

June 19, 2003

Mr. David Struhs, Secretary
Florida Department of Environmental Protection
3900 Commonwealth Boulevard
Tallahassee, Florida 32399

Dear Mr. Struhs,

The Southwest Florida Watershed Council is a grass-roots, multi-county coalition of individuals, organizations, agencies and businesses that have come together during the last two years to address issues affecting the Caloosahatchee and Big Cypress watersheds. The purpose of the Council is to ensure that the interests and concerns of all stakeholders are addressed, and that long term management strategies balance the needs of this region's growth and the natural systems upon which our economy and quality of life depend.

The Council has hosted a number of discussions in recent months which have focused on the Caloosahatchee Basin. One of our major concerns stems from the fact the Caloosahatchee River is not considered an "existing legal user" of water resources when it comes to the process of allocating water resources. It appears likely that the River, which is a tremendously important resource in Southwest Florida, will need extraordinary consideration in order to be guaranteed a flow regime which will support the ecological and economic needs of this region. To that end, last year we requested that the South Florida Water Management District establish a statutory reservation for the Caloosahatchee River and its estuary.

It is our understanding that the District is working to establish reservations of water through the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Program (CERP). While we applaud this effort, the plan to use flow conditions from December, 2000 as a baseline is inadequate to ensure that the Caloosahatchee Estuary will be protected *and* the timelines for implementation of CERP projects in the Caloosahatchee Estuary are quite far off in the future. We do not believe that it is in the best interest of the Caloosahatchee Estuary, or the well-being of the people and economy of this region, to depend upon a CERP-related reservation to resolve the dilemma faced by the Estuary.

We therefore respectfully request that the Department of Environmental Protection initiate work on the rule making process for a statutory reservation of water for the Caloosahatchee Estuary. We would like to be involved in this process, and we would like to be included in the efforts to determine how much water should be reserved. We would appreciate your support of this initiative, and we look forward to hearing from you regarding progress on this important endeavor.

Sincerely,



Michael R. Bauer, Ph.D., J.D.
Chairman

Copy: Honorable Jeb Bush, State of Florida
Honorable Porter Goss, United States House of Representatives
Honorable Bill Nelson, United States Senate
Honorable Bob Graham, United States Senate
Mr. Richard Cantrell, Florida Department of Environmental Protection

The mission of the Southwest Florida Watershed Council is to protect, conserve, manage and/or restore the land and water resources of the Caloosahatchee and Big Cypress Watersheds through participation and cooperation of all stakeholders in consensus building, planning, and decision making to meet the economic, natural and cultural needs for this and succeeding generations.