



Audubon FLORIDA

State of the Everglades

Fall/Winter 2014

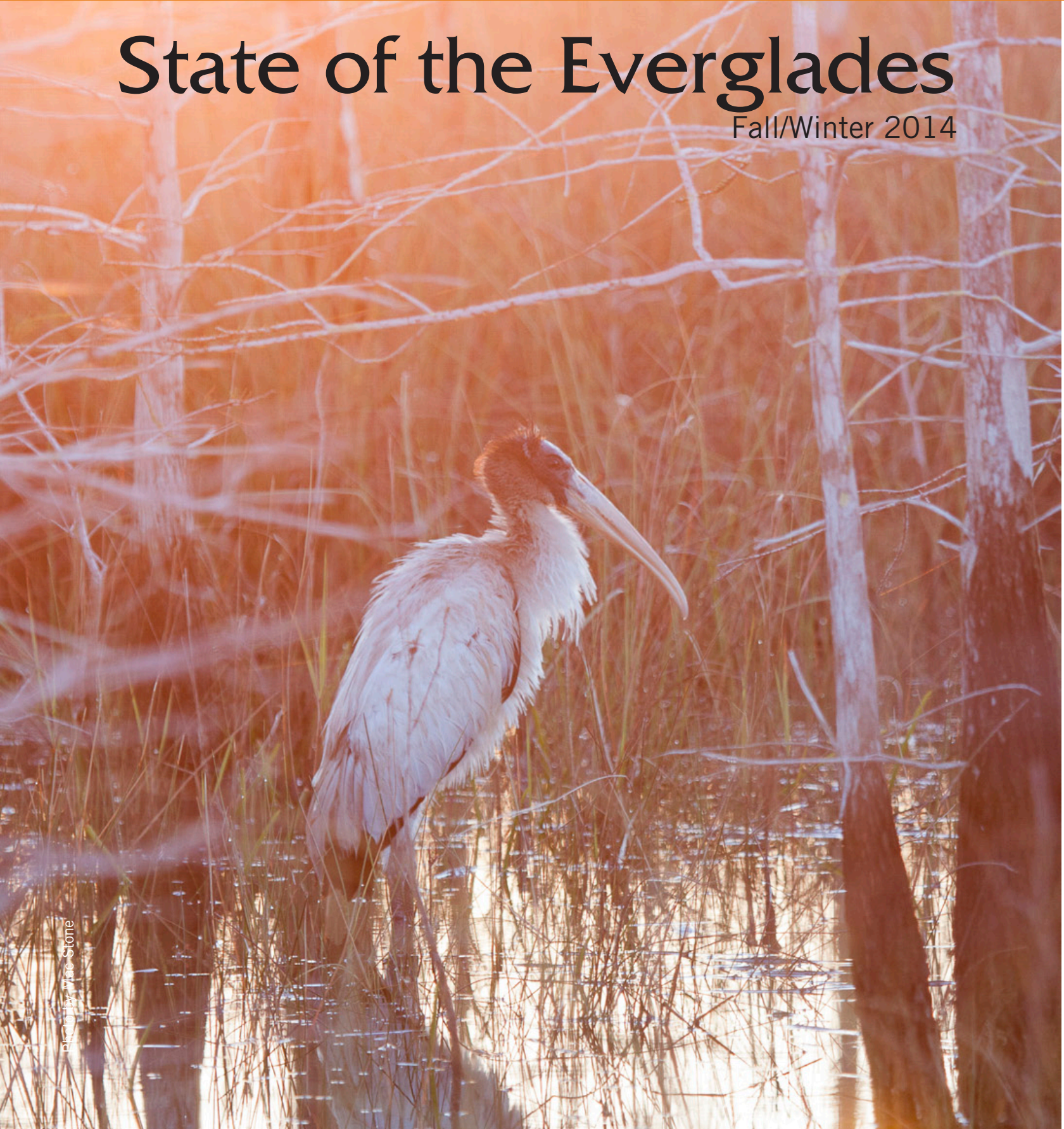


Photo by Mac Stone



Dear Friends,

Recently I had the honor of speaking at the ribbon cutting for the Picayune Strand Everglades restoration project. I told the story of an audacious project that was started so long ago no one could remember exactly whose good idea it was. And I said that the best restoration results come from the actions of many individuals and organizations and that is certainly the case with Picayune.

Here is the short version: An ill-conceived 55,000 acre subdivision south of Alligator Alley failed only after hundreds of miles of canals and roads were cut through beautiful cypress strands and pine flatwoods. Over 19,000 lots were left in the hands of nearly as many owners. For restoration to begin, the State of Florida had to purchase every parcel. Canals were filled and roads eliminated to reestablish sheet flow. Now panthers and wading birds are reclaiming the land.

I like to tell this Everglades success story because it provides more evidence that restoration works. The formula is almost simple – undo the human damage, fill the canals, get rid of the roads, let the water flow and nature shows amazing resilience. You can learn more about this incredible project on page 7 of this report.

Yes, we still have to manage the habitats. Changes wrought by humans ranging from introduced species to loss of ecosystem functions require ongoing intervention.

This issue of Audubon's State of the Everglades report updates you on some of the exciting progress that has been made over the past six months or more.

My favorite is the progress on the Central Everglades Planning Project. This plan brings together state and federal agencies in a fast-track process to design solutions that allow fresh water to flow through the Water Conservation Areas just north of Everglades National Park. These vast impoundments are too deep in some places and too shallow in others. Holding the water back has led to terrible losses of natural Everglades habitats. More information about this project can be found on page 6.

It is only with good science and strong advocacy that Everglades restoration will stay on course till completion. Audubon is the only organization with operations in every part of the Greater Everglades Ecosystem – and that, along with our solutions-oriented approach, makes us the most effective of organizations.

I thank you for your investment in Audubon Florida's work so that we can bring independent science to decision-makers in Tallahassee and Washington.

Together, we will protect and restore America's Everglades.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Eric Draper". The signature is fluid and cursive.

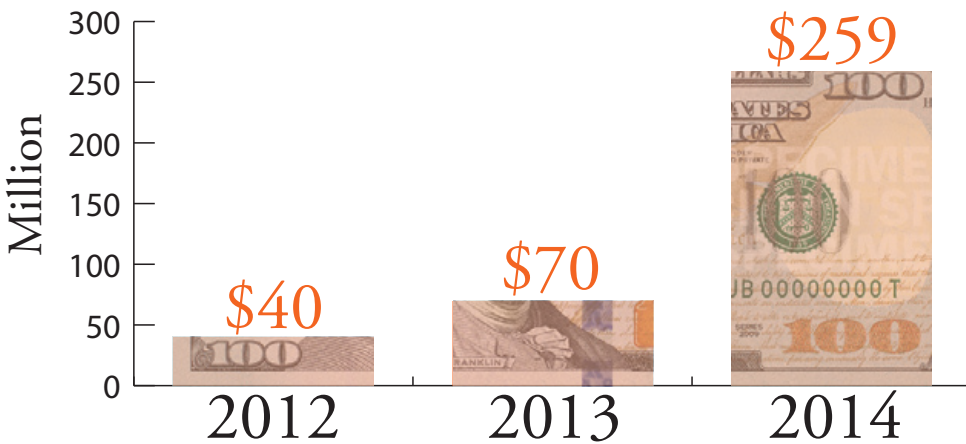
Eric Draper
Executive Director, Audubon Florida



Northern Everglades

Florida Legislature Boosts Funding for Everglades

The Florida Legislature appropriated record funding for the Indian River Lagoon and Everglades projects during the 2014 Legislative Session. The budget includes \$90 million over three years to match federal funds for the Tamiami Trail Next Steps project. This means more freshwater will flow to Everglades National Park and Florida Bay. Also included in this year's budget are projects to store and clean water throughout the Northern Everglades and estuaries. This level of funding will accelerate progress in Everglades restoration. The recent increases in Everglades funding have been impressive, from \$40 million in 2012, to \$70 million in 2013, to \$259 million in 2014.



“Our Audubon Advocates helped state funding for Everglades restoration reach a new level. Now it’s time to focus on how the funding is used to deliver ecological results.”

- Julie Hill-Gabriel
Director of Everglades Policy

Kissimmee River Restoration Back on Track

State and federal restoration partners have settled an impasse that threatened to indefinitely stall progress on the Kissimmee River Restoration Project. The dispute was over cost and land acquisition issues.

In collaboration with environmental allies, Audubon worked with Florida Congressmen Patrick Murphy and Tom Rooney to encourage the resolution to the stalemate. Further negotiations proved successful and the project is now back on track.

The restoration of the Kissimmee River is the largest restoration project of its kind in the world. In total, the project restores 40 miles of the river and floodplain and almost 25,000 acres of wetlands. Now over 85% complete, this decades-long project is finally nearing completion.

Earlier this year, Audubon organized a tour of the Kissimmee River Floodplain for 30 valuable allies with the Everglades Coalition. The benefits of the project were unmistakable. The floodplain was vibrant with life, with Everglade Snail Kites, Swallow-Tailed Kites, and Limpkins all in view.





“Osceola County is home to some of the most important wildlife habitat in Florida. It

is the headwaters of the Kissimmee River and the Everglades. Thanks to the members of Kissimmee Valley Audubon for helping us protect this vital ecosystem.”

- Charles Lee
Director of Advocacy

Photo by Julie Fletcher

Victory for the Northern Everglades

A legal challenge from Audubon was successful in compelling the Osceola County Commission to reconsider harmful changes to its comprehensive development plan. Audubon filed the challenge because of the plan’s potential impact to the Northern Everglades.

In April, the Osceola County Commission voted to erase most of the substantive policies protecting wetlands and wildlife habitat from its comprehensive plan. Audubon Florida and the Kissimmee Valley Audubon Society were unsuccessful in their objections to the changes. Audubon Florida then asked an Administrative Law Judge to review the county’s action.

In a settlement approved in August, the County Commission reversed its earlier position and restored the policies that protected Osceola County’s wetlands and wildlife habitat.

Amendment 1 Creates New Opportunities for the Everglades

In what has been called the biggest victory in history for Florida’s environment, on November 4th, voters overwhelmingly approved the Water and Land Conservation Amendment to the Florida Constitution. The amendment dedicates one-third of the documentary stamp taxes collected to protect and restore water and wildlife habitat including the Everglades. Nearly \$20 billion is projected to go into the Land Acquisition Trust Fund over the 20 year life of the measure. The Amendment language clearly stated that land could be purchased and restored in the Everglades Protection Area and the Everglades Agricultural Area.

Audubon played a significant leadership role in the Amendment 1 campaign including providing the campaign’s largest volunteer force and contributions totaling more than \$200,000. The Legislature still must appropriate the funds, but must operate within the limits of the Amendment. Audubon’s advocacy team will work hard to make sure that funds are spent to benefit the Greater Everglades Ecosystem and other natural areas, including the Lake Okeechobee watershed and coastal estuaries.



Southern Everglades

Tamiami Trail Bridge Gets \$20 Million Influx

In September, the U.S. Department of Transportation funded \$20 million through a Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) V grant for construction of the Tamiami Trail 2.6 mile bridge. With a one mile bridge already built, constructing the next bridge will put another piece of the restoration puzzle into place.

Funding from the TIGER grant, paired with the \$90 million committed by the State of Florida, will allow work to begin.

Maximizing Ecological Benefits in the Southern Everglades

After just two years in operation, the C-111 Spreader Canal Western Project is delivering more freshwater to Taylor Slough and northeast Florida Bay.

Audubon Florida field biologists monitoring the project outcomes are happy to report that as a result of this restoration project, salinity levels are improving and submerged aquatic vegetation is rebounding. These improved ecological conditions will help to increase populations of Roseate Spoonbills, crocodiles, sport fish, and other wildlife. Currently, state and federal agencies are developing operations plans to link the C-111 Spreader Canal Western Project with two other restoration projects – the C-111 South Dade Project and Modified Water Deliveries to Everglades National Park.

Audubon staff are working with these agencies to further the goal that the operational plan for these projects will increase water flows to maximize restoration results and improve habitat quality.

Pilot Test Developed to Help Biscayne National Park

The South Florida Water Management District is moving forward with a new pilot test to maximize the benefits of the completed portions of the Biscayne Bay Coastal Wetlands restoration project.

Excess water released to Biscayne Bay is being redirected to rehydrate coastal wetlands and deliver freshwater to tidal creeks in Biscayne National Park. The goal is to help restore the balance of salinity and rehydrate parched areas of coastal wetlands.

While the test is a useful interim measure, Audubon continues to advocate with our chapters and allies to complete the full Biscayne Bay Coastal Wetlands project that will permanently supply these treasured habitats with enough freshwater.



Preliminary evidence indicates that Roseate Spoonbills and other

wading birds may already be benefiting from the C-111 Spreader Canal Western Project. If the project is operated as planned, we expect to see even greater changes on the horizon.”

- Dr. Jerry Lorenz
State Director of Research



Central Everglades and Lake Okeechobee

Congress Authorizes Four New Everglades Restoration Projects

After seven long years of waiting, the Resources Reform and Development Act became law and included four Everglades restoration projects. The bill authorized the Broward County Water Preserve Areas, C-43 Caloosahatchee West Basin Storage Reservoir, C-111 Spreader Canal, and Biscayne Bay Coastal Wetlands projects.

Under the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP), projects must first be Congressionally authorized before they are eligible for federal funding. When CERP was passed in 2000, the assumption was that Congress would authorize new projects every two years in a water resources bill. Instead the bills have been passed every seven years, delaying restoration progress.

All projects authorized the last time a water resources bill passed in 2007 are under construction. Many elements are nearing completion. Work on this next set of projects must begin as soon as possible to help bring life back to the Everglades.

Members of Congress Work to Advance Central Everglades Planning Project

The Central Everglades Planning Project is Everglades restoration's most ambitious project. It seeks to reconnect the natural flow of water between Lake Okeechobee and Everglades National Park.

In May, dozens of Audubon advocates told the Governing Board of the South Florida Water Management District they support the project. The Board responded by unanimously approving its commitment as the project's local sponsor.

Now, Florida Congressman Patrick Murphy and Senator Bill Nelson have introduced legislation that would make the project eligible for federal funding. This legislation would allow the project to move forward without the uncertain timeline of waiting for the next water resources bill to pass. Other co-sponsors are Senator Marco Rubio, Representatives Corrine Brown, Kathy Castor, Curt Clawson, Ted Deutch, Lois Frankel, Joe Garcia, Alcee Hastings, David Jolly, Bill Posey and Debbie Wasserman-Schultz.



“Restoring the Central Everglades is key to reconnecting the River of Grass. Support for restoration helps wildlife and the millions of Floridians who rely on the Everglades for clean drinking water.”

- Lida Rodriguez-Taseff
Audubon Florida Board Member and
Chair of the Everglades
Sustainability Committee



Western Everglades

First Phase of Picayune Strand Restoration is Complete

In October, Audubon Florida and restoration partners celebrated the completion of the first federal construction portion of the Picayune Strand project. Known as the Merritt Canal and Pump Station, the project included the plugging of 13.5 miles of canals, the construction of an 810-cubic feet per second pump station, and the removal of 95 miles of roads. Eric Draper, Audubon Florida's Executive Director, spoke during the ribbon cutting ceremony and touted the project as an early success story of Everglades restoration.

The new infrastructure will take former canal water and spread it out as natural sheet-flow. This will restore thousands of acres of drained wetlands and help recover Everglades wildlife and habitat.

The Picayune Strand Restoration Project encompasses 55,000 acres originally slated to become the largest subdivision in the world – the South Golden Gate Estates. In a quintessential Florida “swampland scam,” developers abandoned the project in the 1970s, leaving a large portion of southwest Florida's wetlands in ruin. The State of Florida had to acquire more than 19,000 individual properties before this important restoration project could begin.

Using Science to Fight Back Against Wetland Losses

Even as Everglades restoration efforts work to restore wetland habitats, thousands of acres of wetlands are being lost to development. Today over half of wetlands nationwide have been destroyed. New data from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) indicate that as much as two acres of coastal wetlands are now destroyed for each acre restored in the Everglades, Chesapeake Bay, Mississippi River, Great Lakes, and other ecosystems.

Federal and state agencies are revising the regulations that apply to wetlands. This provides an important opportunity to clarify which wetlands must be preserved and what must be done to compensate for those that are lost.

To engage in this wetland regulatory reform process, researchers at Audubon's Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary have charted the impact of local wetland losses on birds and other wildlife, especially the imperiled Wood Stork. Audubon is using this science to develop effective protection strategies and promote the value of wetlands for Florida's environment and economy. Stemming the accelerating trend of wetland destruction is vital to assure Everglades restoration success.



“I've been working on the Picayune Strand Restoration Project

since I first came to Florida in 1992. Seeing this first phase cross the finish line is a big moment – not just for me – but for Wood Storks, Florida panthers, and other important wildlife of southwest Florida.”

- Brad Cornell
South West Florida
Policy Associate



Congressman Patrick Murphy and the Everglades Foundation Honored at the 2014 Audubon Assembly



Audubon's Julie Hill-Gabriel presents the 2014 Champion of the Everglades Award to Rep. Patrick Murphy.

To honor his outstanding efforts on behalf of the Greater Everglades Ecosystem, Audubon Florida honored Congressman Patrick Murphy as the 2014 Champion of the Everglades. The award was presented at the annual Audubon Assembly in Hutchinson Island, Florida.

In just his first term, Congressman Murphy introduced legislation to advance the Central Everglades Planning Project, convened a summit that brought together Congressional leadership with advocates for the St. Lucie River, and worked with state and federal officials to get Kissimmee River Restoration back on track. When presented the award at the annual Audubon Assembly, the crowd greeted Murphy with a standing ovation.

Audubon Florida also honored the Everglades Foundation as the recipient of the 2014 Theodore Roosevelt Award in celebration of the Foundation's 20 years of successfully advocating for America's Everglades. This award is given for showing resilience, resolve and courage on behalf of Florida's environment. The Everglades Foundation has been a strong ally in the fight to protect the River of Grass, funding Audubon Florida policy work, and advocating tirelessly for important restoration efforts like the Central Everglades Planning Project.

Recently, the Foundation announced that it will help fund the environmental assessment of a project in Cape Sable to help speed the restoration of its marshes and help improve conditions in Florida Bay.

Mac Stone Displays Photography at Frost Museum of Science

In October, former Audubon Everglades Science Center field staff Mac Stone published his first book, *The Everglades: America's Wetland*. To celebrate the release, the Patricia and Philip Frost Museum of Science in Miami will display forty of Stone's striking photographs through the end of 2014. Mac's stunning images celebrate the innumerable facets of this ecological marvel while speaking to the importance of protecting this irreplaceable wetland ecosystem.

Your next opportunity to view Mac's prints will be at Audubon's Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary, beginning in January 2015.



Audubon's Eric Draper presents the 2014 Theodore Roosevelt Award to Nathaniel Reed of the Everglades Foundation.



Audubon Florida's Everglades Conservation Team:

Eric Draper, Executive Director
Julie Hill-Gabriel, Director of Everglades Policy
Charles Lee, Director of Advocacy
Dr. Jerry Lorenz, State Director of Research
Dr. Paul Gray, Northern Everglades Science Coordinator

Peter Frezza, Everglades Research Manager
Jane Graham, Everglades Policy Manager
Brad Cornell, Southwest Florida Policy Associate
Dr. Tabitha Cale, Everglades Policy Associate
Jonathan Webber, Communication Manager

Join Audubon's Mission to Restore the Greater Everglades Ecosystem



Everglades Policy Office
4500 Biscayne Blvd, #205, Miami, FL 33137
(305) 371-6399

To donate, please visit www.GivetoAudubonFlorida.org and click on Everglades.