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Floor Statement by Senator Edmund S. Muskie announcing
cosponsorship of S. 2465, a bill to establish the
Everglades-Big Cypress National Recreation Area in
Florida

Mr. President, anyone who has had the opportunity to wander among the tree islands and cypress swamp forests of the Everglades cannot help but come away with an indelible image of the extraordinary beauty and intricacy of this landscape. What is less obvious to the casual wanderer is the way in which the land and water systems of south Florida are interrelated and interdependent.

Nearly two years ago, in the Committee on Public Works, we examined the impact of the Central and Southern Florida flood control project upon the Everglades Parks. We were concerned that the public policy on water use in this area might have an irreversible impact upon the Parks. We concluded that we must protect the Everglades and adjoining areas by all means available to us.

In particular, the Big Cypress watershed plays an irreplaceable role in capturing and transferring water and nutrients to the lower portions of the Everglades, literally supplying life blood for these swamps and marshes, and their associated animal life. The nutrients that flow through this water system eventually feed the large masses of shrimp that gather in the estuaries of 10,000 Islands National Park, and which are later harvested by shrimpers off the Dry Tortugas. The fresh water helps maintain a very sensitive balance in the seasonal fluctuation of water levels in the Everglades; it prevents salt water intrusion into the fresh water embayments and

provides a source of water to which populations of saw grass deer and Florida alligators respond in turn as water levels follow their natural course of rise and fall.

Big Cypress is the area where Indians have lived, hunted, fished and trapped for centuries, and where currently thousands of Floridians enjoy a contact with nature. Here, too, more than a dozen kinds of endangered species make their home, from the Florida panther and Everglades mink to the Southern Bald Eagle and Roseate Spoonbill. This area must be protected from channelization and water diversion; at the same time, it could serve as a source of inspiration and recreation to hikers, hunters, and children, and as a continued home for its earliest settlers, the Miccosukee and Seminole Indians. The Chiles-Jackson bill, S. 2465, introduced on August 6th, would accomplish just such a purpose. By creating the Everglades-Big Cypress National Recreation Area, it would at once preserve the watershed which serves the Everglades, protect the wildlife for observation or harvest, and maintain a fresh water flow which is invaluable for the protection of future fresh water supplies in south and southwest Florida. It is thus with a sense of both conviction and urgency that I announce today my cosponsorship of this bill, and urge my colleagues to give the item their close attention.