



## THE KEY LARGO WASTEWATER TREATMENT DISTRICT

### **History:**

The Key Largo Wastewater Treatment District (KLWTD) serves Key Largo, an unincorporated area of Monroe County, the Florida Keys. In 1999, the state required the communities of the Florida Keys to install central sewer systems. The citizens of Key Largo knew it had to be done. Our water quality was declining and our livelihoods along with it. In the Keys, the environment and the economy are inextricably linked. We also knew that without outside help it would be a tremendous financial hardship. It was a Catch 22. We couldn't afford to do the project, but we couldn't afford not to do it either. The citizens of Key Largo decided that going forward was the right thing to do. An independent special district was formed to complete the task.

### **Results:**

Our wastewater project was mostly complete by the original 2010 deadline. About 85% of our customers are tied in, and we are seeing improvements in water quality. Beach sampling shows a 75% decline in fecal bacteria at John Pennekamp State Park, the largest beach area in Key Largo. Water quality sampling shows a decline in Total Nitrogen, a harmful nutrient, from 19 mg/L to under 8 mg/L. Our wastewater treatment plant has won numerous awards, including the Florida Rural Water Association's Medium Wastewater System of the Year in 2013 and 2014; and the 2013 Plant Operations Excellence Award for the FDEP's South District.

### **Financially Responsible:**

Not only have the citizens of Key Largo stepped up to complete the project, but they've done so as cost-effectively as they possibly can. We saved about 15-20% by breaking up the project into smaller segments, which allowed small local contractors to bid. We chose technologies that are cost effective to build and operate. We entered into a mutually beneficial cost-sharing agreement with our neighbor, the Village of Islamorada. Overall, our original project came in \$3 million under budget.



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### **Financial Impact:**

Unfortunately, even with all those efforts our citizens still bear a disproportionate share of the cost of the project. A typical single family home in Key Largo will pay over \$1,800 more than a single family home in another unincorporated area. Local businesses are also saddled with higher sewer-related expenses. The total cost to this tiny community of 14,000 is about \$85 million, including borrowing costs to date. Our businesses and residents need financial relief.

### **State Money:**

Last year KLWTD received \$17 million from the state. We already had \$8.5 million in projects budgeted. Getting \$17 million from the state meant that we didn't have to borrow more. It also meant that we could go forward with other worthwhile projects, including an innovative vacuum pit monitoring system that will increase the reliability and cost-effectiveness of our system.

### **An Unfilled Need:**

While the \$17 million for new projects is greatly appreciated and will be put to good use, our customers continue to struggle with the financial burden of the sewer project. It is true that government projects create jobs, but so do private businesses. Many local businesses have approached KLWTD to let us know that they are struggling with the costs related to the sewer system: the assessment, the monthly bill, and tie-in costs. KLWTD has done all we can do to keep costs down so that we can keep rates and assessments as low as possible for our customers. We need the state to continue to fund the Mayfield Grant and allow it to be used for both of its original purposes: financing and refinancing sewer projects in the Florida Keys.

### **What Could Relief Mean to our Customers?:**

KLWTD has \$12.5 million coming in the next installment of the Mayfield Grant. With \$12.5 million, we can potentially pass on over \$850,000 per year to our customers. That is about \$60 per single family home per year. It is over \$15,000 per year for our largest customer.