



SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

May 2, 2019

Mr. Chris Stahl
Coordinator, Florida State Clearinghouse
Florida Department of Environmental Protection
2600 Blair Stone Road, M.S. 47
Tallahassee, FL 32399-2400

Subject: **Department of the Army, Jacksonville District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), Loxahatchee River Watershed Restoration Project Draft Integrated Project Implementation Report and Environmental Impact Statement (DPIR) dated March 2019**

Dear Mr. Stahl:

The South Florida Water Management District (District) appreciates the opportunity to provide comments on the Draft Project Implementation Report (DPIR) for the Loxahatchee River Watershed Restoration Project (LRWRP) in accordance with the requirements of the regulations implementing the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), 40 C.F.R. Part 1503. The District is authorized to act as the local sponsor for Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) projects and has played an integral role in the development of the LRWRP DPIR by providing technical resources to the USACE. The District commends the USACE for development of a project plan that will capture and redistribute freshwater to enhance hydroperiods in the Loxahatchee Slough and restore flows to the federally designated "National Wild and Scenic" Northwest Fork of the Loxahatchee River (NWFLR).

The Tentatively Selected Plan (TSP) includes a surface storage reservoir, aquifer storage and recovery wells, and other structures to capture and store water that is currently lost to tide. Captured water will be redistributed to increase volume and improve timing of water deliveries to the NWFLR. The proposed TSP achieves 91% of the dry season river restoration target flows and 98% of the wet season river target flows. In addition to providing more natural deliveries to the Loxahatchee River, the project will promote improved health and functionality of wetland and upland areas, restore hydrologic and ecological connectivity among natural areas, and provide increased quantity and quality of habitat available for fish and wildlife.

Key local stakeholders have participated in the planning process, recognize the importance of this project and support our efforts to restore the Loxahatchee River and watershed. These important stakeholders have also expressed an interest in continuing

Mr. Chris Stahl
May 2, 2019
Page 2

to collaborate with USACE and District on compatibility of the surface storage reservoir with adjacent lands. The District supports this collaboration.

The District has demonstrated a continued commitment in fulfilling our role as the local sponsor for the CERP through support of the LRWRP planning process. We look forward to a continued commitment from the USACE to work diligently with the District and local stakeholders in completing the Project

Implementation Report and Environmental Impact Statement so the LRWRP can be included for congressional authorization in 2020 and move from the planning to implementation phase.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in red ink, appearing to read "Drew Bartlett", with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Drew Bartlett
Executive Director

DB/mm