



COMMITTEE ON
**TRANSPORTATION
& INFRASTRUCTURE**

SAM GRAVES, CHAIRMAN

July 22, 2024

Representative Byron Donalds
1719 Longworth Building
Washington DC, 20515

Dear Representative Donalds,

On June 26, 2024, the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure approved H.R. 8812, *the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) of 2024*. This letter contains important information about your WRDA 2024 priorities included in the underlying bill expected to be considered in the House this week.

H.R. 8812 authorizes studies and projects within the United States Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) Civil Works mission areas: navigation, flood damage reduction, hurricane and storm damage reduction, shoreline protection, and ecosystem restoration. Through WRDA legislation, Congress also provides the Corps with authority to address water supply needs, aid in the production of hydropower, and manage a National recreation program. Additionally, a WRDA bill includes the authorization of projects to address wastewater and stormwater projects in partnership with non-Federal interests.


Since 2014, the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure has successfully passed a WRDA bill every two years. The regular consideration of locally driven, rigorously studied, and Nationally significant Corps infrastructure projects is critical in preserving our Nation's economy, protecting our communities and businesses, creating jobs, and maintaining our quality of life. Additionally, the biennial enactment of a WRDA provides Congress with a regular opportunity to oversee Corps policy on the development and implementation of water resource studies and projects.

With Republicans in the majority, *WRDA 2024* focuses on improving project delivery. *WRDA 2024* includes important policy reforms that will increase transparency and ease restrictions for local and non-Federal interests to act on more aspects of projects, avoiding additional government bureaucracy and easing burdens on the taxpayer, leading to better and more efficiency project delivery.

Attached to this letter you will find a document detailing some of the significant impacts this legislation is expected to have on your congressional district.

We look forward to the final passage of this critical piece of legislation on the House Floor and we hope you will join us in securing America's water resource infrastructure for decades to come. Please do not hesitate to contact us directly or reach out to the Committee's Member Services Director, Leslie Parker, at Leslie.Parker@mail.house.gov if you have any questions or need additional information.

Sincerely,



Chairman Sam Graves
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure



Chairman David Rouzer
Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment



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Rep. Byron Donalds (FL-19)

- Includes language expediting multiple Chief's Reports and Director's Reports expected later this year:
 - o CERP: Lake Okeechobee Watershed Restoration Project
 - o CERP: Western Everglades Restoration Project
 - o CERP: Biscayne Bay Coastal Wetlands Project
 - o Tampa Harbor, Deep Draft Navigation deepening project
 - o Miami-Dade Back Bay coastal storm risk management project
- Report language expediting completion of the Lake Okeechobee Component A Reservoir (LOCAR) Section 203 study
- Does not include language prohibiting discharges from Lake Okeechobee, or any language that would upset the current CERP structure.
- Provides an additional two years for the Corps to continue hurricane and storm damage reduction projects, including beach nourishment, in Florida without requiring a perpetual easement.
- Expands and modifies the Army Corps Harmful Algal Bloom Demonstration Program by:
 - o Including the Lake Okeechobee Watershed;
 - o Increasing the funding authorization level;
 - o Designating new priority areas for the program, including developing technologies for the conversion of algae biomass into fertilizer and other products; and
 - o Authorizing the Corps to enter into agreements with non-Federal entities for the use and sale of technologies developed through this program.
- Includes report language encouraging the Corps to explore opportunities with non-Federal partners to support the development of oyster gardens.
- Directs GAO to conduct an analysis of the Corps' use of nature-based solutions and barriers that exist to incorporating nature-based solutions in water resource projects.
- Report language encouraging the Corps to develop a process to better utilize "after action reports" and lessons learned.
- Does not include a wilderness designation for Big Cypress National Preserve.



July 8, 2024

Honorable Members of the Florida Congressional Delegation
United States Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20004

Re: Big Cypress National Preserve Wilderness Designations

Position: Oppose

Honorable Members of the Florida Congressional Delegation,

As leaders of the Florida Legislative Sportsmen's Caucus (Caucus), we are writing to express our opposition to Wilderness designations within the Big Cypress National Preserve (BCNP), and we urge you to continue to consider the negative impact Wilderness designations would have on the BCNP. Congressionally designated Wilderness would unnecessarily restrict science-based management efforts on the BCNP, negatively impacting wildlife habitat and hunting opportunities. As the BCNP encompasses roughly 729,000 acres, the use of off-road vehicles (ORVs) is paramount to the success of management efforts and opportunities for outdoor recreation. If Wilderness designations were to be created within the BCNP, ORV use would be prohibited within those areas; thus, limiting access to Floridians.

Since its inception, the Caucus has been the leading voice for sportsmen and women in the Florida Legislature. The bicameral and bipartisan Caucus has dozens of members from all corners of the Sunshine State. The Caucus actively works in concert with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) and numerous conservation organizations to advocate on behalf of hunters, anglers, recreational shooters, and trappers in Florida.

Hunting within the BCNP is a longstanding tradition for many Floridians, and establishing portions of the BCNP as Wilderness would negatively impact opportunities for hunters. Without the use of ORVs within the BCNP, natural resource managers would not be able to maintain or improve habitat through practices such as prescribed burning, invasive plant and animal control, and more, leading to habitat degradation over time. Habitat loss not only impacts game species and the opportunities they provide hunters, but it also impacts non-game species. A hands-off approach to management within the BCNP is counterproductive to implementing sound conservation practices and negatively impact resource management and access and opportunity for Florida's sportsmen and women. Therefore, we encourage the National Park Service to

consider other management area classifications that would provide a Wilderness-type experience without hamstringing natural resource managers by removing tools from their toolbox and limiting public access for sportsmen and women and other outdoor enthusiasts.

Sportsmen and women and associated industries generated over \$90 million in conservation funding for the FWC through the American System of Conservation Funding in 2023 alone, highlighting the importance of maintaining public access to areas such as the BCNP.¹ In addition to this critical funding for conservation, hunting in Florida generates \$93 million in state and local taxes while also supporting approximately 14,300 jobs.²

Again, Congressionally designating portions of the BNCP as Wilderness would unnecessarily hamper science-based management practices to improve wildlife habitat for both game and non-game wildlife species, fight invasive plant and animal species, and public access to areas of the BCNP that are nearly impossible to reach without a motorized ORV.

We thank you for considering the ramifications that Congressionally designated Wilderness would have on Florida's wildlife resources as well as our state's sportsmen and women.

Sincerely,

Representative Danny Alvarez
Florida Legislative Sportsmen's Caucus

Senator Jim Boyd
Florida Legislative Sportsmen's Caucus

Senator Jason Brodeur
Florida Legislative Sportsmen's Caucus

¹ <https://s3.amazonaws.com/cdn.congressionalsportsmen.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/11142453/Florida-ASCF-Fact-Sheet.pdf>

² <https://sportsmensalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Florida-State.pdf>