

## MEMORANDUM

TO: James Erskine, Chair, South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force Working Group

FROM: Phil Everingham, Chair, Biscayne Bay Regional Restoration Coordination Team

SUBJECT: Biscayne Bay Coastal Wetlands Project

DATE: 11/27/2018

On behalf of the Biscayne Bay Regional Restoration Coordination Team (BBRRCT), I would like to thank the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) for progress made to date on the Biscayne Bay Coastal Wetlands (BBCW) project. **The BBRRCT is committed to the restoration of Biscayne Bay and Biscayne National Park and strongly supports the completion of BBCW Phase I and the commencement of planning for BBCW Phase II as soon as possible.** BBCW is the only project in the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) that provides direct ecological benefits to Biscayne Bay and Biscayne National Park. Therefore, we are requesting that the Working Group continue its efforts and support for the continued progress on BBCW Phase I and the timely commencement of planning for BBCW Phase II.

The BBRRCT was established by the Working Group to integrate, inform, and coordinate restoration, enhancement, and preservation plans and activities that help maintain a functioning Biscayne Bay ecosystem. BBCW is critical to the health of Biscayne Bay and Biscayne National Park in that it will: a) redistribute incoming freshwater from point source discharges along a broader coastal front to restore tidal creeks and increase coastal estuarine wetlands habitat; b) restore and improve timing, distribution, and quality of freshwater flowing into the Bay; c) reestablish connectivity between freshwater and saline wetlands as well as between BBCW, the Model Lands Basin, and the C-111 project; and d) in Phase II provide needed additional freshwater to Biscayne Bay and Biscayne National Park. Restoration of Biscayne Bay's coastal wetlands will also help protect our water supply from salt water intrusion and will provide a critical buffer to the impacts of climate change and sea level rise.

We recognize the significant investment that has been made to date and thank you for your efforts completing pilot tests and certain project components. **However, to achieve the full suite of project benefits as envisioned in CERP, both Phase I and Phase II of the project must be fully constructed and operated.** Recent monitoring reports from local, state, and federal agencies indicate that the health of Biscayne Bay continues to decline, with increases in hypersalinity, seagrass die-offs, coral reef and mangrove ecosystem decline, and periods of toxic algal blooms.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Miami-Dade County Department of Environmental Resources Management, *Surface Water Quality Monitoring: Results and Discussion*, 21 June 2015-20 June 2016; Miami-Dade County Department of Environmental

Biscayne Bay appears to be shifting from a healthy, clear water seagrass ecosystem to a more turbid and polluted phytoplankton ecosystem in decline. Continued progress on BBCW is imperative to restore the health of this ecologically unique and economically significant ecosystem.

The BBRRCT is not alone in our support for the project. In recent years, Miami-Dade County, the City of Miami, Coral Gables, Miami Beach, Cutler Bay, Palmetto Bay, and the Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce all passed resolutions urging the completion of BBCW Phase I and the commencement of Phase II planning. Support from Miami-Dade County and its municipalities is indicative of the importance of Biscayne Bay to their economic and environmental health. Miami-Dade County continues to purchase lands needed for the project through its Environmentally Endangered Lands (EEL) program. Additionally, U.S. Senator Marco Rubio, in a July 25, 2018 letter, urged USACE to give more attention to features to provide enhanced freshwater flow to Biscayne Bay.

Tens of millions of dollars have already been invested by local, state and federal government agencies on the project. At present and until the project is completed, the restoration benefits of these investments are largely unrealized. Sustained federal and state funding is needed to continue progress on Phase I and to commence Phase II planning. Any delays endanger the long-term health of the critically, important Biscayne Bay ecosystem.

The BBRRCT recognizes that the full implementation of the BBCW project is of paramount importance to the health of Biscayne Bay and Biscayne National Park.

The BBRRCT as special adviser, greatly appreciates the Working Group's continued leadership and efforts towards a sustained level of progress and successful completion on all Everglades restoration projects and programs.

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Resources Management, *Report to June 2017 Biscayne Bay Regional Restoration Coordination Team: Julia Tuttle Basin Seagrass*, June 2017; Samimy & Kelble, *Report to November 2017 Biscayne Bay Regional Restoration Coordination Team: Preliminary Results from an intensive study of Coral Gables Waterway*, November 2017; Millette, *Report to November 2017 Biscayne Bay Regional Restoration Coordination Team: Long-term trends in chlorophyll a concentrations in Biscayne Bay*, November 2017.