

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

December 13, 2017

The Honorable Paul Ryan
Office of the Speaker
H-232 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Ryan:

We write in support of strong and robust funding for the National Estuary Program and the South Florida Geographic Initiative at the Environmental Protection Agency. Florida's residents, and the millions of visitors to the state each year, depend on these programs to preserve and clean vulnerable watersheds. Investments in protecting these environments are critical to the health and economy of Florida.

Our beaches, estuaries, and countless waterways are an important part of life in Florida. When they are healthy they support thousands of jobs, protect real estate values, and preserve wildlife habitat. Florida's mangrove forests defend against sea level rise and mitigate hurricane damage. Their ecological health is threatened by pollution and hazardous waste; however, work can be done to save these ecosystems and help them thrive.

The National Estuary Program and the South Florida Geographic Initiative are both critical to protecting Florida's natural wonders. The National Estuary Program helps clean up vulnerable watersheds where Floridians work, swim, and fish. The four estuaries in Florida generate tens of billions of dollars annually for local economies. A recent report by the Inland River Lagoon Council found that for every dollar spent on clean up and protection, the Lagoon returns \$33 in total economic value.

Local estuaries have suffered years of pollution, contributing to a layer of brown algae covering water surfaces. This algae impedes sunlight, preventing seagrass growth and contributing to the death of fish, dolphins, and manatees. Additionally, the South Florida Geographic Initiative provides critical monitoring of potentially hazardous substances that could damage seagrass, coral, and water quality. The health of our waters is critical to Florida's fishing and tourism industry. Each year, the Everglades attracts more than a million visitors who create over \$100 million in economic benefits and more than 1,400 jobs. The Everglades also provides drinking water to millions of Central and South Floridians, making its well-being a critical part of our well-being.

Preserving our environment is not a partisan issue. These programs protect the health and prosperity of all Floridians. As we move towards consideration of funding for the entire government, we encourage continued funding at FY 2017 levels for these critical programs that safeguard our local communities and economies. These programs in particular are essential to Florida's ability to clean up and prevent water pollution, leaks from hazardous waste sites, and monitor water and air quality.

Sincerely,



Darren Soto
Member of Congress



Brian Mast
Member of Congress