

# White House changes course, backs push for \$200 million in Everglades funding

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After receiving letters and prodding by Florida's state and federal lawmakers, President Donald Trump changed course Monday, announcing his support of a \$200 million push to fund projects aimed at

restoring Florida's Everglades via Twitter.

"Congress needs to help us complete the world's largest intergovernmental watershed restoration project ASAP! Good for Florida and good for the environment," he tweeted.

The cost-share project was originally signed by former President Bill Clinton and former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush. It was expected to take 20 years and cost \$8.7 billion. It was supposed to map out a way to re-plumb the Everglades with a system of pumps, levees, canals and wells that would help its flow mimic its original one.

Last year Congress appropriated close to \$139 million for the project.

In March, Trump's 2020 [budget proposal](#) slashed spending by the Army Corps of Engineers by 31 percent and failed to include money for an Everglades reservoir to reduce polluted water from being flushed from Lake Okeechobee to coastal estuaries.

The proposal earmarked just \$63 million to help restore Florida's wetlands, and included projects not part of Everglades restoration—completing two small reservoirs east and west of Lake Okeechobee and restoring bends in the Kissimmee River.

It was far short of the \$200 million requested by Gov. Ron DeSantis and Florida lawmakers for Everglades work and didn't include a 17,000-acre reservoir on sugar fields south of the lake to help reduce the polluted runoff that contributed to last summer's algae blooms and red tide that choked Florida's coasts and waterways.

DeSantis made Everglades restoration a campaign promise and said the environment was his No. 1 priority. The efforts showed in the state budget, which included about \$682 million for environmental needs.

The Everglades [project](#) is also a priority of DeSantis' newly appointed South Florida Water Management District governing board, which sent a letter to the entire Florida congressional delegation encouraging members to push for \$200 million in Everglades restoration funding.

Trump's tweet came hours after U.S. Sen. Marco Rubio, R-Fla., had tweeted the letter and also followed a letter sent by Rubio, DeSantis and Sen. Rick Scott, R-Fla., in February urging Trump to include the funding in his budget request to Congress.

"I've consistently fought for the federal government to match the state's investment," Scott said in a statement Monday. "I applaud President Trump for working with the Florida delegation to commit to fight for \$200 million in federal funding for Everglades restoration projects this year."

Sean Cooley, a spokesman for the South Florida Water Management District, said the board is "elated" by the president's apparent commitment.

"We are working hard to accelerate projects as we can, but of course, that depends on federal and on state funding," he said "The state has been a generous provider, but the [federal government](#) needs to step it up. This is an enlightening and wonderful move."

Kimberly Mitchell, executive director of West Palm Beach nonprofit Everglades Trust, also said she was pleasantly surprised by the Trump tweet. She said, however, that she hopes the \$200 million funding not only comes through but stays consistent.

Frank Jackalone, director of Sierra Club Florida, was more skeptical of the commitment and wondered which projects Trump means for the \$200 million to fund. The Sierra Club doesn't support certain

"restoration projects" such as a reservoir south of the lake it deems too shallow.

He said he'd believe in a large financial commitment if he heard it from the Army Corps itself.

The Corps could not be reached for comment Monday night.

"I find it difficult to trust any commitment that Trump is making on Twitter. Does he really have the authority to commit \$200 million?" Jackalone asked Monday night. "Some people have been bugging Trump to say something about Everglades. But is it real? I doubt it."

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