

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0926

March 11, 2013

Mimi A. Drew
Governor's Representative to the RESTORE Council
Florida Department of Environmental Protection
3900 Commonwealth Boulevard M.S. 49
Tallahassee, Florida 32399

Ms. Drew,

I write this morning in regards to the crucial importance of improving water quality and nearshore waters through a canal restoration program to be implemented throughout the Florida Keys. It is my understanding that Monroe County will be submitting a request for Resources and Ecosystems Sustainability, Tourist Opportunity and Revived Economics (RESTORE) of the Gulf Coast Act funds for this very purpose. I encourage you to take a close look at this essential project, and consider carefully any RESTORE Act funds which may be available to enable it.

The 500 plus canals running throughout Monroe County were built long before the strict water quality standards (by which we operate today) were implemented. According to evaluations released by the Environmental Protection Agency, the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, many of these canals suffer from extreme impairment of water quality. Studies have found that septic tanks, cesspits, stormwater runoff, accumulation of seagrass and other organics, as well as the physical construction of the canals themselves (long, deep, dead-ended) continue to cause water quality impairment.

The Florida Keys boasts one of the most unique National Marine Sanctuaries in the Country, as well as the only living coral reef in the Continental US. The canals discharge into these protected waters. Improvement of the canal water quality is thus essential to the health and prosperity of these very unique ecosystems. The restoration of such canals is vital to the preservation of one of our greatest State and National treasures. In addition, improving the water quality in these canals would make them swimmable once again, reduce the health risks inherent to anyone now using them, improve property values, and help improve nearshore water quality and fisheries.

Monroe County is aware of these issues. County Officials have presented a detailed and vetted project to address them, as well as supplemental local funding. With the remainder of necessary resources, I have no doubt as to the valuable difference this project could make in the quality of water, and the health of our overall environment, here in Monroe County. I urge you to consider this when reviewing Monroe County's relevant submission for funding.

Sincerely,



Joe Garcia
Member of Congress