

NOTE TO MEDIA: Everglades Coalition members Mark Perry and Marisa Carrozzo are available for interviews. For media on-site at the conference, please visit the Mangrove Room at 9:15 a.m. For phone interviews, please contact Emily Golden at 239-565-1595 or Holly Boldrin at 239-887-9335.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Everglades Coalition releases Everglades Rescue Mission at 34th Annual Conference

DUCK KEY, *FL* (Jan. 11, 2019) – In the Florida Keys at its 34th Annual Conference, the Everglades Coalition today released its **Everglades Rescue Mission**, highlighting key priorities for federal and state lawmakers for Everglades restoration in 2019. Meeting downstream of Everglades National Park on the waters of Florida Bay, the Coalition will call for increased funding to advance projects to send clean water south. Over 300 participants, including elected officials, environmental groups, members of the public, and community leaders will discuss the importance of securing consistent and sufficient funding to complete Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) projects.

“As we’ve seen over the nearly two decades CERP has been in place, fully funding CERP at both the state and federal levels is one of the biggest missing pieces in Everglades restoration,” said Mark Perry, Co-chair of the Everglades Coalition and Executive Director of the Florida Oceanographic Society. “Without that funding, projects that will restore flows to the Everglades, and help reduce the damaging discharges to the estuaries won’t be realized in a timely manner. We call upon both the state and the federal government to commit to fully funding CERP at \$200 million annually.”

America’s Everglades is recognized as a global treasure, and CERP is one of the world’s largest ecosystem restoration projects. In the 1980s, lack of freshwater flow caused catastrophic seagrass die-offs and fish kills that were the catalysts that set the wheels of restoration in motion. Decades later, the Coalition will examine when Florida Bay – and the northern Caloosahatchee and St. Lucie estuaries – will finally feel relief from the ongoing crisis that continues to plague Florida’s waters.

Several major milestones were achieved in 2018, including the nearly-complete 2.6 mile Tamiami Trail bridge project, and federal authorization of the Everglades Agricultural Area Reservoir in the 2018 Water Resources Development Act. Looking forward to 2019, the Everglades Rescue Mission calls on lawmakers to prioritize CERP project funding and to address the ongoing water quality crisis in the estuaries. The Coalition will also soon announce its legislative priorities. Yet more work remains to be done – and strong leadership is needed to achieve progress.

“At this time of transition at both the state and federal leadership levels, our goal is to provide a framework of priorities to reinvigorate our community, elected officials, and the agencies to implement meaningful policy changes to advance Everglades restoration and water quality improvement,” said Marisa Carrozzo, Co-Chair of the Everglades Coalition and Senior Environmental Policy Specialist for the Conservancy of Southwest Florida.

The Everglades provides drinking water to eight million people who depend upon clean, fresh water. This internationally-unique ecosystem is the lifeblood of South Florida's environment, economy and public health. However, this past year marked yet another water quality crisis with harmful algal blooms plaguing Lake Okeechobee, the Caloosahatchee, and the St. Lucie.

"Cyanobacteria is still lingering in the Caloosahatchee and Lake Okeechobee today," added Carrozzo. "The 2018 harmful algal blooms brought national attention to the plight of Lake Okeechobee and the estuaries, and there's no time like the present to take decisive action to clean up our waters."

At the state level, the Everglades Coalition is calling on Governor DeSantis and the Florida Legislature to strengthen protection for all waters – Everglades, estuaries, springs, lakes, rivers, coastal waters and beaches – by undertaking the following in 2019:

- Stop pollution at its source for all waters;
- Protect water supply for the environment as an essential need;
- Acquire land needed for water storage, treatment, and conveyance; and
- Enact and enforce protective Basin Management Action Plans for impaired waters.

Additionally, the Coalition has called for the reinstatement of strong statewide and regional land use planning to protect our remaining natural areas and guide sustainable growth to bolster our economy and communities. Former governor Rick Scott dismantled the Department of Community Affairs, which had overseen large-scale developments impacting Florida's natural resources, like the Everglades, for over three decades.

The Coalition's annual conference comes on the heels of two major public statements from Governor Ron DeSantis about the Everglades yesterday. Just days after his inauguration, Governor DeSantis has announced a significant commitment to restoration funding while also calling for the resignation of the entire South Florida Water Management District Governing Board. The Everglades Coalition stands ready to work with the new Administration to achieve our shared goals and solve Florida's ongoing water crisis.

Joining the Coalition for its 34th annual conference, keynote and panel speakers include: Congresswoman Debbie Wasserman Schultz, Congresswoman Debbie Mucarsel-Powell, Florida Senator Jose Javier Rodriguez, former U.S. Senator and Florida Governor Bob Graham, Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Army (Civil Works) Ryan Fisher, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Jacksonville District Commander Andrew Kelly, South Florida Water Management District Governing Board Chair Federico Fernandez, Miami-Dade County Commissioner Daniela Levine Cava, Monroe County Commissioner Michelle Coldiron, and Collier County Commissioner Penny Taylor. Sessions focus on topics such as priorities for newly elected leaders, growth management, harmful algal blooms, estuary restoration and water quality policy, southern Everglades restoration, weakening of environmental laws, Lake Okeechobee management, and restoration-related jobs creation in the Glades.

Save the date for the 35th Annual Everglades Coalition Conference January 9-12, 2020, hosted by "Ding" Darling Wildlife Society at South Seas Island Resort in Captiva, Florida.

About the Everglades Coalition: The Everglades Coalition represents more than 60 regional, state, national and international organizations committed to the restoration of America's

Everglades. The coalition's annual conference is the largest forum for Everglades conservation and restoration, bringing together coalition members with business leaders, stakeholders, local, state, tribal and federal partners to engage in meaningful discussions about restoring America's Everglades. Learn more at www.evergladescoalition.org.

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