



Friends of the
Everglades



March 29, 2022

Florida Governor Ron DeSantis
VIA email @
GovernorRon.Desantis@eog.myflorida.com

RE: **VETO SB 2508**

Dear Governor DeSantis,

The undersigned organizations thank you for your attention to Everglades Restoration and water quality since your election in 2018. It is because of your voiced commitment to our state's water resources that we bring to your attention our concerns regarding Senate Bill 2508 and ask that you VETO this bill.

Our organizations appreciated your swift public response to some of the most egregious parts of the bill soon after it was introduced in mid-February. While the Legislature did amend the bill to remove some of the most concerning language, the bill that is coming to you for consideration still undermines important components of Everglades Restoration and the development of the Lake Okeechobee System Operating Manual (LOSOM).

For example, this bill will still have a chilling effect on state water managers by perpetuating the harmful "hold and dump" practices of the existing Lake Okeechobee Regulation Schedule (LORS 08) – reducing beneficial flows to the Caloosahatchee and Everglades during the dry season and increasing damaging high-volume discharges to our coastal communities during the wet season.

The harmful elements of the bill that remain include:

- Language that unnecessarily requires legislative ratification of new water rules designed to address water allocation during the dry season, both complicating and delaying rulemaking and moving decision making away from those who live and work in the areas (and ecosystems) most harmed by the water shortages.
- Allows public entities, including utilities, to pay to expedite their wetland permits, expanding and accelerating the destruction of wetlands and exacerbating impacts to water quality.
- Changes the current Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS) Rural and Family Lands program *from* approving conservation easements which keep special agricultural lands in production and on the tax rolls - *to* also allow FDACS to out-right purchase these lands duplicating and potentially competing with the underfunded Department of Environmental Protection Florida Forever land acquisition program.

These damaging elements of SB 2508 alone deserve to be vetoed. In addition, the fact that these substantive policy changes were passed in a budget conforming bill with only one public hearing sets a dangerous precedent that would, if allowed to become law, essentially reward the Legislature for undermining the intent of government in the sunshine.

This bill was put forward outside of the normal and appropriate legislative committee process, thus severely limiting public input into the important issues contained in this bill. This bill will have widespread negative

impacts on Floridians, the state's tourism-based economy, and undermines the transparency that your administration has advocated for in the past.

We strongly urge you to VETO SB 2508 and look forward to working together in restoring America's Everglades and our state's critical natural resources.

Sincerely,

James Evans, Chief Executive Officer
Sanibel Captiva Conservation Foundation

Eve Samples, Executive Director
Friends of the Everglades

Nicole Johnson, Director of Environmental Policy
Conservancy of Southwest Florida

John Cassani,
Calusa Waterkeeper