

Audubon Florida • Audubon of Southwest Florida • Caloosahatchee River Citizens Association • Clean Water Action • Collier County Audubon Society • Conservancy of Southwest Florida • Defenders of Wildlife • Ding Darling Wildlife Society • Everglades Foundation • Everglades Law Center • Everglades Trust • Environment Florida • Florida Defenders of the Environment • Florida Keys Chapter of the Izaak Walton League of America • Florida Keys Environmental Fund, Inc. • Florida Wildlife Federation • Friends of Arthur R. Marshall Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge • Friends of the Everglades • National Audubon Society • National Parks Conservation Association • National Wildlife Federation • Natural Resources Defense Council • Sierra Club • Snook and Gamefish Foundation • South Florida Audubon Society • Tropical Audubon Society

April 20, 2012

Secretary Ken Salazar
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Salazar:

We applaud your many efforts to restore the Everglades, including issuing the Record of Decision for the Tamiami Trail Modifications: Next Steps Project, and encourage your continued leadership to ensure that this project becomes a reality. On behalf of the undersigned organizations, we write to express our support for using the National Park Service's Park Roads and Parkways Program (PRPP) funds for planning and design for the additional 5.5 miles of bridging on Tamiami Trail, which blocks critical freshwater flow south into Everglades National Park.

Tamiami Trail has been an obstruction to freshwater flow into the Everglades since its construction in 1928. Although Congress recognized the importance of immediate restorative action and authorized the Modified Water Deliveries project in 1989, more than 20 years elapsed before the Army Corps of Engineers broke ground on the one-mile bridge. While we are pleased that this project is moving forward, this first phase of bridging is a first step and is insufficient to truly reconnect the divided parts of the ecosystem. Each day that moves forward we are losing critical habitat and endangered species. According to the National Research Council's "Progress Toward Restoring the Everglades: The Third Biennial Review," additional bridging of Tamiami Trail is required to achieve significant ecological benefits. The Department of the Interior (DOI) is uniquely suited to advance this project in a way that more quickly and efficiently restores freshwater flow to Everglades National Park.

The FY 2012 Interior Appropriations Bill contained language authorizing the National Park Service (NPS) to implement the additional bridging as approved in the Final Environmental Impact Statement noticed in the Federal Register on December 14, 2010 (75 Fed. Reg. 77896).

We believe that using PRPP funds for planning and design will allow this next phase to begin in a timely manner.

Finding funds for the project is a challenge. The PRPP, part of the Federal Lands Highways Program, can be used to begin the planning and design of the additional bridging. The PRPP was authorized to provide funding for road and bridge improvements and renovations in the national park system. Elevating Tamiami Trail meets these qualifications. In fact, there is no other road improvement project in the national park system that can restore critical habitat and an entire ecosystem as well as a national park than this road elevation project. Future construction funds will be critical to secure as well. The PRPP could be one source to pursue along with other funding including within the Department of Transportation such as the Federal Highway Administration.

America's Everglades is one of the world's most diverse and productive wetlands and a tremendous economic generator for Florida. It is recognized as a World Heritage Site, an International Biosphere Reserve, and a Wetland of International Importance. In a study commissioned by the Everglades Foundation, Mather Economics found that for every \$1 invested in restoring the Everglades, there is a \$4 return in economic benefits related to real estate, groundwater purification, park visitation, and recreational uses such as birding, hunting, and fishing. Over the next 50 years, the incremental impact of restoration is expected to produce more than 440,000 jobs. Bridging Tamiami Trail is a vital component to restore the Everglades and is estimated to generate nearly 4,000 jobs alone. We know that Everglades restoration is a priority for this Administration. In a speech last month to conservation leaders, President Obama remarked on his commitment to restoring the River of Grass in the Everglades, providing clean water to millions of residents, and creating thousands of jobs, including construction jobs, in southern Florida.

Now that the additional bridging of Tamiami Trail is congressionally authorized, we must continue to build on this momentum of working to restore America's Everglades. Your leadership can leave an incomparable legacy. We look forward to working with you to identify and obtain funding for planning and design and then for construction for the additional bridging.

Sincerely,

Julie Hill-Gabriel
Director of Everglades Policy
Audubon Florida

Kathleen E. Aterno
Florida Director
Clean Water Action

Wayne Daltry
President
Audubon of Southwest Florida

P. J. Marinelli
President
Collier County Audubon Society

Pete Quasius
President
Caloosahatchee River Citizens Association

Jennifer Hecker
Director of Natural Resource Policy
Conservancy of Southwest Florida

Laurie Macdonald
Director, Florida Programs
Defenders of Wildlife

John McCabe
President
Ding Darling Wildlife Society

Kirk Fordham
CEO
Everglades Foundation

Lisa Interlandi
Executive Director
Everglades Law Center

Mary Barley
Chair
Everglades Trust

Aliki Moncrief
State Director
Environment Florida

Susan Wilson
Everglades Coordinator
Florida Defenders of the Environment

Mike Chenoweth
President
Florida Keys Chapter of the Izaak Walton
League of America

Charles Causey
President
Florida Keys Environmental Fund, Inc.

Manley Fuller
President
Florida Wildlife Federation

Stephen Horowitz
President
Friends of Arthur R. Marshall Loxahatchee
National Wildlife Refuge

Alan Farago
President
Friends of the Everglades

Brian Moore
Legislative Director
National Audubon Society

John Adornato, III
Sun Coast Regional Director
National Parks Conservation Association

Jeffrey A. Skelding
Director, Aquatic Habitats Restoration
National Wildlife Federation

Brad Sewell
Senior Attorney
Natural Resources Defense Council

Jonathan Ullman
South Florida/Everglades Senior Field
Organizer
Sierra Club

Captain Jim Bandy
Chairman
Snook and Gamefish Foundation

Grant Campbell
Director of Wildlife Policy and
Conservation Chair
South Florida Audubon Society

Laura Reynolds
Executive Director
Tropical Audubon Society

cc: Jon Jarvis, Director of the National Park Service