



JANET C. LONG
CHAIR

PINELLAS COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

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June 22, 2017

Office of Governor Rick Scott
State of Florida
The Capitol
400 S. Monroe St.
Tallahassee, FL 32399

Dear Governor Scott:

The Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners wishes to express our deep concern over the recent veto of \$920,973 in State funding for the Anclote River dredging project. This project is a clear example of cooperation and partnership at all levels of Government, who recognize the tremendous value the Anclote River provides to the local economy and the overall environmental health of the Pinellas County Aquatic Preserve. The Board worked closely with the City of Tarpon Springs, the Army Corps of Engineers, and members of our Federal and State Delegation to move this project forward. The Board also set aside \$300,000 in local funds to initiate the Design and Engineering phase of the project.

The project was established to improve the conditions within the Anclote River navigation channel and enhance the usability of the public waterway system by providing increased access for vessels that need to reach businesses along the waterway. The river was last dredged in the 1990's, and since that time it has experienced a significant buildup of silt along the riverbed. This has prevented many boat operators from navigating the river and offloading their goods at the Historic Sponge Docks of Tarpon Springs. Furthermore, both larger commercial vessels and recreational boaters have been actively avoiding the area for fear of running aground and causing damage to their boats.

In a recent example, a local boat manufacturer successfully built a state-funded 78-foot research vessel for the Florida Institute of Oceanography program that is hosted at the University of South Florida St. Petersburg's campus. While the manufacturer built the boat onsite, they were unable to install the ballasts due to shoaling in the channels. Even at high tide, transport required the use of a tugboat to reach St. Petersburg from Tarpon Springs. The Anclote Federal Channel is supposed to serve as a critical public safety and disaster preparation point for the region, however, these shallow conditions mean that the port is not operable as a harbor of safe refuge, putting vessels and crew members at risk in heavy seas or emergency situations. As you can imagine, this severely impacts commerce and job prospects in the Tampa Bay area and creates several public safety hazards.

The Board received the transmittal memo that accompanied the veto, which explained that your office determined that the Anclote River Project was among a list of water projects that did not have a demonstrable improvement or a return on investment statewide. While there were numerous projects around the state which sought funding, the Board believes that dredging the Anclote River would provide

the State a significant return on investment due to the environmental, economic, and public safety benefits that will result from this project.

We respectfully ask that your office consider this a funding priority during the next legislative session, or consider funding it as part of the newly created Florida Job Growth Grant Fund. This project is not only needed for the health and vitality of the river, but also for the economy in the Tarpon Springs and Tampa Bay community. As the City of Tarpon Springs has pointed out to your office, dredging the river would align with the Governor's "Fighting for Florida's Future" budget priorities by supporting more than 50 marine-related businesses and more than 100 tourism-related businesses, all of which support more than \$252 million annually in economic activity in the marine commerce, shipping, and tourism industries. Combined, these local businesses support nearly 2,500 jobs, which equates to 21% of the workforce in the City.

The Board looks forward to working closely with your office as well as our State Delegation to present this project for appropriations during the next legislative session.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Janet C. Long". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "L".

Janet C. Long
Chair, Pinellas County Commission

Cc: Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners
Mark S. Woodard, County Administrator
Pinellas County Federal Delegation Members
Pinellas County State Delegation Members
Chris Alahouzos, Mayor of Tarpon Springs
Mark LeCouris, City Manager of Tarpon Springs