



Everglades Coalition

1000 Friends of Florida
Arthur R. Marshall Foundation
Audubon of Florida
Audubon Society of the Everglades
Audubon of Southwest Florida
Caloosahatchee River Citizens
Association
Clean Water Action
Clean Water Network
Collier County Audubon Society
Conservancy of Southwest Florida
Defenders of Wildlife
Ding Darling Wildlife Society
Earthjustice
Environment Florida
The Environmental Coalition
Everglades Coordinating Council
Everglades Foundation
Everglades Law Center
Florida Defenders of the
Environment
Florida Keys Environmental Fund
The Florida Native Plant Society
Florida Oceanographic Society
Florida Sierra Club
Florida Wildlife Federation
Friends of Arthur R. Marshall
Loxahatchee Wildlife Refuge
Friends of the Everglades
Izaak Walton League
Florida Keys Chapter
Florida Division
Izaak Walton League of America
Mangrove Chapter
Last Stand
League of Women
Voters of Florida
Loxahatchee River Coalition
Martin County
Conservation Alliance
National Audubon Society
National Parks
Conservation Association
National Wildlife Federation
National Wildlife Refuge
Association
Natural Resources
Defense Council
The Ocean Conservancy
The Pegasus Foundation
Sanibel-Captiva
Conservation Foundation
Save It Now, Glades!
Sierra Club
Sierra Club Broward Group
Sierra Club Central Florida Group
Sierra Club Loxahatchee Group
Sierra Club Miami Group
South Florida Audubon Society
Tropical Audubon Society
The Urban Environment League
World Wildlife Fund

September 18, 2009

Assistant Administrator Peter S. Silva
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
EPA Headquarters
Ariel Rios Building
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, N. W.
Mail Code: 4101M
Washington, DC 20460

Dear Assistant Administrator Silva:

The Everglades Coalition writes concerning proposed limestone mining in what mining companies have dubbed the “Lake Belt” area of Miami Dade County (“County”). The Everglades Coalition is an alliance of 52 local, state, and national conservation and environmental organizations dedicated to full restoration of the greater Everglades ecosystem, from the Kissimmee Chain of Lakes into Lake Okeechobee, through the “River of Grass,” out to Florida Bay and the Keys.

As EPA knows, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (“Corps”) is currently considering the re-issuance of ten-year mining permits, authorizing more than 5,400 acres of wetlands loss, that had been set aside by a federal district court in January and the issuance of new permits of indefinite duration that would authorize an additional 10,000-12,000 acres of wetlands loss. Together with existing mining pits, this amounts to an approximately 30 square mile expanse of mining pits potentially lining the eastern side of the remaining publicly-owned Everglades. As further explained below, the Everglades Coalition opposes issuance of these permits, because the mining as currently proposed would cause significant and irreversible harm to the Everglades, our nation’s largest subtropical wilderness and a unique part of our natural heritage.

As documented in the Corps’ recently completed Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (“SEIS”), the proposed mining will result in the enormous loss of irreplaceable Everglades wildlife habitat and significantly increase harmful seepage out of the remaining publicly-owned Everglades, including from Everglades National Park (“Park”) and the “Pennsuco” wetlands. The scale of potential wetlands loss is so huge that even the Corps was unable to identify sufficient mitigation in the SEIS. Even assuming sufficient mitigation were available – and that such activities, *e.g.*, invasives removal, could be considered an adequate ecological substitute for the permanent destruction of rare short hydro-period wetlands in the Lake Belt – the proposed mining fees are far too low to afford them, based on the SEIS’ projections and available information on the potential mitigation activities’ costs. The permanent creation of an expanse of 80-foot deep mining lakes will also produce, as the Department of Interior has said, “damaging seepage impacts” on the Park and other adjacent Everglades areas. For example, the proposed mining would increase seepage out of the Park by 25 percent, according to the SEIS; if other adjacent mining projects being permitted separately are also considered, seepage

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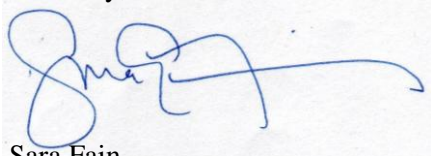
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would increase *by almost 45 percent*. This is directly contrary to Everglades restoration initiatives in the area, which are trying to *reduce* seepage.

In a July 1st letter to the Corps, EPA similarly determined that the expansion of mining in the Lake Belt, as currently proposed, will have “substantial and unacceptable adverse impacts on aquatic resources of national importance.” In following through on this determination, which we strongly support for the reasons outlined above, the Everglades Coalition requests that EPA ensure, including through use of its veto authority under the Clean Water Act if necessary, that any Lake Belt mining permits, if issued, contain adequately-protective permit conditions and restrictions. At the minimum, this should include the following: *First*, the permits must include buffer areas close to the Park and Pennsuco wetlands (including specifically protection zones established in Alternative 7 and resulting from the south of Miami Canal exclusion area at 5-18 of the SEIS). *Second*, the permits must include an expanded protection zone around the Northwest Wellfield delineated on the basis of recent studies by the U.S. Geological Survey, which have demonstrated that the County’s most important drinking water source is under much greater risk of contamination from mining than previously considered. *Third*, the permits must be of limited duration, *i.e.*, five to eight years, so that the significant problems with the wetlands mitigation plan and with mining-induced seepage can be addressed and resolved prior to irretrievable consequences. Based on the information in the SEIS, sufficient limestone resources exist in areas of the Lake Belt away from the publicly-owned Everglades and the Wellfield to last this duration, *i.e.*, allow at least eight years of mining, depending on the rate of mining, which the SEIS makes clear has slowed dramatically in recent years. It would also allow for the continued growth of alternative supplies, which the SEIS acknowledges has occurred over the last several years.

Again, we appreciate EPA’s efforts thus far to protect these vital public lands and resources and look forward to continuing to work cooperatively with the agency on this issue and other issues vital to the future of America’s Everglades.

Sincerely,



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