DONNA E. SHALALA
27TH DISTRICT, FLORIDA

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON RULES

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND LABOR

SUBCOMMITTEE ON HEALTH, EMPLOYMENT, LABOR AND PENSIONS

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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

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Environmental Protection Agency
Region 4—Water Division, OWSPB
Atlanta Federal Center
61 Forsyth Street, SW
Atlanta, GA 30303

Attn. Kelly Laycock
Via email: 404Assumption-FL@epa.gov

To Whom It May Concern:

As representative for Florida's 27th Congressional District, I write in opposition to the Florida Department of Environmental Protection's (FDEP) efforts to assume Clean Water Act Section 404 dredge and fill permitting authority from the Army Corps of Engineers.

Florida's environment generates billions of dollars for our state and local economies. Our water resources deserve the highest level of scrutiny and protection. Unfortunately, the FDEP is not well-equipped or ready to assume these duties.

Currently, the FDEP is barely meeting its existing regulatory demands and remains dangerously underfunded. The assumption of dredge and fill permitting authority would add immense new regulatory burdens for FDEP with no guarantee of additional federal funding to support these duties. Ultimately, this assumption of permitting authority is likely to stretch FDEP to the point where it will be unable to fulfill its current duties or its new responsibilities.

This shift in authority will impact also how our waterways are used and developed. This assumption will fast-track development permits for the many special interests that want to exploit the already degraded wetlands throughout the state and use public water resources for private profit. We've seen what happens when we allow special interests to dictate our approach to wetland development: Urban Development Boundaries in South Florida have already been pushed back indiscriminately, and as a result, half of the Everglades has been paved over. Lake Okeechobee and the adjacent Caloosahatchee and St. Lucie Rivers are inundated in manure and fertilizer run-off, threatening not only the water quality in Central Florida but also the local economies downstream. Irresponsible coastal development and a reckless push for urbanization has led to harmful algal blooms that prove dangerous not only to humans but also deadly to aquatic flora and fauna of coastal and marine ecosystems. Special interests should not dictate our use of water resources.

Finally, I am disappointed that much of my constituency has been carved out of this conversation. I am concerned that public involvement has been far too limited for a decision of this magnitude. Floridians are passionate about weighing in decisions that impact our environment, and they deserve the opportunity to have their voices heard.

I urge you to deny the FDEP's application package for assumption of Clean Water Act Section 404 authority in order to ensure that our wetlands and water resources retain the critical federal protections and oversight that they so desperately need.

Sincerely,

Donna E. Shalala
Member of Congress