliance, from \$50 million to \$200 million. This increase of \$150 million will make available more funds for which Everglades restoration projects can compete. And once the appropriations bill is signed into law, you can be certain I will be pressuring the Army Corps to include full funding for Everglades restoration projects in their Work Plan.

Healthy Everglades are essential to a healthy economy in South Florida. The 1.5-million-acre wetland is a source of jobs and economic livelihood for hundreds of thousands of people. They attract visitors from across the country and around the world, contributing immensely to the tourism industry. The Everglades adds billions of dollars to the South Florida economy annually. Yet with each year that passes without significant restoration, our economy is put at risk.

A thriving Everglades ecosystem is crucial to our health, as well. We have already experienced consequences of our current system. This past year, we suffered through disastrous algal blooms that are not only toxic to marine life and our fishing and tourism industry but are harmful to human health. The overgrowth of algae causes respiratory and eye irritation – so much so that some people are unable to go outside over the duration of the bloom.

The Everglades also provide drinking water for more than one third of Floridians – that's over 8 million people who rely on the ecosystem for their most basic needs.

Furthermore, the Everglades are natural barriers to flood waters. They act as sponges during floods and storm surges. With rising sea levels and stronger, more frequent storms due to climate change, the natural infrastructure provided by the Everglades is even more vital to the existence of our South Florida environment.

The Everglades are like our circulatory system – they are the arteries that provide life to South Florida. They are a certified nationwide treasure. This is a bipartisan issue, with support at the federal level, state level, and local level. **This must be a national priority.**

I strongly urge you to provide the highest funding possible for Army Corps accounts so that we can propel Everglades Restoration projects ahead for the sake of our economy, our health, and the beautiful landscape and biodiversity of South Florida.

As Marjory Stoneman Douglas said in her book *The Everglades: River of Grass*, "There are no other Everglades in the world. They are, they have always been, one of the unique regions of the earth, remote, never wholly known. Nothing anywhere else is like them..."