



# Audubon OF FLORIDA

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## **2010 Campaign: Securing Everglades Restoration Lands by 2010**

The Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP), approved by Congress in 2000, aims to “enhance ecologic values” by “increasing the total spatial extent of natural areas,” “improve habitat and functional quality,” and “improve native plant and animal species abundance and diversity.”<sup>1</sup> Timely land acquisition and conservation are key elements to achieving these goals. The State of Florida has already acquired 57% of the nearly 400,000 acres at more than \$1 billion for Everglades restoration. Yet due to extreme development pressure in South Florida, all land acquisition must be accelerated. The pressures of price escalation and development increase every day, resulting in reduced restoration boundaries and lost habitat function.

Successful restoration of the Everglades ecosystem requires a combination of habitat restoration, water quality treatment, and water storage. Natural lands and intensive water storage facilities are both necessary to achieve ecosystem restoration. Wetland restoration on natural lands is an essential component to achieve enhanced ecological value in the CERP, while creating flexible water storage and treatment. Success will require a significant commitment to land acquisition through the end of this century.

### **Threats to Successful Restoration**

Successful restoration of the Everglades is undermined by the rapid pace of development and the high rate of land value escalation in South Florida. Lands identified within the Lake Okeechobee Watershed and Indian River Lagoon projects have increased in value by 400 to 600% since the 1999 CERP<sup>2</sup>. For example, the 20,000 acre Allapattah Ranch in the Indian River Lagoon project, acquired in 2002 for \$50 million, is now valued at \$300 million. Early acquisition will provide significant fiscal savings to the State of Florida and the Federal government while ensuring the land is available for restoration.

The Water Preserve Areas (WPAs) represent opportunity lost when land is not acquired early. An integral part of the CERP located just east of the Everglades, WPAs were originally conceived as a 75,000-acre buffer separating urban and natural areas. The final project is 18,139 acres after key lands were lost to development. The project benefits of habitat creation are reduced to engineered water storage. Restoration options continue to be foreclosed as development encroaches on restoration lands.

To keep restoration on track and to stay ahead of development pressure, the State of Florida must acquire almost 180,000 acres at an estimated cost of \$1-1.5 billion by 2010. That translates to over 45,000 acres per year an estimated cost of \$250-300 million.

The 2010 Campaign proposes accelerating the protection of land for Everglades restoration by:

- Increasing the Save Our Everglades Trust Fund appropriation to \$200 million in 2007,
- Accelerating the Florida Forever Trust Fund to \$600 million over next two years,
- Appropriating \$25 million for land acquisition in the Biscayne Bay Coastal Wetlands,
- Encourage counties with lands identified for CERP inside their borders to implement transfer of development rights programs before the lands are acquired;
- Encourage the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) to reimburse SFWMD for securing purchase options on lands needed for CERP; and
- Secure federal funding to acquire land within CERP project boundaries.

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<sup>1</sup> The Yellow Book, Central and Southern Florida Project Comprehensive Review Study Final Integrated Feasibility Report and Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement, April 1999, page 5-21.

<sup>2</sup> Natural Lands Report, South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force, February 2006.