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COMMITTEE ON
APPROPRIATIONS

SUBCOMMITTEES:
TREASURY, POSTAL SERVICE,
AND GENERAL GOVERNMENT

VA, HUD, AND
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September 30, 2002

The Honorable Les Brownlee
Undersecretary of the Army
Department of the Army
101 Army Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20310-0101

Dear Undersecretary Brownlee:

I write to offer my suggestions on how to improve the guidelines to the programmatic regulations for implementation in the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP). In advance, I would like to commend you for your commitment and dedication to ensure that Everglades restoration is a success.

As you know, the Water Resources Development Act of 2000, which authorized the CERP, included language to ensure public outreach and minority contracting. This is not happening as broadly and effectively as necessary. I would like to see included in the programmatic regulations explicit and direct language clearly spelling out the infrastructure or mechanisms needed to achieve meaningful outreach and ensure that minority contractors have the opportunity and a fair chance of competing successfully for contracts.

One way to provide a concrete mechanism to achieve these goals is to designate the South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Council (SFERC) by name in the programmatic regulations as the umbrella organization for the 16 county CERP area that represents the interest of the built community and the people. This group is a non-profit organization established to provide a voice to South Floridians with a special interest and focus on the under-served, economically and environmentally disadvantaged communities. SFERC will monitor restoration projects and their positive and/or negative effect on the built community. Other environmental and community based groups can work under the SFERC's umbrella. In addition, SFERC could serve as the organization, along with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, to train and manage 1,000 new Earth Team volunteers.

I would also like to see included in the programmatic regulations specific measurement tools that could be used to monitor the effectiveness of the outreach effort and the minority contracting provisions. I am concerned that without such tools, we will not know the level of engagement in low income communities and the amount of restoration dollars benefitting small businesses from South Florida's socially and economically disadvantaged communities.

The needs of the human environment are critically important to the success of the Everglades Restoration Plan, the largest environmental restoration project in human history. Transparency of the outreach process must be made clear in the programmatic regulations which serve as the framework for this long term restoration plan. Providing the people of South Florida, including those who live in the urban core, with a place at the table in the decision making process will not only ensure the successful restoration of the natural system, but also will provide economic opportunity for Florida's disadvantaged communities.

I ask for your leadership on these important issues as we move forward in this historic endeavor. I look forward to continuing to work with you in improving the quality of life for people of South Florida.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Carrie P. Meek in black ink.

Carrie P. Meek
Member of Congress

CPM/lm