



Rita Pritchett, District 1 Commissioner

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BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

District Engineer
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
Jacksonville District
Attn: CESAJ-PM
P.O. Box 4970
Jacksonville, FL 32232-0019

RE: Section 206 request to determine the feasibility of an ecosystem restoration project where Highway 528 crosses the Banana River portion of the Indian River Lagoon in Brevard County, FL

Dear Sir:

This letter is to request that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Jacksonville District, conduct a study under Section 206 of the Water Resources Development Act of 1996, as amended, to determine the feasibility of an ecosystem restoration project where the earthen causeway supporting Highway 528 crosses the Banana River segment of the Indian River Lagoon in Brevard County, Florida.

The Indian River Lagoon, designated by Congress as an estuary of national significance, extends along 40% of Florida's east coast. Its historically high biological diversity and abundance includes 4,300 species, many of economic value or federally listed as threatened or endangered species. For the last decade, harmful algal blooms have limited light penetration to the shallow seagrass beds and decimated this critical habitat for marine life. In 2020 and 2021, the paucity of surviving seagrass led to mass starvation of hundreds of manatees in Brevard County, the hub of the east coast manatee population, a federally listed threatened species.

Slow flow and long residence/retention times makes certain segments of this national estuary more vulnerable to nutrient pollution and harmful algal blooms. In particular, the Banana River, and especially the northernmost compartment of the Banana River, has experienced the most dramatic loss of seagrass areal extent. Several modeling efforts indicate that causeways across the Banana River contribute to compartmentalization, restricting the exchange of nutrient rich waters in the northern end of the Banana River with better quality water to the south.

Brevard County requests that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Jacksonville District, undertakes an investigation of the extent to which the causeway supporting Highway 528 across the Banana River segment of the Indian River Lagoon contributes to ongoing water quality issues, associated harmful algae blooms, consequential seagrass losses, and whether removal or modification of the causeway could be a significant part of ecosystem restoration, benefitting seagrass, fish and marine life. Brevard County hereby requests an investigation and expresses our willingness to serve as the study sponsor.

This correspondence is NOT being sent on behalf of the Brevard County Board of County Commissioners. Any views, opinions or other matters expressed or represented in this correspondence are my own.

Brevard County understands that the first \$100,000 of the initial investigations would be Federally financed and feasibility study costs in excess of \$100,000 would be cost shared 50%-50%. Further we understand that the non-federal cost share for project design and construction is 35%, if a feasible plan is identified. The sponsor's cost share may include cash, work in-kind, or a combination.

If studies indicate a viable solution, our objective will be to proceed with construction. We are also aware that the Corps' and local sponsor's responsibilities will be delineated in the Project Partnership Agreement, which both parties will execute before construction commences.

If you need additional information, please contact Virginia Barker, Natural Resources Management Department Director at 321-350-8411 or virginia.barker@brevardfl.gov.

Sincerely,



Rita Pritchett, Chair
Brevard County Board of County Commissioners

As approved by the Board on September 14, 2021