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Governor Jeb Bush
The Capitol
Tallahassee, FL 32399

March 3, 2005

Dear Governor Bush,

We are writing to convey to you our concerns for the future of Florida's coastal resources. Specifically, we believe Florida's current coastal management policies are not adequately protecting some of Florida's most important natural features—its beaches, dunes and near-shore reefs. We are writing, therefore, to urge you and the leaders of the Florida Legislature and relevant state agencies to initiate a comprehensive reassessment of Florida's coastal management policies.

Over the past few months, representatives of our organizations have met with your staff, as well as legislative and agency leaders, to discuss these issues. We have found consistent support for a coastal policy reassessment. As you no doubt are aware, it has been 20 years since the Florida Legislature adopted the current policies designed to protect the state's coastal resources. These policies were enacted for the purpose of protecting our beaches and dunes, while assuring the safety and reasonable use of private coastal property. Unfortunately, as we continue to rapidly develop the shoreline, our beaches have been put at increasing risk. It is time for Florida to develop creative new regulatory and planning policies that lessen developmental pressures on critically eroding shorelines, and we need to explore and institute new approaches for dealing with erosion and sea level rise on developed beaches.

In 1986, the current Coastal Construction Control Line (CCCL) program established a jurisdictional zone on the coast. Within that zone, homes must be built to withstand storms and are supposed to be set back from the eroding shoreline in order to protect the beaches, dunes and surf zone. The program has succeeded in ensuring that new construction is better built. However, the CCCL program has failed to protect vulnerable beaches and dunes for future Floridians by failing to control unwise coastal development on eroding shorelines. Since 1986, over half of the almost 5,000 new homes, hotels and condominiums permitted under the CCCL program now stand on shorelines designated by the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) as "critically eroding." As a result of state coastal management policies, these vulnerable structures eventually will need coastal armoring or the state will need to artificially maintain sand in front of the structures through never-ending beach nourishment programs. Such risky and short-sighted development is encouraged by loopholes in the CCCL program that regularly allow new or rebuilt structures to be sited seaward to the existing line of construction on the coastline.

The Department of Community Affairs and DEP should work together to design policies that will lessen development pressures on frontal dunes of eroding shorelines, while balancing the need for coastal resource protection with economic growth in the coastal zone.

Floridians would be well served to have options other than beach nourishment and coastal armoring as the primary tools available for dealing with risky coastal development, coastal erosion and beach loss. We ask you to initiate a study that will bring together state agency staff, coastal policy leaders, coastal erosion experts, biologists, economists and other outside experts to study the effectiveness of Florida's coastal management policies in protecting the beach/dune system. As part of this reevaluation process, the group should propose policy changes that will ensure the long-term protection of these coastal resources. The statewide assessment should answer questions such as: Is the CCCL program protecting the beach/dune resources as originally intended? Is Florida adequately addressing the underlying causes of coastal erosion? Do current coastal policies supporting beach renourishment and coastal redevelopment encourage risky shoreline development? What are the long-term environmental impacts of high density development on eroding beaches? Are statutory changes needed in the CCCL program to enforce coastal setbacks? Have we assessed the long-term costs and benefits of coastal armoring and perpetual beach renourishment projects? Is it time to begin exploring "retreat" in the most vulnerable areas? If so, what are the creative, non-confrontational methods available for bringing vulnerable beachfront property into public ownership? Toward that end, policies could support the landward relocation of destroyed or condemned coastal buildings and a priority coastal land acquisition program.

The weaknesses in Florida's coastal policies have been highlighted by the recent season of devastating hurricanes. Now is the time to act decisively. Unless we are able to discuss and answer the hard questions associated with ensuring the long-term protection of our coastal resources, we will fail future generations of Floridians. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

David Godfrey

Eric Draper

Charles Pattison

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cc: Senator Tom Lee, Senate President
Representative Allan Bense, Speaker
Senator Paula Dockery
Representative Donna Clarke
Colleen Castille, FDEP
Ken Haddad, FWCC
Thaddeus Cohen, DCA