

Hurry please

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STATEMENT TO
Governing Board
South Florida Water Management District

by

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for

The Coalition to Repair the Everglades System

Marathon, Florida
June 11, 1981

My presence today is in a sense an extension of my remarks to your Shirt-Sleeve Symposium on November 20, last year.

But it is more than that.

I spoke then for myself.

Today I am speaking for the largest coalition of environmental organizations ever formed in Florida. The Coalition also includes organizations which are not primarily environmental and some which are not at all environmental. All of them share a common purpose which is to repair the Everglades System from the Kissimmee Lakes into Florida Bay.

May I first present to you Mrs. Marjory Stoneman Douglas who requested our inclusion on today's agenda. Mrs. Douglas is well known to you and to Florida. Marjory has asked me to present our petition.

Next I wish to present representatives of Friends of the Everglades, Florida Division, Izaak Walton League; Florida Chapter, the Sierra Club; Florida League of Anglers; Florida Wildlife Federation; Florida Audubon Society; Florida Defenders of the Environment; Florida Garden Clubs; Everglades Protection Association of the Florida Keys; Organized Fishermen of Florida; Southeastern Fisheries Association; Environmental Confederation of Southwest Florida; North Florida Environmental Coalition; and the Sport Fishing Guides Association of the Florida Keys. These people represent all of Florida's statewide environmental organizations, several regional organizations and one which is nation-wide. Never before have these people, who often differed strenuously, come together as a group. I would like for them to please rise.

Next I ask those persons to rise who represent local chapters of environmental and other organizations. To save time here, we will furnish later a list of their names and the organizations they represent.

If time allows, our members are available for questions.

We have invited Secretary Tschinkel of the Department of Environmental Regulation; Director Gissendanner of the Department of Natural Resources; and Director Brantly, of the Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission (or their representatives) to join us today. I would like to acknowledge and thank them for coming.

We are here because we know, like so many others know, that south Florida is under a worsening seige in its urban, agricultural and wild regions and that the problems of each are interrelated. We are not here to exclaim, complain, or defame. We are here to begin mustering in Florida the will and the ability to cope with the causes of our common apprehensions. Our ambitions are not to treat the symptoms of the region's ailments, but to get at their causes. Our confidence in the ability of state government to make the great step from symptoms to causes has been severely eroded. Further, if we the public are the cause of the problems as has often been said, then we must also provide the solutions.

This is the first stop in a series of petitions to government we plan to make in South Florida and in Tallahassee.

We have prepared and are distributing widely a brochure entitled "Repair the Everglades" which briefly explains our concerns; lists the membership of our Coalition to Repair the Everglades; gives our thoughts on how that can be done and lists benefits south Florida can derive from repair of the Everglades system. We have provided copies to your Director for each of you.

The South Florida Water Management District has an important role in the matter, but not only one. The District can deal with water management for varied purposes but it cannot deal single-handedly with issues such as: water pollution; highway or airport construction; fresh water or marine fisheries; the Everglades National Park; or with the overriding question of continuing growth and development in South Florida and its multiple and insatiable demands for resources. Yet all of these elements and many more are interrelated as recent events have shown.

The members of our coalition know that every action, every process, in a given life-support system affects every other part of that system. We are convinced that the well-being of city and wilderness in south Florida is unyieldingly inter-connected and inter-dependent. Nowhere in the nation is that inter-connection demonstrated more sharply than in south Florida.

A number of others have seen this.

In 1947, Col. Mason J. Young, Division Chief of the Corps of Engineers in Atlanta, wrote in regard to plans for the Central and South Florida Flood Control Project,: The District Engineer has not sufficiently emphasized the importance of water conservation in the Lake Okeechobee-Everglades and lower east coast areas, nor has he claimed full credits to be derived therefrom."

In 1971, the Director of your Engineering Department, Mr. William V. Storch, in reference to a needed state land use policy said to the Florida Atlantic Builders Association: "With the general objective of maintaining an acceptably healthy environment this policy, as I see it, will have its keystone the control of population through the control of land and related water use."

Then: "Why such a policy? Because it is just possible we may be approaching the point where our demands for water will exceed the supply which can be made available by environmentally, or ecologically, acceptable means....When we are finally able....to store water in Lake Okeechobee at higher elevations than it is safe to do now, we will be in a position to relieve some of the strain. But it will not be enough. (Emphasis supplied).

Recent years have confirmed Bill's expectations. Lake Okeechobee - long regarded as south Florida's ultimate water reservoir - fails now periodically to meet the combined needs of the cities, agriculture, Everglades National Park and the flows needed to keep salt water out of the Biscayne Aquifer of the Gold Coast. This predicament can only worsen as the demands of the cities and of the National Park increase in the future.

Bill said much more including this: "The direction in which Florida is going to move....will be the result of State-made decisions rather than decisions of the Federal Government."

Bill's foresight is truly remarkable. The shift of responsibility from the federal government to the states is a hallmark of the Reagan administration.

These are the reasons we are here. To ask you, and later the Governor, Cabinet and Legislature, to set a new course for south Florida's future.

Other major institutions have lately aligned themselves with Bill's theses:

On April 28, 1981, the Miami Herald labeled 'unlimited water' as a mirage. And further: "...this environmentally fragile region has a definite "carrying capacity'....."

On May 7, the Herald said, "...fresh water is the vital limiter on south Florida's growth."

On May 16, the Palm Beach Post added: "There are limits to the number of human beings that can be supported in Southeast Florida and we may be fairly close to those limits." In November, 1972, Bill Storch tabbed the number for Palm Beach County as 700,000.

We have a lot of coping to do. There is so much to do and it is all so obstreperous - that the only reason for doing it is because we must.

Water is the major concern of our coalition. If Lake Okeechobee fails periodically to be adequate for all needs, what is to be done?

Knowing that rainfall and its retention are the only satisfactory sources of water in the Everglades system, we support the re-establishment of sheet flow in the basin to the greatest possible extent. We cannot ignore the efficiency of the pristine system which often extended the wet period in the Everglades for four months or more beyond the four or five months of the rainy season.

We are guardedly hopeful over possibilities for augmenting water supplies in the basin by reinforcing the rainfall cycle through reestablishment of sheet flow.

Dr. Patrick Gannon, meteorologist, has written of the positive effects of wetlands on rainfall in south Florida. Waters evaporated from the basin return to the basin in a form of natural recycling. In addition to this in-basin recycling, the moist air rising from the basin can trigger additional rain to fall from water laden oceanic air masses as they blow inland over south Florida.

There are observations elsewhere which support these views.

Sheet flow restored to the Kissimmee Basin by dechannelization of Canal 38 coupled with refluctuations of Lakes Cypress, Hatchineha and Kissimmee may be the most direct - of not the only - means of augmenting the effective storage capacity

of Lake Okeechobee. The River and its Lakes have the fortunate attribute of lying north of Lake Okeechobee. Their waters can only drain into Lake Okeechobee. Dechannelization of Canal 38 and refluctuation of the three lakes can raise ground and surface water levels which have been lowered in the basin; augment the rain-evaporation-rain cycle there and slow the river flow to Lake Okeechobee. Each of which would benefit the Lake.

Water quality improvement is not the only issue relative to dechannelization of the lower Kissimmee as the Legislature indicated in its Kissimmee River Restoration Act of 1976. We are overdue on assessing the 'seek-tos' of that Act - six of which were for purposes other than water quality. The author of the bill goofed when he separated water quality from the 'seek-tos' for special emphasis. That author was me.

We believe it is time to stop thinking only of the pollutants of the lower Kissimmee - which some regard as unimportant - and to think of the water which it can have - which is important to us all.

Restoration of sheet flow in the Kissimmee is the way to resume the long slow flow into Okeechobee and thence into the sawgrass Everglades. The natural slow flow down the Kissimmee was undoubtedly an integral part of the PROCESS which created the great muck delta now comprising the Everglades farming area. Resumption of that flow as I described in my 'shirt-sleeve' talk also offers us an opportunity to use the nitrogen-phosphorus load in Okeechobee to create muck - an advantageous use of materials which are commonly regarded as wastes in the great Lake.

There is also a social benefit to restoring the lower Kissimee which I am constrained to mention. Those of us who had the displeasure of helping to pay for a ditch we didn't want would regard as a modest return on our investment the pleasure of helping pay to restore a river which we do want.

Water is the dominant resource issue in the Everglades system. But there are other resource issues. In troubled south Florida resources are the dominant issue. Too few resources demanded by too many people. This is true in the nation and in the world.

Improved water quality; restoration of wetlands; the regeneration of peat and muck; expanded populations of fresh water fishes throughout the system and of marine fishes in the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee Estuaries and in Florida Bay; the provision of more adequate flows to Everglades National Park - are other resource issues of importance to our Coalition and to south Florida at large. Improvement of these resources will provide food for people and wildlife, expanded bases for recreation; and economic benefits to the tourist industry, the commercial and sport fisheries industry and to south Florida at large.

I don't need to tire you with recitations on these matters. They were all covered in my talk to the 'Shirt-Sleeve Symposium' and are summarized in our Brochure. Beyond that they are easily, almost automatically, accomplishable.

All of them will be improved if sheet flow is restored in the Everglades System.

Members of our Coalition have given careful thought to the predicaments of the Everglades and what might be done about them. These are our thoughts:

1) There are both physical and functional limits to the resources of the Everglades and we must live with both. There is only so much land; so much water; so much muck. There is only so much rainfall; so much water to be recycled; so much pollutant assimilative capacity in its waters.

2) Our prime concern with the system has to be centered on PROCESSES - functional ecologic processes. We have to be much more concerned with them than with the crisis of the moment. We have to care where we are but we must have infinite care about where we are going.

3) Our possible choices of action are:

a) Leave everything the way it is. This is not a viable option. Water quality is worsening; the muck is disappearing; water demands are increasing.

b) Increase demands on the system. This can occur in the East Everglades; the jetport site; wetland developments in Broward and Dade Counties and in the lower Kissimmee basin; and in the Hendry County Canal which is planned. These can only make bad things worse.

c) Take actions to reverse the degrading processes which are operating - or at least to lessen their severity.

I narrow now to our specific petitions to this Board:

1) Maintain the concept of the 'Shirt-Sleeve Symposium' as a continuing means of assessing water management in the Everglades system. We all know that we need lots of heads working together; freely interchanging ideas and learning about each other. The kinds of creative thinking which we all need will result from that effort with the single proviso that there be no boss - only a person to serve as a facilitator of the symposium's investigations and deliberations.

2) We ask this Board to assess the features of the Marshall Plan. Ideas suggested by members of your staff and of the staffs of the other agencies should certainly be included in that assessment. Those actions which are determined to improve and expand sheet flow over broader areas should be implemented as rapidly as possible.

3) Assist and support Everglades National Park and its efforts to reestablish sheet flow in Shark Slough, block the Buttonwood Canal, and to restore the Turner River - all of which have the potential of reducing rapid loss of fresh water to tide.

4) Continue to work with the National Park in its program of modelling the water needs of the Park.