

Testimony of Elizabeth Jolin
“The Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan and Water Management in Florida”
House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment
September 24, 2020

Chair Napolitano, Ranking Member Westerman, Vice Chair Mucarsel-Powell, and Members of the Subcommittee, My name is Captain Elizabeth Jolin. I have owned and operated a fishing and environmental tour business in Islamorada in the Florida Keys for the past 20 years.

Thank you for your time today.

When you next visit the Florida Keys and book a charter with me, we will have a magical day. We will catch fish, see herons, egrets, dolphins, explore the mangroves, and dive into the clear waters to be charmed by a myriad of tropicals swimming in the coral.

While we are on board it is unlikely we will talk about the wildly fluctuating salinity levels of the Florida Bay. We will not visit the 40,000 acres of dead sea grass in the Bay caused by those salty conditions. We will certainly not spend any time in the near sure ocean zone that has been suffocated by algae laden Bay water circulated on the tidal exchange. And finally, we will not discuss the future of the Florida Bay - because it is in crisis.

The Florida Bay receives a fraction of its historical water flow causing it to be perpetually starved for freshwater. And while we are often accused of being laid back in the Florida Keys, we can recognize an emergency when we see one.

The Florida Bay is facing a very real emergency. The Florida Bay receives a fraction of its historical water flow causing it to be perpetually starved for freshwater.

This emergency is affecting my business but more importantly this emergency is affecting every business in my community in Monroe County. There isn't a single job in the Florida Keys that doesn't rely on a thriving and vibrant natural resource. Our teachers, policeman, restaurateurs, housekeepers and of course fisherman rely on a healthy Florida Bay. It is quite literally the foundation of our community.

Despite this, I have confidence in our citizens, scientists, and legislators. Today's gathering strikes me as an indication that we clearly understand and quite possibly can agree on these points:

1. Everglades restoration is not about preserving the Everglades as much as preserving the economy of South Florida.
2. We have to manage the puzzle of Everglades restoration holistically. That is, we can't solve the problems of one estuary to the exclusion of others.
3. Politics must be put aside if we're going to find success in our Restoration efforts.
4. And finally, we are running out of time. CERP was designed to 20 years ago in a fraction of its projects have been completed. I sincerely hope we can come together to attach urgency and priority to Restoration efforts.

Thank you.