



MEMORANDUM

AGENDA ITEM #VII.B

DATE: JULY 22, 2019
TO: COUNCIL MEMBERS
FROM: STAFF
SUBJECT: CORRESPONDENCE AND ARTICLES

Recommendation

Information only.



South Florida Regional Planning Council
1 Oakwood Boulevard, Suite 250, Hollywood, Florida 33020
954.924.3653 Phone, 954.924-3654 FAX
www.sfregionalcouncil.org



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Executive Director

Isabel Cosío Carballo, MPA

Legal Counsel

Samuel S. Goren, Esq.
Goren, Cherof, Doody &
Ezrol, P.A.

July 2, 2019

The Honorable R.D. James
Assistant Secretary of the Army – Civil Works
Department of the Army
108 Army Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20310-0108

Dear Assistant Secretary James:

On behalf of the South Florida Regional Planning Council, I would like to add the Council's support for the restudy of the aging flood control system created as a result of the Central and Southern Florida (C&SF) Project. Created pursuant to Chapter 186, F.S., the South Florida Regional Planning Council is a regional government agency serving 3 counties – Monroe, Miami-Dade, and Broward, 71 municipalities and almost five million residents. The Council is governed by a 19-member board. Two-thirds of our board is comprised of elected officials from the counties and municipalities; one-third are gubernatorial appointees. Representatives from the South Florida Water Management District, Florida Department of Transportation, and Florida Department of Environmental Protection serve as ex-officio members.

As eloquently stated in the enclosed letter from Florida's U.S. Senators and Congressional representatives, a new restudy of the C&SF Project is overdue to ensure the cost-effectiveness of the region's flood control system. Specifically, a new C&SF Project Flood Control Restudy would assess the full extent of South Florida's aging water management infrastructure. Building off the USACE's concurrent efforts in the region through Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) and the South Atlantic Coastal Study, the restudy should also integrate the potential impacts of sea level rise and generally higher water tables into the engineering and design of improved flood control features. Importantly, the restudy should focus on maintaining current levels for flood control service throughout the region, including by proposing new projects as necessary, such as a South Dade Flood Protection Project to ensure comprehensive seepage management west of Krome Avenue in Miami-Dade County.

Facing dynamic new pressure on the existing flood control system, the USACE, working in concert with the South Florida Water Management District, now has critical opportunity to improve the resilience of South Florida communities for



The Honorable R.D. James
Assistant Secretary of the Army – Civil Works
July 2, 2019
Page 2

decades to come. In accordance with all applicable rules and regulations, we encourage you to seize this opportunity to dedicate supplemental disaster funding to restudy the C&SF Project flood control system.

Thank you in advance for your time and consideration.

Sincerely yours,



Isabel Cosio Carballo, MPA
Executive Director

Enclosures

cc: LTG Todd T. Semonite
Commanding General and Chief of Engineers
Headquarters
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
441 G Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20314-1000

BG Diana M. Holland
Commander
South Atlantic Division
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
60 Forsyth Street SW, Room 10M15
Atlanta, GA 30303-8801

COL Andrew Kelly
District Commander
Jacksonville District
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
701 San Marco Boulevard
Jacksonville, FL 32207-8175

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

June 25, 2019

The Honorable R.D. James
Assistant Secretary of the Army—Civil Works
Department of the Army
108 Army Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20310-0108

Dear Assistant Secretary James:

Following passage and signing into law of the *Additional Supplemental Appropriations for Disaster Relief Act, 2019*, Congress has now provided the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) with \$35 million in investigation funding and \$740 million in construction funding for flood and storm damage reduction projects in states and territories impacted by hurricanes and typhoons in 2018, including Florida. As your office begins work with all three levels of the USACE to identify, evaluate, and take action on studies and projects eligible for this new supplemental disaster funding, I urge you to strongly consider funding a restudy of the aging flood control system created as a result of the Central and Southern Florida (C&SF) Project.

The C&SF Project was authorized by Congress in 1948 and has served as an invaluable contributor to the development and economic success of South Florida. The most recently completed restudy in 1999 served as a template for the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP), with the goal of restoring the region's hydrological connectivity and ensuring the sustainability of South Florida's water resources for people and the environment. A new restudy of the C&SF Project is overdue to ensure the cost-effectiveness and resilience of the region's flood control system.

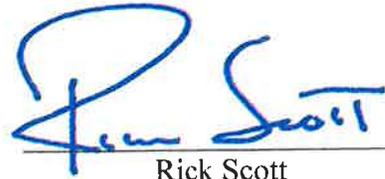
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Facing dynamic new pressures on the existing flood control system, the USACE, working in concert with the South Florida Water Management District, now has a critical opportunity to improve the resilience of South Florida communities for decades to come. In accordance with all applicable rules and regulations, we encourage you to seize this opportunity to dedicate supplemental disaster funding to restudy the C&SF Project flood control system.

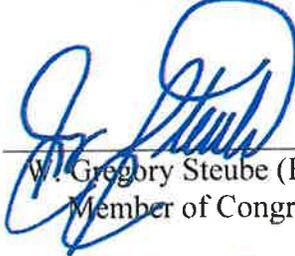
Sincerely,



Marco Rubio
U.S. Senator



Rick Scott
U.S. Senator



W. Gregory Steube (FL-17)
Member of Congress



Brian Mast (FL-18)
Member of Congress



Francis Rooney (FL-19)
Member of Congress



Alcee L. Hastings (FL-20)
Member of Congress



Mario Diaz-Baart (FL-25)
Member of Congress

cc: LTG Todd T. Semonite
Commanding General and Chief of Engineers
Headquarters
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
441 G Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20314-1000

BG Diana M. Holland
Commander
South Atlantic Division
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
60 Forsyth Street SW, Room 10M15
Atlanta, GA 30303-8801

COL Andrew Kelly
District Commander
Jacksonville District
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
701 San Marco Boulevard
Jacksonville, FL 32207-8175

SOUTH FLORIDA REGIONAL PLANNING COUNCIL

COUNCIL MEMBERS

April 2019

ASSEFF, Patricia T.
Governor's Appointee (Broward)
950 South Southlake Drive
Hollywood, FL 33019
PHONE – (954) 439-4668
FAX – N/A

BAILEY, Mario J. (Treasurer)
Governor's Appointee (Miami-Dade)
Becker & Poliakoff
Emerald Lake Corporate Park
1 East Broward Boulevard, Suite 1800
Fort Lauderdale, FL 33301
PHONE - (954) 987-7550
FAX - (954) 985-4176

BATES, M. Margaret
Commissioner, Lauderhill
Lauderhill City Hall
5581 W. Oakland Park Boulevard
Lauderhill, FL 33313
PHONE - (954) 730-3017
FAX – (954) 485-1970

CAVA, Daniella Levine
(First Vice Chair)
Commissioner, Miami-Dade County
Miami-Dade Center
111 N.W. 1st Street, Suite 220
Miami, FL 33128
PHONE - (305) 375-5218
FAX – N/A

COLDIRON, Michelle
Commissioner, Monroe County
25 Ships Way
Big Pine Key, FL 33043
PHONE – 305-292-4512
FAX – N/A

CORRADINO, Joseph
Mayor, Village of Pinecrest
126 Pinecrest Parkway
Pinecrest, FL 33156
PHONE - (305) 234-2121
FAX - (305) 375-5569

DIAZ, Jose "Pepe"
Commissioner, Miami-Dade County
Miami-Dade Center
111 N.W. 1st Street, Suite 320
Miami, FL 33128
PHONE - (305) 375-4343
FAX - (305) 372-6109

FURR, Beam
Commissioner, Broward County
Governmental Center
115 South Andrews Avenue
Fort Lauderdale, FL 33301
PHONE - (954) 954-357-7006
FAX – N/A

GELLER, Steve (Second Vice Chair)
Commissioner, Broward County
Governmental Center
115 South Andrews Avenue, 413
Fort Lauderdale, FL 33301
PHONE - (954) 357-7005
FAX - (954) 357-7295

GOLDBERG, Cary
Governor's Appointee (Broward)
President, Diversified Companies
6300 N.E. 1st Avenue, Suite 100
Fort Lauderdale, FL 33334
PHONE - (954) 776-1005, #202
FAX – (954) 776-1006

HERNANDEZ, Nelson
Governor's Appointee (Miami-Dade)
15900 West Troon Circle
Miami Lakes, FL 33014
PHONE - (305) 343-6802
FAX – N/A

KAUFMAN, Samuel (Secretary)
Commissioner, Key West
1300 White Street
Key West, FL 33040
PHONE - (305) 809-3844
FAX – N/A

LEONARD, Jordan
Council Member, Bay Harbor Islands
Town Hall
9665 Bay Harbor Terrace
Bay Harbor Islands, FL 33154
PHONE - 305-866-6241
FAX – N/A

RICE, David
Commissioner, Monroe County
9400 Overseas Highway, #210
Marathon Airport Terminal
Marathon, FL 33050
PHONE – (305) 289-6000
FAX – (305) 289-4610

ROSS, Greg (Chair)
Mayor, Cooper City
P. O. Box 290910
Cooper City, FL 33329
PHONE - (954) 434-4300, #6
FAX – N/A

UDINE, Michael
Commissioner, Broward County
Governmental Center
115 South Andrews Avenue
Fort Lauderdale, FL 33301
PHONE - (954) 357-7003
FAX - (954) 357-7295

WALTERS, Sandra
Governor's Appointee (Monroe)
Sandra Walters Consultants, Inc.
5570 3rd Avenue, Suite C201
Key West, FL 33040
PHONE – (305) 294-1238
FAX – (305) 294-2164

COSIO CARBALLO, Isabel

Executive Director
South Florida Regional Planning Council
1 Oakwood Boulevard, Suite 250
Hollywood, FL 33020
PHONE - (954) 924-3653
FAX - (954) 924-3654

GOREN, Sam

Legal Counsel
Goren, Cherof, Doody & Ezrol, P.A.
3099 E. Commercial Blvd., Suite 200
Ft. Lauderdale, FL 33308
PHONE - (954) 771-4500
FAX - (954) 771-4923

Ex Officio Members -

CORRY, Laura

South Florida Water Management
District
3301 Gun Club Road
West Palm Beach, FL 33406
PHONE – (561) 682-6012
FAX – (561) 682-5383

HUYNH, Dat

District Intermodal Systems Manager
Florida Department of
Transportation, District Six
1000 NW 111th Avenue
Miami, FL 33172
PHONE: (305) 470-5201
FAX – (305) 470-5205



[ENVIRONMENT](#)

Adapting to climate change is going to cost Florida a lot. Who's going to pay for it?

BY [ALEX HARRIS](#)

JULY 10, 2019 03:08 PM, UPDATED JULY 11, 2019 02:06 PM

FullscreenPause

Duration 1:52

This Miami street has some ideas for fighting sea rise [SHARE](#)

Neighbors on a Coconut Grove street worked with a landscape architect to come up with a list of ideas for how to keep their flooded neighborhood dry in the face of sea level rise. Now the city will decide what gets built and how it's paid for. BY [MATIAS J. OCNER](#) | [ALEX HARRIS](#)

For the state of Florida, adapting to climate change is going to be complicated, revolutionary and very, very expensive. But so far at least, Tallahassee hasn't invested much in protecting the most vulnerable state in the nation from rising seas. Gov. Ron DeSantis, who campaigned on a promise to address red tide and harmful algae blooms, has won initial praise from environmentalists for stepping above the low bar set by his fellow Republican predecessor, Rick Scott, a climate change skeptic who is now a U.S. senator.

In the latest budget, DeSantis more than tripled the state's investment in planning for sea rise through its [Florida Resilient Coastlines Program](#). That sounds considerable but in hard dollars it only raised the Scott budget of \$1.6 million to about \$5.5 million.

In a state that [by one estimate](#) needs to shell out \$75 billion by 2040 just for seawalls, that's pocket change.

No one knows exactly how much it will cost to adapt the Sunshine State to a warming world. The only certainty is the projects won't be cheap.

"[The costs] are going to be astronomical," said state Rep. Holly Raschein, a Republican from Key Largo. "It's hard for us to build a statewide plan when we don't have a price tag on what it's going to cost."

In the absence of significant investment from Florida lawmakers and governors, the tab so far has fallen mostly on local governments. In South Florida alone, local governments have already spent hundreds of millions on raising roads, flood pumps and elevating buildings.

"There's a strong economic case there to start investing now," said Yoca Ardití-Rocha, head of Miami-based climate advocacy group CLEO. "The multi-billion dollar question is, where do we get the money?"

Right now, South Florida climate projects in particular are funded by a mix of hiked-up fees, bond money or grants.

One day — perhaps soon — most experts agree the region will have to get more creative. That could include a concept like insuring coral reefs that help protect the coastline from storm surge and generate tourism money, like one community in Mexico is already doing. Or perhaps a statewide fund, maybe based on taxes on property sales, that would be dedicated to helping communities cover the cost of adaptation.

Play Video

Duration 1:09

Return of the King Tide

As the king tide recedes, it leaves in its wake flooded beaches, parking lots, and streets inside Matheson Hammock Park on Sunday, September 9, 2018.

By [Carl Juste](#)

Before that, though, Florida and coastal communities are still trying to figure out how much everything will cost. It's a difficult calculation because so much fundamental stuff is threatened by rising seas — from low-lying roads to leaky septic tanks and rusting old sewer pipes.

The City of Miami, for instance, assembled a [\\$1.3 billion wish list](#) of sea rise-fighting projects a few years ago, but it isn't considered comprehensive, just a start of things to come.

Miami-Dade County's most recent [proposed budget includes](#) a multi-year projection of resiliency costs that topped \$20 billion, although its broader definition of "resilience" includes improved public safety, economic support and healthy housing, not just sea rise-related projects.

Saving county parks alone has a \$175 million price tag, [according to a consultant report](#). Fixing leaky septic tanks at risk from smellier problems when groundwater rises could cost [\\$3.3 billion](#) for residential septic tanks, \$260 million for commercial.

A [county-commissioned report](#) showed nearly half of county-owned properties are at risk from sea rise. The report showed that tweaking the upgrades currently in the pipeline to include more resilience for the 28 most vulnerable would cost about \$6.3 million, a low price compared to losing the properties — an estimated \$24 million price.

Counties from Palm Beach to Monroe have already started spending big bucks on sea level rise projects. For instance, Monroe County is spending about [\\$3.5 million](#) to elevate less than one mile of road in the flood-prone Keys.

Studies underway to raise roads in parts of the Florida Keys

Monroe County official talks about the program to raise the roads in the Florida Keys after Hurricane Irma flooded the area this past September.

By Charles Trainor Jr.

Adaptation could cost the South Florida Water Management District, which operates the flood control and water supply system for 16 counties from Orlando to Key West, more than \$550 million in the coming decade, according to [a presentation](#) by district Hydrology Chief Aki Owosina.

In Tallahassee, state Rep. Ben Diamond, D-St.Petersburg, introduced a bill last session that asked the state to [track climate adaptation costs](#), past, present and future. It died in committee.

Many South Florida cities aren't waiting to start paying for these projects. Some are slipped into budgets as standard projects or improvements, and others are the results of new, dedicated funding sources.

"There isn't a day that goes by that somebody in the county is spending some time, money or monitoring a contract that's part of the solution," said Miami-Dade Chief Resilience Officer James Murley. "It's not just planning for a large investment, it's the small investments we make every day."

Miami Beach pays for its pumps and raised roads with higher stormwater fees, an idea that won the city praise from [an expert panel](#) that reviewed Miami Beach's climate strategy. That money is expected to fund \$500 million worth of flood-proofing infrastructure.

An anti-flooding water pump roars at full capacity at Maurice Gibb Park in the 1800 block of Purdy Ave. in Miami Beach due to the beginning of King Tide last October. C.M. GUERRERO CMGUERRERO@ELNUEVOHERALD.COM

Miami voters agreed to spend \$192 million on climate adaptation as part of a \$400 million Miami Forever Bond. The first wave of projects include revamping riverfront Jose Marti Park, strengthening Brickell Bay Drive and installing a new stormwater system in the flood-prone Fairview neighborhood.

But the problem with locally generated money like the Forever Bond, as Miami Commissioner Ken Russell puts it, is "it'll be gone before we know it."

That's why elected officials in South Florida are eager to tap federal funds, like the millions FEMA is spending on Florida projects after Hurricane Irma. That money — [nearly \\$500 million of it](#) — was given to the state after Irma to help prepare counties and cities for the next big storm. It's paying for projects like adding generators on top of government buildings and even elevating buildings.

"South Florida is an economic engine for the country and the state. It really behooves the nation to look at us as an example, not only for the benefit we bring to others but the learning we have in our community," said Miami-Dade Commissioner Daniella Levine Cava, who said she wants to draft legislation about paying for climate change adaptation.

If South Florida is ahead of the curve when it comes to paying for these projects, Tallahassee is playing catch-up. For sea rise, the primary dedicated money pie is the Resilient Coastlines Program, which awarded its first slate of grants in 2018.

It is designed to help communities plan for sea level rise through vulnerability assessments, stormwater master plans or — in the case of Miami Beach — [\\$35,000](#) to finish building a resilient shoreline. Its new \$5.5 million budget puts it ahead of

some smaller states, like Massachusetts, which plans to spend [\\$3 million](#) in 2020, but behind the slightly less populous New York, which has [\\$11 million](#) up for grabs this year.

“We are excited about the opportunity the unprecedented support for resiliency efforts provides and look forward to working with local leaders to protect Florida together,” Resilient Coastlines Program Spokeswoman Dee Ann Miller said in a statement.

Some of that cash is already in the works. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is doing several studies about the vulnerabilities of Florida’s coastal communities, including Miami. At the end of the three-year study, which kicked off late last year, the Corps will suggest an infrastructure project to protect the area — and pay for most of it. South Florida cities are applying for the state’s revolving loan program that helps tiny communities switch from septic tanks to sewer systems.

But what happens when — not if — the bills continue to grow?

One of the most controversial ideas, which will surely be met with pushback from politicians and industry, comes from activists, [including the Miami Climate Alliance](#), who have been pushing for energy companies to foot the bill in a campaign called Pay Up Climate Polluters. Advocates say the oil and gas companies continue to pump out emissions they know cause climate change, and that the companies should pay for the cost of adapting to a warming world.

But if that doesn’t pan out, academics say Florida has other options.

Harvard business students, in [a report for The Nature Conservancy](#), highlighted impact fees, a special tax for the neighborhood getting one of these projects and a collaborative revenue bond, where any city or utility that benefits from the project — say, all the cities that border Biscayne Bay — can pitch in to pay for a bond.

Lauren O’Connell, one of the report’s authors, said South Florida leaders even considered following the lead of Quintana Roo, Mexico, which took out a [\\$3.8 million insurance policy](#) on the coral reef its tourism-dependent economy relies on. The state government, local hotel owners’ associations and the National Commission for Natural Protected areas all pay into a trust that covers the insurance policy as well as routine maintenance on the reef. If a hurricane hits, the insurance policy [immediately pays for](#) repairs to both the reef and the beaches.

In South Florida, leaders mulled insuring the sand on the beach, which must be renourished regularly, at great cost. But since the federal government usually picks up the check, leaders told O’Connell they scrapped the idea.

This image shows the erosion that Irma caused in South Beach. *CITY OF MIAMI BEACH*

She thinks one of the most feasible ideas for Florida is a resilience fund, a state-level pool of money that cities and counties can cheaply borrow money from to shore up their defenses against sea rise.

“It’s so important to have a source of upfront capital that local governments can pull from and eventually pay back,” O’Connell said. “It would do a lot to help local governments start preparing for these risks.”

California and Massachusetts have pending legislation to build a resilience fund, and New York is working on one for next year’s legislation, said Jesse Keenan, the Harvard professor who advised the business students on their report. He said he’s talked to many legislators in Florida who want to build one for Florida.

CLEO’s Ardit-Rocha is lobbying the state for a [Florida Future Fund](#) that would do just that, with a funding emphasis on low-income areas and communities of color. So far, the effort hasn’t gotten much traction.

“We know as the planet keeps warming we’re going to start seeing it in our pockets and cities,” Ardit-Rocha said. “Governments need to prepare for that.”



[ALEX HARRIS](#)
[305-376-5005](#)

Alex Harris covers climate change for the Miami Herald, including how South Florida communities are adapting to the warming world. She attended the University of Florida.

Climate change denial ends at agency that protects waters in South Florida

| Randy Schultz

By [RANDY SCHULTZ](#)

| SOUTH FLORIDA SUN SENTINEL |

JUL 09, 2019 | 4:01 PM

At the South Florida Water Management District, the theme song for this year might be “Ding Dong The Witch Is Dead.”

Out went the anti-environment board members whom former Gov. Rick Scott appointed. In came the appointees of Gov. Ron DeSantis, whose promises to protect the environment might have shifted enough votes for him to beat Andrew Gillum.

Out went former Executive Director Ernie Marks, whom the Scott appointees had hired. In came Drew Bartlett from the Florida Department of Environmental Protection. He vowed, “Nothing is going to get in the way” of Everglades restoration.

The Florida Wildlife Federation had sued the district after the previous board – with almost no public notice – extended a lease that allows Florida Crystals to keep farming land that will become a reservoir south of Lake Okeechobee. The reservoir will reduce or eliminate the many harmful discharges to the east and west.

Environmental groups worried that the lease could delay the reservoir for eight years. Under new management, the district secured assurances from Florida Crystals that the company would make the land available when needed.

That commitment prompted the federation to drop the lawsuit. A representative confirmed Tuesday that the federation will rely on “the new board.”

The previous board and director also had embarked on a bad plan to store excess lake water underground. Sugar growers, some of Scott’s biggest patrons, had pitched the idea. They opposed the southern reservoir because it might require land from farmers.

But in addition to providing a new outlet for lake water, the reservoir will feed the Everglades when the “River of Grass” gets too dry. Storing the water underground would keep it from helping the Everglades.

Under Bartlett and Board Chairman Chauncey Goss, the district has abandoned that plan. In an interview, Goss said the roughly \$10 million that had been budgeted will be used on real needs.

One day after Bartlett started, the management shakeup started. Gone were the lawyer who had supervised the controversial lease and the director of Everglades policy. Another casualty was the communications director on whose watch the district waged online campaigns against critics and aligned itself with the sugar industry.

In contrast, Goss has pledged to make South Florida’s most important public agency “transparent and accountable.” In an April email, the district sought public comment on determining “strategic priorities.” Last month, the district announced that it is 18 months ahead of schedule on the southern reservoir.

Other Republicans are noticing that environmental protection resonates with voters. In March 2017, Sen. Marco Rubio said buying land for that southern reservoir could turn communities around Lake Okeechobee into “ghost towns.” Last December, Rubio joined U.S. Rep. Brian Mast – whose Treasure Coast district suffers regularly from lake discharges to the east – in asking the Army Corps of Engineers not to delay the reservoir.

Another sign of the new attitude could come soon. During his first year, Scott ordered huge, indiscriminate budget cuts at the district. Each year, he told board members to cut taxes, despite warnings that the agency didn't have enough money for flood control.

Goss wouldn't commit to a tax increase for next year. For now, he's "leaning on staff" for guidance. "My concern is the long-term operations and maintenance. We need to keep the pumps running to deal with sea level rise."

That last comment represents another break from the Scott administration, which forbid agencies even from mentioning climate change and global warming. Rising seas threaten coastal communities. They increase the danger from high-tide storm surges. They can allow salt water to penetrate and destroy public water wells.

So last month, the district board heard a presentation on what it will take to make the southern third of Florida more resilient. The cost could be \$1 billion over 10 years, spread across the district's 16 counties.

"It's a bit of a sea change," Goss understated, referring to the changes at the district. The previous board had no member whose background included environmental advocacy. It's the opposite now.

Scott considered the economy his priority. Climate change denial, however, places Florida's economy at risk. Though we are barely a few months into this new era at the water management district, there's reason to celebrate.

Randy Schultz's email address is randy@bocamag.com