Friends,

The work of preserving, protecting, and restoring the only Everglades in the world seems to move quickly and slowly all at once. Bad ideas pop up and good ideas are chipped away at on a weekly basis while substantive efforts move at what can feel like a glacial pace. So, it’s always gratifying for me to step back and take stock of progress with Friends of the Everglades’ annual report!

2023 marked 25 years of Friends of the Everglades working without our founder Marjory Stoneman Douglas, and 2024 marks five years since Friends merged with the Bullsugar Alliance — now VoteWater — forging the powerful 501(c)3/501(c)4 relationship that exists today. I can say in full confidence that in these past five years Friends has grown into a stronger organization than it’s been in at least a quarter century.

Friends’ policy and education efforts have had great success through the Legislative Accountability and Young Friends of the Everglades programs, our small but mighty staff is expanding, and Friends continues to grow its voice, visibility, and influence in the environmental space.

This report is the result of the tireless efforts of our wonderful staff, our board of directors, our volunteers and of course you — our supporters! 2024 is shaping up to be a pivotal year in Everglades restoration and we look forward to building on our successes with your continued support of our mission!

Sincerely,

PHIL KUSHLAN
BOARD PRESIDENT

“Produce something lasting, something that people will be able to hold in their hands a hundred years from now.”

— Marjory Stoneman Douglas
The mission of Friends of the Everglades is to preserve, protect, and restore the only Everglades in the world.

OUR GOALS:

- Compel government agencies to comply with existing environmental laws, and resist any efforts to weaken such laws.
- Encourage politicians to recognize the long consequences of their actions.
- Spread awareness of the importance of the Everglades to the South Florida ecosystem.

A LEGACY THAT TRANSCENDS TIME

When Marjory Stoneman Douglas founded Friends of the Everglades in 1969, she knew she was creating something bigger than herself. Her intentional recruitment of ordinary people created a base of support that grew from person-to-person as these “friends” experienced the Everglades themselves, learned more about the unique and precious ecosystem, and in turn, enlisted new support from their own networks. This grassroots foundation still guides the work we do today, as we continue to carry out a vision of impact and preservation that will outlast any one person’s individual contributions.

To this day, we recognize that army of support as our greatest asset. With help from friends of the Everglades near and far, knowledge is shared more widely and the ability to activate large groups of people into unified action has helped us apply pressure for better water management, advocate for responsible growth across Florida, spotlight instances of injustice, and hold leaders accountable. All while nurturing the next generation of champions.

Marjory saw the importance of an enduring legacy. As we face new challenges each year, we remain cognizant of the need to rally public support around long-term solutions that are scientifically vetted and work in tandem with nature. With your help, we’ll leave a mark on the Everglades and across Florida that will continue to inspire long after we’ve passed the torch to future generations.
Dear Friends,

As I enter my fifth year as Executive Director at Friends of the Everglades, I’m incredibly heartened by the recent groundswell of support for our work to save this majestic and imperiled ecosystem.

This is a pivotal moment for the Everglades. Wetlands protections are under assault at the state and federal levels, development pressure is intensifying in rural and coastal areas, the sugarcane industry has rigged our water-management system, Lake Okeechobee is plagued by algae, fish are ailing in the Keys, and climate change presents an uncertain future.

Friends of the Everglades is rising to meet these challenges — just as we have since our founding by Marjory Stoneman Douglas in 1969. In fact, we just wrapped up one of our most significant years of organizational growth, policy impact, and visibility in our 55-year history.

As a Friend of the Everglades, you made this possible. This annual report is a testament to what we have accomplished together.

We celebrated significant milestones in 2023. The work outlined in this report is a glimpse at what our team accomplished at Friends of the Everglades. It’s a reflection of the dedication, creativity, and passion of our staff, board of directors, and volunteers. It also indicates how much more is possible.

Yes, the Everglades face an uncertain future — but there are reminders all around us of the wilderness, water, and wildlife that endures. It’s still worth fighting for. We would have it no other way.

Thank you for standing with us.

For the Everglades,
WATER-QUALITY ACCOUNTABILITY: Working with our Senior Scientist Dr. Thomas Van Lent, we tracked phosphorus levels in waters of the Everglades to hold the state of Florida accountable for meeting court-ordered pollution deadlines. These pollution limits stem from successful Clean Water Act litigation previously brought by Friends of the Everglades and the Miccosukee Tribe — one indication of our enduring commitment to water quality. We also met with state officials to elevate concerns voiced by the National Academy of Sciences about challenges the state faces in meeting its pollution deadlines.

MEETING OF THE MINDS: Friends of the Everglades Science and Policy Committee expanded to include 14 experts (listed) in 2023. With backgrounds that include water management, engineering, wetlands law and policy, coastal and fish ecology and climate resilience, this impressive committee meets regularly to advise Friends on how to embrace and implement science-backed policy positions.

SUGAR REFORM NOW — A SPOTLIGHT ON INJUSTICE: Following our Last Burn Season mini-documentary series chronicling the negative health impacts of sugarcane burning on surrounding area residents, we collaborated with Stop the Burn campaign organizers to demand action from the Florida Department of Health. Friends of the Everglades also led a campaign to reform the outdated, environmentally damaging sugar industry protections in the U.S. Farm Bill. We enlisted state and national allies — from Key West to California — and took our cause to Capitol Hill, meeting with key members of Congress to push for an end to federal protections of sugar’s abuses. Our Sugar Reform Now petition drew thousands of signatures, and continues to grow, demonstrating broad support for this environmental-justice issue. The chaos in Congress has provided additional time to make our case as 2023 Farm Bill negotiations were pushed into 2024.

FIXING THE RIGGED WATER MANAGEMENT SYSTEM: Our advocacy efforts to improve water management in Lake Okeechobee reached a national audience through extensive press coverage, including in a front-page story in the New York Times. Our team continues to watchdog water-management decisions by the Army Corps of Engineers and South Florida Water Management District to ensure public health and the environment are prioritized, and to see the implementation of the new Lake Okeechobee System Operating Manual (LOSOM) to fruition.
INTRODUCTION OF THE KAREN MASHBURN ENVIRONMENTAL SCHOLARS PROGRAM

A generous multi-year gift from Jerry Mashburn enabled the creation of the Karen Mashburn Environmental Scholars Program in memory of his wife — a long-tenured member of the Friends of the Everglades Board of Directors who was instrumental in establishing and stewarding Young Friends of the Everglades. Autumn Bryan became the first recipient of the internship and scholarship, awarding $10,000 to her academic efforts. During her internship, she helped to develop Everglades Library Learning Kits, which have been shared with public libraries in three counties.

ART INITIATIVES FOR AWARENESS:

We’ve embraced the power of art to connect with our community. We sponsored the Passages exhibition created by Artists in Residents in the Everglades (AIRIE), and hosted a gathering of our Friends at AIRIE’s Nest gallery at Everglades National Park. We also were invited by Hulu to speak on a panel at the South by Southwest (SXSW) conference in Austin, Texas, about the importance of a public monument to Friends of the Everglades’ founder, Marjory Stoneman Douglas. The monument is expected to be installed at Peacock Park in Coconut Grove in 2024.

SUNSET AT BAY TREE LODGE

Friends of the Everglades’ new home base in Sewall’s Point has allowed us to deepen relationships with supporters in Martin County. These connections are especially important in communities like Stuart where residents experience direct impacts of Lake Okeechobee discharges. This event, hosted by Knight and Ann Kiplinger at their historic property along the St. Lucie River, helped Friends grow support within a community of stakeholders that has been transformed by decades of poor water management.

2023 IMPACTS

YOUNG FRIENDS OF THE EVERGLADES

YOUNG FRIENDS provides inspiring experiences to students in South Florida classrooms with Everglades Learning Exploration Kits and interactive presentations. Our free lessons have been downloaded by more than 1,200 educators, and we are on track to reach 50 classrooms by the end of 2024.

NURTURING THE NEXT GENERATION OF ADVOCATES

The Young Friends of the Everglades youth education program inspires students to protect and preserve the Everglades and learn from the legacy of Marjory Stoneman Douglas. The program reached new heights in 2023 with the addition of a full-time professional educator. Amanda Purnell joined our team as Education and Outreach Director, bringing a wealth of classroom experience and a history of engaging students in authentic, real-world experiences that empower them to create meaningful change.

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Be the Change the Everglades Needs!

YOUR DONATIONS FUEL OUR FIGHT FOR LASTING SOLUTIONS.

By donating to Friends of the Everglades, you are championing one of the planet’s most vital ecosystems. Every penny counts in our grassroots movement to safeguard this magnificent gift of nature.
Marjory’s Circle

**MARJORY’S CIRCLE — EXCEPTIONAL DEDICATION**

Marjory’s Circle members’ choice to support the work of Friends of the Everglades reflects their own commitment to environmental stewardship. Member spotlight videos, produced by Friends of the Everglades Multimedia Producer Leah Voss, feature the stories and motivations that led supporters to the giving group, revealing deeply inspiring connections to natural Florida and a shared commitment to preserve what’s left of its green and wild spaces. In 2023, members were celebrated with a guided tour of the Passages exhibition at The Nest Gallery in Everglades National Park and an artist talk with 2022 ARIE fellow Cornelius Tulloch, followed by a hike along Anhinga Trail.

Members of Marjory’s Circle contribute a minimum of $1,200 annually to help sustain the legacy of environmental hero, celebrated author and Friends of the Everglades founder, Marjory Stoneman Douglas. This support ensures a continued role in presenting the future of our River of Grass and its connected waterways. To join, visit www.everglades.org/marjorys-circle.

**“The Everglades is perfectly balanced and then here we come, humans, and we are the ones just messing it up, so we have an obligation and responsibility to try to bring back that balance and that resilience in the best way possible. I joined Marjory’s Circle because it’s an easy way to contribute.” — Marjory’s Circle member Camilla Quaresma-Sharp**

**WE INVITE YOU TO FOLLOW MARJORY’S LEAD**

Marjory Stoneman Douglas transformed the world’s view of the Everglades from swampy wasteland to national treasure, and she sounded the alarm to threats facing the ecosystem long before they were widely understood.

Today, Friends of the Everglades stands as the single best hope for creating the change Marjory envisioned through advocacy, scientific research, education and litigation. With Florida’s water quality degraded by pollutants and harmful algal blooms — and as we face added risks from sprawling development and climate change — we need bold supporters like you to continue the work Marjory started. At this critical time, become a member of our special alliance of donors: Marjory’s Circle.

**OUR PARTNERSHIP WITH VOTEWATER**

*SYNERGIZING FORCES*

The work we do at Friends of the Everglades is made stronger by a strategic alliance with our sister organization, VoteWater. VoteWater is a 501(c)4 political nonprofit, meaning it has more freedom to engage in politics. And, make no mistake, saving the Everglades requires political solutions. While Friends of the Everglades, a 501(c)3, remains focused on building public support and awareness through education, community outreach, advocacy and scientific research, VoteWater can leverage its unlimited ability to lobby policymakers and engage in direct political action. The complementary relationship has enhanced the influence and visibility of both organizations, allowing us to leverage each of our respective strengths as we work toward shared environmental goals. This includes traveling together to Tallahassee to advocate for clean-water issues as well as joint appearances to educate the public.
2023 Financial Review

**Expenditures**

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**Support**

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<tr>
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“The miracle of the light pours over the green and brown expanse of saw grass and of water, shining and slow-moving below, the grass and water that is the meaning and the central fact of the Everglades of Florida. It is a river of grass.”

**Champions Spotlight**

These organizations provided game-changing support to Friends of the Everglades in 2023.