

## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Governing Board Members

**FROM:** Deena M. Reppen, Deputy Executive Director, Regulatory and Public Affairs

**DATE:** November 10, 2010

**SUBJECT:** Lake Okeechobee Regional Initiative

### **Background**

In 2008, as due diligence for the acquisition of land from the United States Sugar Corporation for the purposes of Everglades Restoration, the District's Governing Board agreed to provide funding to support activities associated with establishing an economic diversification strategy for the Glades Communities. As part of that effort, the District contracted with the Collins Center for Public Policy to initiate and coordinate the Lake Okeechobee Regional Initiative (LORI). The purpose of LORI is to bring together the communities of western Palm Beach County and eastern Hendry and Glades counties to develop effective communication and establish economic priorities for the region.

The objective of LORI is to assist the affected stakeholders along the south rim of Lake Okeechobee to develop and communicate a regional economic diversification plan for long term sustainability of the region. To do so, the Collins Center has brought together public and private stakeholders within the region to evaluate existing resources and establish strategies to foster the economic diversification of the region.

To support the development of this regional economic initiative, the District's Governing Board approved \$150,000 in ad valorem funds for the Collins Center in FY-2010. Thus far, the Collins Center has convened a steering committee for economic diversification, established a regional framework for economic diversification, identified a regional leadership group to investigate implementation of regional infrastructure, completed a draft economic diversification plan, developed a LORI website, established a tourism subcommittee and produced a regional branding tourism video and brochure.

This amendment to the existing contract with the Collins Center will extend the term for one year and authorize an additional \$100,000 in ad valorem funding to further the LORI objectives.

### **How this helps meet the District's 10-year Strategic Plan:**

This initiative helps the Regulatory and Public Affairs Resource Area implement its strategic goals for outreach and intergovernmental relations by sustaining the relationships the District has with local Governments in the Glades Communities. The continued support for LORI will help convey the District's mission to the community and promote our on-going activities within the region.

**Funding Source:** District General ad valorem funds

### **This Board item impacts what areas of the District, both resources areas and geography:**

The LORI will benefit the southern Lake Okeechobee region located in Hendry, Glades, and Palm Beach Counties. Staff from Regulatory and Public Affairs will oversee the initiative in cooperation with the Procurement Department, Finance and Administration Department and Office of Counsel.

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**What concerns could this Board item raise?**

None identified.

**Why should the Governing Board approve this item?**

This project supports the Governing Board's commitment to assist the Glades Communities with the development of an economic diversification strategy for the region and promotes ecotourism associated with Lake Okeechobee.

**Staff Contact** - Phil Flood, Lower West Coast Service Center Director, ext. 7768.