



# Audubon OF FLORIDA

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Dear Congressman:

I am writing to encourage and enlist your support for the proposed acquisition of U.S. Sugar Corporation's land in the Everglades Agricultural Area (EAA).

Two recent events prove the urgency and necessity of the pending purchase. First, a federal court determined that the state's plan to clean water flowing off farm fields into the Everglades does not comply with the Clean Water Act. And now, stormwater from Tropical Storm Fay has filled Lake Okeechobee, and water managers are planning to release nutrient-rich water to the coastal estuaries. Both problems could be solved if more land in the EAA is used to address, not cause, South Florida's water challenges.

Historically, water from storms moved downstream from Lake Okeechobee to the Everglades. This flow is now interrupted, and the water is of such poor quality that legally it cannot be released into the Everglades, necessitating damaging releases of this phosphorous and nitrogen rich water to the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee estuaries. The most obvious solution is holding the water and cleaning it on agricultural land.

Now, with Lake Okeechobee's waters rising to levels that could cause the dike around the lake to fail, the release of billions of gallons of nutrient-rich water to the coast is likely. When Governor Crist and water managers announced the proposed purchase they were clear about the benefits:

- Increases in water storage to reduce harmful freshwater discharges from Lake Okeechobee to Florida's coastal rivers and estuaries.
- Improvements in the delivery of cleaner water to the Everglades.
- Preventing thousands of tons of phosphorus from entering the Everglades.
- Eliminating the need for "back-pumping" water into Lake Okeechobee.
- Sustainability of agriculture and green energy production.

These benefits are needed now. Fay's water could be moving south now if we had sufficient capacity to clean it up. That means using U.S. Sugar's land to expand the currently undersized water treatment areas. Florida's cycle of storms and droughts will continue, as will population growth and our need to grow food. We must craft solutions that allow nature and our economy to work together. Last year we prayed for rain to replenish our water supplies. Now that new water may be released to the ocean.

This is an unusual opportunity. I have asked Audubon's policy director Eric Draper to be available to you if there are any questions we can answer.

Sincerely,

David E. Anderson  
Executive Director