June 19, 2015

Congressman Curbelo
1429 Longworth HOB
Washington, DC 20515

Congressman Patrick Murphy
211 Cannon HOB
Washington, DC 20515

Re: Foreign Spill Protection Act

Dear Congressman Curbelo and Congressman Murphy:

On behalf of the 57 member organizations of the Everglades Coalition, we write to support H.R. 1684, the Foreign Spill Protection Act. As organizations dedicated to protection and restoration of America’s Everglades, we recognize the importance of this legislation for ensuring that a foreign party responsible for an oil spill that reaches U.S. waters is held accountable for its clean up.

The Deepwater Horizon oil spill demonstrated the impact of a spill on wildlife, natural resources, and Florida’s tourism-based economy. Five years later, the consequences of the Deepwater Horizon spill are still not fully understood. With many foreign nations in close proximity to South Florida, the Everglades is at risk of suffering devastating impacts from a spill that originates in one of these nations. For example, Mexico, Cuba, and the Bahamas are either currently drilling or looking at exploratory drilling just beyond U.S. waters.

The Oil Pollution Act of 1990 controls how a party responsible for an oil spill in U.S. waters must pay to clean up the spill. However, the law did not fully take into account financial responsibility for an oil spill that occurs off the coast of a foreign nation and reaches U.S. waters and coasts.

America’s Everglades supports nearly 70 threatened and endangered species and provides the water supply for nearly 8 million Floridians. If oil was to reach the River of Grass, there could be serious impacts to the Greater Everglades Ecosystem that are in direct contrast to the goals of Everglades restoration. The goals of restoring and protecting estuarine, beach and near-shore habitat are especially threatened.

If a spill occurs and oil was to reach the shores of South Florida, it could cause great harm to four national parks units - Everglades, Biscayne, and Dry Tortugas National Parks and Big Cypress National Preserve. National parks should be able to recover the costs of cleanup and restoration whenever damage is done by a private party or government. These parks attract 2.5 million visitors, generate 2,619 jobs, and contribute over $275 million to the economy in Florida annually.
In addition, the Everglades supports industries like ecotourism, commercial, recreational and charter boat fishing. A healthy environment also increases real estate values. An oil spill that impacts the Everglades could result in significant economic losses for these industries.

The Foreign Spill Protection Act ensures that any party responsible for an oil spill that causes harm to the Everglades, Florida’s coastal habitat or National Parks should also be held responsible for the full clean-up and all associated costs, regardless of origin. We thank you for introducing this important legislation.

Sincerely,

Cara Capp
National Co-Chair

Jason Totoiu
State Co-Chair