SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

February 24, 2020

Mr. Chris Stahl
Florida Department of Environmental Protection
Florida State Clearinghouse
2600 Blairstone Road, MS 47
Tallahassee, FL 32399-2400

Subject: Central Everglades Planning Project, Central and Southern Florida, Everglades Agricultural Area, Florida, Final Environmental Impact Statement

Dear Mr. Stahl:

The South Florida Water Management District (District) developed an Integrated Feasibility Study and Draft Environmental Impact Statement (FS/DEIS) pursuant to Section 203(a)(1) of the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) 1986, as amended, to recommend a post-authorization change to the federally authorized Central Everglades Planning Project (CEPP). This FS/DEIS, called the CEPP Post Authorization Change Report (PACR), will significantly increase the CEPP ecosystem restoration benefits to the Caloosahatchee and St. Lucie Estuaries and the central portion of the Everglades including Water Conservation Area 3 and Everglades National Park. The Preferred Alternative recommended in the CEPP PACR has broad support from federal, state and local agencies, stakeholder interest groups and the public.

The Preferred Alternative provided in the CEPP PACR is consistent with the goals, objectives and project assurances of the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) and substantially decreases the frequency and intensity of damaging regulatory discharges from Lake Okeechobee to the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee Estuaries. The CEPP, as modified by the CEPP PACR and in conjunction with other authorized projects, will provide a 63% reduction in the number of discharge events and an overall 55% reduction in discharge volumes from Lake Okeechobee to these northern estuaries. These modifications will also substantially increase the amount of clean water delivered to the central Everglades as envisioned in the CERP. On an average annual basis, the CEPP PACR will deliver approximately 370,000 acre-feet of additional flows to the central Everglades as compared with the approximately 210,000 acre-feet provided by the CEPP. The additional storage and treatment capacity included in the Preferred Alternative will deliver the remaining increment of freshwater flow to the central Everglades as envisioned in the CERP as well as significantly reduce the harm associated with flood control releases to Florida's northern estuaries.

On March 26, 2018, the District initiated the Federal action by submitting the CEPP PACR to the Assistant Secretary of the Army Civil Works (ASACW) for review, approval and subsequent transmittal for Congressional authorization. On May 30, 2018, the ASACW determined that the project identified in the CEPP PACR is feasible and recognized the importance of this project to the restoration of the Everglades system. The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) applies to this Federal action in response to submittal of the CEPP PACR.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) Jacksonville District has prepared the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for the Central and Southern Florida, Everglades Agricultural Area (EAA) in accordance with the NEPA to evaluate and document the effects of the Preferred Alternative on the human environment, with such modifications as the Secretary of the Army considers appropriate. The District is appreciative of the USACE Jacksonville District's dedication to this important Everglades restoration project.

On January 10, 2019, Governor DeSantis issued Executive Order 19-12. The Executive Order urges action to implement projects that directly impacted and reduced damaging discharges to the Caloosahatchee and St. Lucie Estuaries. One of the projects that can have the most beneficial impact on the discharges is the CEPP, specifically the EAA Reservoir and Stormwater Treatment Area (STA) Project. The expedited design and construction of the EAA Reservoir and STA Project is a key priority for the District and the State of Florida. The completion of the Final EIS will allow for the USACE to issue the permits necessary for the District to start construction of the STA component as soon as possible.

The District supports the Central and Southern Florida, Everglades Agricultural Area EIS. The District looks forward to a continued commitment from the USACE on the Central Everglades Planning Project so construction and implementation can quickly move forward.

Sincerely,

Drew Bartlett
Executive Director

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