

The Pelican

Sierra Club

Florida

THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF SIERRA CLUB FLORIDA



SPRING 2022



florida.sierraclub.org



SIERRA CLUB

FLORIDA CHAPTER

Everglades Reservoir: A Letter to the President

BY DIANA UMPIERRE
Organizing Representative,
Sierra Club Everglades Resto-
ration Campaign

On February 25, 2022, Sierra Club sent a letter to President Joe Biden to express gratitude for the boost in funding to the 2022 budget for the US Army Corps of Engineers and for directing those funds toward certain Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) projects, including the Broward County Water Preserve Area, a new pump station in the southern Everglades, Western Everglades Restoration Project, and Biscayne Bay Southeastern Everglades Restoration.

That funding, from the 2021 Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, did not go to one particular project: the inferior, ill-conceived 23-foot deep Everglades Agricultural Area (EAA) reservoir. In the letter, Sierra repeated the request we have been making since 2017, for the thorough re-evaluation of the EAA reservoir project.

Sierra Club Florida has long fought for nature-based restoration of the Everglades, versus growing dependency on industrial size plumbing and artificial solutions that require forever expensive human maintenance and re-



Aaron Umpierre

Photo/Aaron Umpierre

engineering every few years in an unending cycle of fixing mistakes.

While Everglades restoration efforts could never fully return a pre-drainage ecosystem, the unnaturally deep reservoir to store polluted water is a compromise gone way too far.

The EAA reservoir was conceived and rushed to Congress in 2017-2018, during the Rick Scott and Donald Trump administrations, and since 2019 Gov. DeSantis has carried on greenwashing the project. Despite what DeSantis and his supporters claim, the EAA reservoir could not be farther from the "crown jewel" of Everglades restoration. The urgent climate and biodiversity crises require bold investments

in nature-based solutions, not short-term band-aids for political victories.

The reasons for a re-evaluation are many:

► The current reservoir plan fails to add significant relief from harmful Lake Okeechobee discharges. While any relief to the estuaries is welcomed, the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) chose not to evaluate other alternatives that may have presented higher benefits to the estuaries. A 23-foot deep reservoir, significantly deeper than Lake Okeechobee, filled with nutrient-polluted water, will promote the same or more profound conditions that fuel intense, frequent, and long-duration algal blooms

(Continued on page 8)

ANNUAL CHAPTER FUND DRIVE

Volunteers from Sierra Club Florida Chapter have been fighting to protect the Sunshine State for decades, but this year is truly extraordinary. No one has been left untouched by the multiple crises we face — from deterioration of our democracy to attacks on solar energy and the ongoing climate crisis that threatens our future.

Our volunteers are engaging across many issues from protecting Florida's wild places, to fighting environmental injustice and demanding action on climate change. But we can't do it alone.

With your support we are poised to make groundbreaking victories in 2022. You can help defeat attacks on the solar industry, support our campaign to work with cities and counties across the state to adopt commitments to 100% clean and renewable energy, and protect Florida's wildlands by stopping senseless toll roads to nowhere.

It isn't always easy, but we will never stop fighting for a better and healthier Florida. Your investment is critical to this work. Right now we are conducting our annual fundraising appeal. With your financial support, Sierra Club Florida can show up on the trail, in the courts and in the capitol to fight for public lands, clean air and clean water.

Any amount is great appreciated; and remember that **100 percent of your gift stays in Florida.**

To make a donation, simply go to our web site at sierraclub.org/florida and click on **Contribute to Florida Sierra Chapter** on the right side. Or send a check to:

Sierra Club Florida
c/o T.C. Larson, Treasurer
P.O. Box 49024
Jacksonville Beach, FL 32240

Donations are not tax-deductible.

IMPORTANT NOTICE: WE'RE GOING DIGITAL, WILL YOU JOIN US?

This issue of The Pelican is the last to be delivered by mail to all members. In the future, members who have provided an e-mail address to Sierra Club will receive a Pelican newsletter via e-mail only.

As a Sierra Club member, you make positive environmental change a priority. Please continue to combat climate change by opting for digital delivery. It's simple: Just go to sierraclub.org/florida and click on **Subscribe to the Pelican Newsletter**. To make sure you are on our e-mail list, contact member.care@sierraclub.org.

Thanks for going digital and reducing fossil fuel consumption!

Join our Equity, Inclusion and Justice Team

Everyone deserves clean water and breathable air — but for many communities in Florida access to those basic necessities is compromised by systemic racism and discrimination. Sierra Club Florida's Equity, Inclusion, and Justice Committee was founded to support the Sierra Club's mission of "enlisting humanity to protect and restore the quality of the natural and human environment."

The EIJ Committee is working with a renewed sense of urgency to educate and address issues across the state. For example, our Stop the Burn – Go Green Harvest Campaign is hard at work organizing residents in Glades communities to combat Big Sugar's pre-harvest burning of sugar cane. These high-smoke events are targeted on days when winds blow in their direction, leading to serious air pollution and threatening the health of all residents.

Do you see an issue of inequality or discrimination in your community that needs attention? Go to www.florida.sierraclub.org/justice to read more about our EIJ Committee work and find resource materials. Or reach out to justice@florida.sierraclub.org for more information. Let's do this together!

The Pelican, Vol. 55 No. 1

Marcia Biggs, Editor

The Pelican is published by Sierra Club Florida and delivered to Sierra Club Florida members. Annual membership dues include The Pelican newsletter. To subscribe for e-mail delivery, go to www.sierraclub.org/florida and click on **Subscribe to the Pelican Newsletter**.

Sierra Club Florida Director

Emily Gorman

Sierra Club Florida Executive Committee

Steve Wonderly, Volusia Flagler Group, Chair

Craig Diamond, Big Bend Group, Vice-Chair

Debbie Matthews, Miami Group

James Scott, Suncoast Group

Erica Hall, Suncoast Group

Christian Hammond, Loxahatchee Group

www.sierraclub.org/florida

Florida Chapter Award Winners Announced

Our volunteers and supporters are the backbone and strength of our efforts. Florida Chapter annually recognizes these individuals who have been nominated through Group Executive Committee. This year's winners are:

Drew Martin, Loxahatchee Group Florida Black Bear

The Black Bear Award is one of the top honors presented to a Sierra Club volunteer. It is given to an individual who has made a unique contribution to the Florida Chapter's conservation agenda. As Conservation Chair for the Loxahatchee Group, Drew has had a long time of service from educating members on South Florida environmental issues and Everglades issues, to his work on climate adaptation and restoration and the single use plastics campaign. He was the recipient of a National Service Award in 2021 from the National Sierra Club.



Kevin Brown, Northeast Group Cypress Award

The Cypress Award is for an individual who has contributed greatly to the public's environmental awareness. Kevin Brown is a retired educator who is recognized for his longtime work engaging students in coastal habitat restoration campaigns.

Sarah Younger, Suwannee -St. Johns Group Pine Tree Award

The Pine Tree award is a special award for group leadership. Sarah was instrumental in reforming a new Steering Committee for the Suwannee- St. Johns group in the wake of reorganization. She is the current chair of the group.

Michelle Rutledge, Suwannee St. Johns Group Manatee Award

The Manatee Award is for outstanding service to the group. Michelle jumped into the reorganized SSJ group by representing the group's mission on environmental justice. She has also joined the Energy Committee of Florida Chapter. She and her energy committee have recently been awarded a Sierra Club National grant to educate the public on environmental justice issues.

Chapter Equity, Inclusion, and Justice Committee - Eco System Award

This award is for a team who has made significant accomplishments on an environmental or organizational issue. The EIJ Committee formed several years ago with Jessica Lewis and Alyssa Cadwalader at the helm, with the goal of supporting efforts by groups to establish effective EIJ work at the local level throughout Florida. Since forming, the committee continues to diligently pursue the tasks of environmental justice, particularly in the quest for clean energy, for disenfranchised Floridians. The current EIJ Committee is Jessica Lewis, Erica Hall and Ingrid Ayala.

Robert Hartsell, Loxahatchee Group Red Howell Legal Services Award

This award recognizes attorneys who work through the legal system to improve Florida's environmental quality. Hartsell has shared his legal expertise to help halt development and mining next to the Everglades, as well as preserve other Florida wetlands. He has been invaluable in helping Sierrans in preparing for legal interactions.

Adriene Barmann, Broward Group Otter Award

The Otter Award honors a Group member who has done an outstanding job for the Group's outings program.

Since 2010, Barmann has inspired members and non-members to experience the outdoors both in person and virtually during the pandemic.

Sue Caruso, Broward Group Manatee Award

The Manatee Award honors a Group member who has done an outstanding job of service to the Group. Sue is a longtime volunteer and inspiration. She works doggedly to protect the environment from unnecessary development, educating both the public and public officials as a spokesperson and activist.

Cat Uden, Broward Group Cypress Award

The Cypress Award is for an individual who has contributed greatly to the public's environmental awareness. Uden is a powerhouse fighting plastic pollution and single-use plastics, working with local government officials to pass ordinances banning plastic pollution.

Commissioner Melissa P. Dunn, Broward Group Osprey Award

This award is presented for extraordinary effort by a governmental staff person to promote or effect changes in policy or practice to protect or preserve Florida's environment. Vice Mayor Melissa P. Dunn was elected



to the City of Lauderhill Commission in November 2020. Since joining Broward Sierra Club she has shown she is a strong voice for environmental issues including sponsoring an ordinance to repeal M-CORES and an ordinance to ban single-use plastics and polystyrene on City owned property.

SUMMARY: Wins, Losses in 2022 Legislative Session

BY LUIGI GUADARRAMA
Florida Sierra Political Director

It's no secret that the 2022 Legislative Session was a disaster. Even though we're no strangers to difficulty, the results of this session have been painful to witness and tough to swallow. The effects of the 2022 session will be felt by Florida's children, parents, homeowners, environment, and many others for years to come.

As we look back on this session, it's important to remember that we at Sierra Club care about people as much as we care about the environment. That's why this year we want to highlight the attacks on people, as much as the attacks on the environment.

This session we saw the unconstitutional attempt to erase the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ Floridians and children in the classroom; the erosion of reproductive rights and freedoms that Americans hold dear; the banning of books in classrooms; and the decimation of Florida's rooftop solar industry.

We also continued to see trends and attacks that Floridians are all too familiar and fed up with.

Local governments continued to lose their ability to respond to local climate and conservation crises and our waters will continue to be polluted by fertilizer and biosolids. Freedom and democracy continue to face attacks.

However, there were some positive outcomes. We and our allies were able to kill one of the super preemption bills — SB 280/HB 403 — which would have allowed businesses to sue local governments for “unreasonable” ordinances with the locality paying legal fees, and to block their enforcement on demand. The seagrass mitigation banking bills — SB 198/HB 349 — were killed, which would have allowed developers to destroy mature seagrass in coastal areas on the unlikely premise of successfully replanting it somewhere else.

We were able to pass legislation restricting the preemption of local tree pro-



A Look at How Sierra Club Priorities Fared

tection ordinances to occupied single family residences and limiting the preemption to instances when the only way to reduce a tree's risk below moderate is removal. In other words, unbridled tree trimming and wholesale clear cutting will now be indefensible.

This fight is far from over.

These attacks on Florida's freedom, economy, and environment cannot stand. The legislators and officials who espoused these attacks on Florida challenge us to continue our fight, and this November we will oblige them. It is more important than ever for us to elect candidates who will support Florida's people and environment.

Register to vote. Get your friends and neighbors registered. Then lean in with your local Sierra Club Political Committee to continue the fight for a sustainable future.

Here's what happened to Sierra Club's Top Priority Bills; at the time this article was written, the Governor had not received any of our priority bills from the Legislature.

HB 741/SB 1024 “Net Metering”

OPPOSE

By reducing how much utilities pay homeowners and small businesses for electricity they send to the grid by 80% over the next seven years, this bill will

STAY INFORMED

Keep up on the latest news from Florida Sierra's Political team and Tallahassee lobbyist Dave Cullen by adding your e-mail to **The Florida Report** listserv.

Simply e-mail cullenasea@gmail.com requesting to be added.

Keep updated on our endorsements leading up to the November elections at www.sierraclub.org/florida/florida-sierra-club-political-endorsements-list. Check back often!

curtail rooftop solar access. HB 741 will decimate the solar industry and shutter hundreds of small businesses.

Passed both chambers. *The Sierra Club has requested a veto.*

SB 2508 “Environmental Resources”

OPPOSE

This bill shifts the focus of Florida's land acquisition from conservation to agriculture and lowers standards for the Rural and Family Lands Protection Program. It deprioritizes the protection of certain lands. The bill also codifies a conflict of interest by allowing utilities seeking permits to make donations to expedite permit applications.

Passed both chambers. *The Sierra Club has requested a veto.*

HB 403/SB 280 “Local Ordinances”

OPPOSE

Combined with SB 620, these bills would create a super-preemption of sorts by authorizing courts to award attorney fees and costs and damages in certain civil actions filed against local governments and more. This bill would have contributed to a chilling effect against local governments attempts to act on conservation and the climate crisis. *Died on calendar.*

(Continued next page)

Supporting Endorsed Candidates Is Effective

BY DAVID HARBEITNER
Florida Chapter Political Chair

As you can see in Luigi Guadarrama's article about the 2022 Florida Legislative session, it continues to be a difficult time for those of us who care about Florida's environment. While we experience a few limited wins, all too often our political leaders at the state level provide lip service to the importance of the environment to both our health and economy while prioritizing the interests of developers and corporations over both the short and long term needs of the citizens of Florida.

Given this recent trend, much is at stake in the 2022 elections in Florida. We will be voting on the entire state executive branch, one of our U.S. Senate seats, all of our Congressional Representatives (including one new congressional district) and all our state legislative districts.

It is worthwhile noting Sierra Club is first and foremost an advocacy organization working to protect our environment. To increase our chance at winning important policy decisions we need to elect pro-environment officials.

This is where our political work

comes in. To get the endorsement of Sierra Club, candidates go through a comprehensive process that includes completing a questionnaire and participating in an interview while volunteer members do additional research on each candidate and, if appropriate, recommendations for endorsement must be approved by two different levels of committees within Sierra Club.

Our endorsement process is one that has been vetted over the past 60 years across all 50 states and continually evolves to reflect the new challenges that face the environment.

In order to win elections, we need not only to identify and endorse those candidates whose values best align with Sierra, we also need to support them to help them win their elections. Providing support to our candidates takes resources, both volunteer time as well as money to support our efforts.

We can not expect to outraise or outspend our political/advocacy opponents, but with smart allocation of our resources and the engagement of our

members and supporters, we can be very effective at helping our candidates win.

If you are frustrated with the lack of progress on addressing nutrient loads in our waters, managing growth with the understanding we will continue to experience population growth or supporting the movement to renewable energy sources, **now is the time to get involved.** A few hours a month or investing as little as \$10/month into our political program can make us even more effective at competing in elections.

The governor and the Florida Legislature have been gutting environmental protections for years, favoring moneyed interests at the expense of natural Florida. Only through our collective efforts, partnering with like-minded organizations, and realizing our personal engagement is critical to our state's future, can we win the critical elections we need to win!!

Donate to the Sierra Club FL PAC to help our electoral work - bit.ly/SierraClubFLPAC. Or reach out to me at davidh@suncoastsierra.org to learn more about how you can get involved with our political program.

HB 569/SB 620 "Local Business Protection Act"

OPPOSE

This bill lets businesses sue local governments for an ordinance they claim will cost them a 15% loss of profit or more. This bill will chill local governments' attempts to act on conservation and the climate crisis and will impose an undue burden upwards of 900 million dollars on taxpayers.

Passed both chambers. *The Sierra Club has requested a veto.*

HB 349/SB 198 "Water Resources Management"

OPPOSE

This bill would have authorized the Board of Trustees of the Internal Improvement Trust Fund to establish seagrass mitigation banks. This would have been devastating to Florida's flora and fauna and would have deeply damaged our waterways. *Died in committee.*

HB 1139/SB 954 "Energy"

OPPOSE WITH NATURAL GAS AMENDMENTS

The bill requires vehicles of a given use by Florida governments be selected based on the lowest lifetime ownership costs over five years. This bill originally promoted the use of electric vehicles and infrastructure for electric vehicles, but

Sierra club withdrew support when it was amended to include vehicles that run on natural gas. *Died on calendar.*

HB 887/SB 732 "Heat Illness Prevention"

SUPPORT

The bill provided responsibilities and required training for certain employers and employees aimed at curtailing the incidence of heat illness for outdoor employees. With the ongoing climate crisis, it is imperative that we afford outdoor workers protections against weather changes.

Died in committee.

Rural Florida Says ‘No Build’ to Toll Roads

By MICHAEL MCGRATH
Red Tide/Wildlands Campaign Organizer

The fight against the “Roads to Ruin” is in full swing! Floridians in the pathway of the Northern Turnpike Extension, a vestige of the infamous 330-mile M-CORES toll roads proposal, want nothing to do with it. An unprecedented uprising began in rural areas of North Florida last fall when Citrus, Marion, Levy, and Sumter county residents were alerted by the No Roads to Ruin Coalition that kick-off meetings would begin the planning process to construct a new toll road that would imperil their homes, farms, environmental treasures, and way of life.

Rejecting FDOT’s rubber-stamp of these new toll roads, the early December FDOT kickoff events brought out hundreds of local residents and No Roads to Ruin activists bedecked with brightly colored “No Build” mini-posters, self-made signs, and No Roads to Ruin stickers.

The energy that came from those events quickly translated into organized local action. People have taken to social media to share information, strategize, and plan. Yard sign orders were quickly placed and funds were raised to distribute campaigns materials and raise awareness. Residents contacted their local city councils and county commissions and have admirably



packed meeting chambers in Citrus, Levy, Marion, and Sumter counties to request decisive action be taken against the toll roads.

Sierra Club Florida has been at the forefront of organizing alongside activists and residents to send a crystal clear message to leaders across the state that “No Build” is the lone option for the Northern Turnpike Extension.

Our collective organizing has already paid off. Levy Board of County Commissioners, Dunnellon City Council, and Inglis Town Commission have each unanimously passed “No Build” resolutions which will influence FDOT’s final report, with the promise of other local city and county governments soon joining their ranks. Meanwhile, even SWFWMD has formally come out opposed to the project

citing that all of the four current potential corridors would bisect district-owned conservation lands or sever district lands, which would be inconsistent with the original intent to acquire those lands.

While this fight is far from over, the toll road stress has kicked activists and residents across North Florida into high gear to fight the Roads to Ruin and defend all that they hold dear. You can learn more and get involved in the “No Build” fight by visiting: <https://noroadstoruin.org/>

If you live or play in Citrus, Levy, Marion, or Sumter counties and want a “Rural Florida Says No to Toll Roads” sign, or want to donate a sign to someone who does, go to: <https://noroadstoruin.org/stop-the-turnpike-extension/>

Sierra 100% Clean Energy Campaign Stronger Than Ever

BY BROOKE ALEXANDER
Organizing Manager, Clean Energy

The Clean Energy Campaign has been busy working to move Ready for 100% cities in the Sunshine State forward with their clean energy goals. With support from other allies in the state, we are working with National Renewable Energy Lab through May to help Sarasota and Tallahassee move their 100% implementation goals forward. With this work comes many tools that will be useful for all cities that have committed to 100% — and those who haven’t but hope to make progress in creating a

cleaner and healthier city.

Another project that we’ve been working on is the creation of a statewide Energy Solutions Toolkit website, where cities can find all of the resources they need to take the next step toward 100%. Our hope is that this website will make it easier for municipalities to get everything they need, in one place, to start the transition to 100% clean and renewable energy in a way that just and equitable for the whole community.

Figuring out where to even begin is one of the biggest struggles cities and counties face, and this energy solutions

website will make that easier. We hope this website will go beyond helping Florida and serve as a major resource to other states as well.

We are continuing to work with uncommitted cities and counties in the state and hope to add a few more to our list of 100% commitments in the near future.

If you’re interested in being added to our **clean energy e-mail list** for updates, or want to learn more about how to help your city or county achieve 100% clean energy, please e-mail brooke.alexander@sierraclub.org

AROUND THE STATE

The Hillsborough and Orange County Boards of County Commissioners voted unanimously to enact **stricter fertilizer ordinances**, thereby joining the ranks of the seventeen counties and over 100 municipalities in Florida that have adopted strong fertilizer ordinances that include strict, no exemption, rainy season application bans.

The county-wide ordinances will help to protect watery wonders like Rock Springs and the Wekiva River in Orange County and Tampa Bay and the Alafia River in Hillsborough County from being besieged with slimy algae blooms fueled by excessive nutrient pollution.

Strictly regulating urban fertilizer is a proven, low-cost way to stop nutrient-laden urban stormwater runoff at its source, before it reaches our waterways. A big thank you to all of our members, supporters, and partners in the Hillsborough and Orange County areas as well as the leadership of the **Tampa Bay and Central Florida Groups** who worked with the Red Tide-Wildlands Campaign to build overwhelming public support.

Broward Group celebrated Earth Day a little early with a highly successful community event on March 6 at the Ann Kolb Nature Center in Hollywood. Event Chair **Adriene Barmann** organized a well attended event that featured educational seminars, nature



The **Suncoast Group** hosted National Sierra Club President **Ramon Cruz** at a Meet and Greet for endorsed candidates in October. Photo from left, Chapter Director Emily Gorman, Dan Huber (Suncoast Political Chair), Gina Driscoll and Lisset Hanewicz (candidates), Ramon Cruz, Ken Welch (Mayor St. Petersburg FL), Copley Gerdes and Richie Floyd (candidates). Congrats to Suncoast Group which won 100 percent of their political endorsements in the last election!



walks and kayak tours, exhibitors, live music and a student “Perils of Plastic” recycled trash art contest.

Kudos to the **Northeast Sierra Group** for establishing a **Military Outdoors Group** for current and former military and their families. Part of a National Sierra Club Military Outdoors Program, events focus on getting military members outside to aid in stress relief and well-being and enlisting them in our environmental and conservation activities. Recent outings included hikes at Fort Clinch and Ravine Gardens (photo left).



Left, Sierra members and supporters from around the state gathered along with other protestors at the Historic Capitol Museum in Tallahassee on Feb. 8 to denounce proposed bills SB1024/HB741 aimed at dismantling solar net metering in the Save Our Solar rally, organized by Solar United Neighbors. The bill was later passed, threatening the state’s clean energy growth.

Photo/Bob Olary

Moving?

Email new address to
address.changes@sierraclub.org
and include your membership ID
number located on the mailing label.

Email changes can be made at
member.care@sierraclub.org

Everglades Reservoir

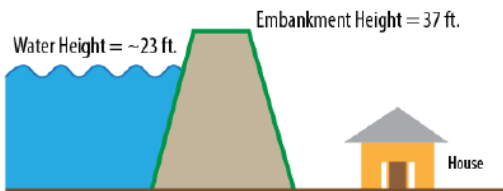
(Continued from page 1)

within Lake Okeechobee.

► The public was deprived of the benefit to weigh-in on possible alternatives that may have provided more economically feasibility, with less risk and uncertainty in cost and benefits.

► Because Everglades restoration cannot be successful without large swaths of land south of Lake Okeechobee, it is still in the public interest to evaluate the impacts and feasibility of other less land-restricted alternatives, restrictions that SFWMD chose to impose on itself. The state already owns some of the land required, and only needs to halt its repeated leasing of those parcels as they come up for renewal.

We do not forget that in 2014, 75% of the state's voters passed a constitutional amendment creating the Land Acquisition Trust Fund (LATF), which in Fiscal Year



Graphic from USACE (Note: Lake Okeechobee avg water depth is 9 ft)

2022-23 has over \$1 billion to spend on acquiring and restoring conservation land. The LATF will continue to provide funds through 2034.

► An undersized Stormwater Treatment Area (STA) lacking effective treatment potential for additional water flows from Lake Okeechobee will violate the Miccosukee Tribe's Water Quality Standard of 10 parts per billion (ppb) for phosphorus, and fail to deliver on assurances made to the Tribe of an 80% phosphorus load reduction. The 6,500-acre STA proposed for the EAA Reservoir has not been certified as adequate water quality treatment for the flows of new water from Lake Okeechobee.

The bottom line is that this reservoir

will not provide the level of ecological restoration benefits South Florida needs, but rather has become a go-to project for greenwashing by Gov. DeSantis and others looking for a quick political, rather than an enduring ecological, fix.

The current plan is a far cry from what we truly need in the Everglades Agricultural Area to restore ecologically beneficial clean water flows, sequester carbon, regenerate peat soils, recover native vegetation and wildlife, and adapt to a changing climate.

It is yet another hard-infrastructure project that may mitigate some of the results of an unrestored Everglades, but does not represent true Everglades restoration.

To find the complete letter from Sierra Club to President Biden, go to <https://tinyurl.com/EvergladesReservoirLetter>