



August 14, 2005

Mr. Kevin McCarty, Governing Board Chairman  
South Florida Water Management District  
3301 Gun Club Road  
West Palm Beach, FL 33416-4680

Dear Mr. McCarty,

I am writing on behalf of the members of the Southwest Florida Watershed Council to urge you and your colleagues on the Governing Board to ensure that some highly important programs and projects receive full funding in the upcoming fiscal year. The Southwest Florida Watershed Council is a grass roots, multi-county coalition of individuals, organizations, agencies and businesses that have come together to address issues affecting the Caloosahatchee and Big Cypress watersheds.

Many members of our organization attended the June 24<sup>th</sup> community forum at the Lower West Coast Service Center to discuss the budget process and to offer feedback on what Southwest Floridians believe are the most important water resource issues here. Programs and projects that we believe are essential in order for the District to fulfill its mission of managing and protecting the water resources of South Florida include:

- **Florida Yards and Neighborhoods Program**

This program was developed to address serious problems of pollution and disappearing habitats by enlisting homeowners in the battle to save our natural environment. It provides special educational and outreach activities directed at the community to help residents reduce pollution and enhance their environment by improving home and landscape management. Southwest Floridians benefit every day from this program, and we encourage you to continue and expand funding for it.

- **Mobile Irrigation Labs**

The Mobile Irrigation Lab is a service provided by Soil and Water Conservation Districts and the Natural Resources Conservation Service to property owners at no charge. It provides on-site evaluations of irrigation systems in both agricultural and urban areas. Continued funding of this program in Southwest Florida will help ensure the conservation of water and the protection of water quality in this region.

- **the Estero Bay Nutrient Management Partnership**

The Partnership was organized in 2003 as a non-regulatory, community based partnership to address deteriorating water quality in Estero Bay and its tributaries and to achieve nutrient load reduction goals that will be consistent with the Total Maximum Daily Load program that is being developed by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection. The Partnership is actively motivating private and public stakeholders toward a community/watershed strategy to improve the resource.

*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 increased awareness, participation and cooperation among all stakeholders in consensus building, planning and decision making, we are working to meet the economic, natural and cultural needs for this and succeeding generations.*

- **a Study of the Effects of the Sediment Laden Discharge into the Caloosahatchee from Lake Okeechobee and a Set-Aside of Money to Remedy any Problems that Result in the Estuary**  
While we recognize the urgency of the need to reduce water levels in Lake Okeechobee, many Southwest Floridians are very concerned about the potential impacts of the sediment-laden water on the natural systems of this region. We ask that you provide funding to investigate what effects the releases of 2005 are having on our local waters, as well as funding to mitigate any damages that stem from the releases.
- **the Initial Reservation of Water for the Caloosahatchee**  
It appears in the Strategic Plan of the District which shows District priorities with a timeframe for deliverables (which will drive budgets) that just one initial reservation is scheduled for 2006 (it is not identified) and four are scheduled for 2007 (they are not identified – page 29). The District has consistently said that the first initial reservation will be for the Northwest Fork of the Loxahatchee, and the next four will be for the Caloosahatchee, Biscayne Bay, and two in the Everglades. The stated time frames have been 2005 and 2006, not 2006 and 2007, as are now stated in your Strategic Plan. We urge you to fund these important measures in 2005 and 2006 – please do not allow them to be delayed.
- **the Southwest Florida Feasibility Study**  
The Strategic Plan contains no time frame or deliverables schedule for the Southwest Florida Feasibility Study -- pages 12 and 13. This alarms us, as the Feasibility Study should have been completed by now (according to the original schedule). Exclusion from the list of Deliverables and Milestones in your Strategic Plan is a serious matter. The Feasibility Study should be one of the District's major priorities for Southwest Florida, and it should be reflected in your Strategic Plan and your budget.
- **the Addition of a Water Quality Component for the County Line Drainage Project**  
Actually, every drainage improvement project, no matter how small, needs to include a water quality component. The District is helping counties improve/clear drainage ways, but that simply compounds our water quantity and quality problems. You need to consider storage and quality in every culvert cleaning and maintenance project (or at least have a matching fund set-aside for parallel work that addresses the locations of the drainage improvements).
- **Additional Compliance and Enforcement Officers in Southwest Florida**  
A recent newspaper article about permit violations quoted a District spokesperson as saying that there are only two people assigned to these tasks in all of Southwest Florida. Clearly, this leaves the task of monitoring to permit holders and members of the general public who serve as “watchdogs.” Such a high level of self-policing by permit holders has not proven to be in the best interest of the public, and greater resources should be expended to allow the District to achieve a high level of proven permit compliance. This would go a long way toward avoiding problems and engendering a greater level of public trust.

Thank you for your consideration of these program and projects. Representatives of the Southwest Florida Watershed Council will be happy to speak with you in more detail about these priorities for funding if you have any questions. You may reach me by telephone at 239.822.1319 (cell) or via email at sbrookperson@otterwater.com.

Sincerely,

Susan Brookman  
Watershed Council Representative to the Water Resources Advisory Commission

Copies: Ms. Alice Carlson  
Mr. Malcolm Wade, Jr.  
Ms. Carol Wehle  
Mr. Thomas Olliff  
Ms. Jacque Rippe