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September 29, 2015

On behalf of the Caloosahatchee River Citizens' Association, we endorse the proposed submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV) restoration projects and agree to participate in the Caloosahatchee River Restoration Consortium.

The Caloosahatchee River Restoration Consortium is a NGO, public, academic and private partnership that includes the Caloosahatchee River Citizens Association ("RiverWatch"), Florida Gulf Coast University, University of Florida, the City of Fort Myers, Johnson Engineering Inc. Sea & Shorline LLC with start-up funding from Lee County and the South Florida Water Management District. **Our goal is to restore 2000-acres of submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV)** (i.e. tape grass, *Vallisneria americana*) in the Caloosahatchee River which has seen virtually all tape grass beds decimated in the last two decades.

Sport fishing, eco-tourism, hospitality and the resort industry along with related tourism jobs are expected to be preserved as a result of this project. Eco-tourism is one of our River's largest industries with thousands of jobs directly dependent on the health of the aquatic habitat in the Caloosahatchee Estuary, which lies at the center of the Charlotte Harbor National Estuary. The proposed Tape Grass renewal project will improve water quality and restore fish and wildlife habitats within several National Wildlife Refuges and our Aquatic Preserves.

The ecosystem services provided through this project are the renewal of our living shoreline habitat in the upper estuary, creating fisheries, nursery and migratory waterfowl foraging habitats, and supporting commercial fisheries for blue crabs and bait shrimp. Tape grass beds also improve water quality through nutrient uptake, binding and stabilizing sediments, wave attenuation and production of oxygen through photosynthesis. Tape grass beds are known to provide habitat for at least 44 species of fishes as well as many crustaceans, mollusks and other macroinvertebrates.

Public education and outreach will be a key element of this project to educate boaters, fishermen, tourists, and the general public about the importance of restoring SAV beds in the Caloosahatchee River. We anticipate an active role in this portion of the partnership.

Sincerely,

Caloosahatchee River Citizens Association
Board of Directors

Approved by the Board, August 2015