



Proposed Everglades Headwaters National Wildlife Refuge and Conservation Area  
Compilation of Public Scoping Comments - as of 2.3.2011

Comments were submitted in a variety of ways (e.g., at a public scoping meeting and by mail and email) and are grouped together by topic, as listed.

- General/Other Comments
- Wildlife and Habitat
- Resource Protection
- Recreation
- Administration

Please note, the deadline for public scoping comments is February 28, 2011. This list of comments will continue to be updated as comments are received.

### General/Other Comments

#### General

- It is our opinion that if you are serious about changing the future for the Everglades we need to start by changing the way governments and agencies are allowed to circumvent the system and manipulate the law to pollute the headwaters (Alligator Lake Chain). Politicians and staff in Osceola County destroyed a stormwater improvement project paid for totally with private money. (This was) A project that was to be used to educate members of the National Teen Angler Program. As a property owner, I would be interested in participating if everyone was willing to protect the resources equally, politicians and “their staff”, as well as the citizens.
- There is zero downside to this proposal, so please make it happen.
- How can we make FWS get out of our lives?
- How many people would/would not like the federal government to take over this area?
- Isn't the 1,000s of acres already in the Everglades National Forest enough?
- Question: For those communities inside the study area boundary, how do you see the vision of this proposal being compatible with planned municipal growth?
  - Answer: We are in the process of coordinating with the local governments and the regional planning councils.
- This is government sprawl.
- Cattle farming in Polk County is different; cows roam off the property of the farmers.
- I'm pro wildlife. But, I hear schmoozing and “maybe” and “I don't know”. It seems you always do all or nothing.
- You can't buy land and make money right now.
- This federal expenditure of tax dollars has no benefit for non-landowners.
- This whole thing is about development versus protection. Urban sprawl is bad for hunting.
- Question: Will this impact road projects that are currently planned?
  - Answer: No. The Service will work with State, county, and regional planning offices to integrate the proposed refuge within planned road projects.
- Generally this is a good idea. I like to see wildlife.
- We've seen what development does and I don't like what it did.
- Question: How do we know that these concerns and comments go further than this room (1.26.2011 meeting at the Kissimmee Civic Center)?
  - Answer: We will use the comments and concerns to help us develop and evaluate the alternatives and the proposal. We will make the comments available on the web and to requesters.
- It is apparent that this group (at the 1.26.2011 meeting at the Kissimmee Civic Center) doesn't want this proposal. Are you going to do this regardless of the majority of this group?
- How can we work together without the government?

- It was a huge mistake to not break up into the smaller groups as planned (at the 1.26.2011 public scoping meeting at the Kissimmee Civic Center). The large group format discounted the “quiet shakers” who likely had better things to say than most of us who aren’t afraid to speak up in front of a couple hundred people.
- The proposal has high merit and should be passed and work on it should start ASAP.
- I feel cheated as a resident that Florida’s natural lands have been systematically given over to the highest bidder with little or no consideration of the consequences. I know that this wildlife refuge will make up for some of that destruction. As a taxpayer and a lifelong resident of this state, I support this refuge 100%.
- I am in total support of protecting the headwaters to the Florida Everglades. The Everglades is our state’s greatest natural resource. It is our responsibility to preserve and protect the glades for generations to come.
- 1000 Friends complements the FWS and the other federal, state and local public and private partners involved in this important and forward thinking initiative aimed at preserving rural working landscapes and protecting and restoring ecosystem services. 1000 Friends of Florida support the three study areas that have been defined within the greater Everglades landscape: (1) the Everglades headwaters area, (2) the Fisheating Creek area, and (3) the area around Florida Panther NWR and the Caloosahatchee River. 1000 Friends of Florida supports the creation of the Everglades Headwaters –National Wildlife Refuge and Conservation Area and looks forward to assisting overtime with the development and implementation of the effort.
- In addition, 1000 Friends of Florida suggests that the Everglades Headwaters Proposal will provide an example to the rest of the nation of the successful use and demonstration of the evolving conservation strategies such as Payments for Ecosystem Services (PES), “Dispersed” Water Management to maintain, restore and enhance the ecosystem services of the natural landscape. Our organization with the help of other professionals has just completed an in-depth article on these conservation strategies which can be viewed at: <http://www.1000fof.org/PUBS/FI-working-landscapesFinal2011.pdf>.
  - **Ecosystem Services** - An ecosystem is a biological environment consisting of all the organisms living in a particular area, as well as all the nonliving, physical components of the environment with which the organisms interact, such as air, soil, water, and sunlight. It includes human working rural lands and developed areas. Ecosystem services are the benefits people obtain from ecosystems. They are components of nature, directly enjoyed, consumed, or used to yield human well-being. Examples of services include: regulating (climate, floods, nutrient balance, water filtration), provisioning (food, medicine, fur), cultural (science, spiritual, ceremonial, recreation, aesthetic), and supporting (nutrient cycling, photosynthesis, soil formation). Ecosystem services naturally provided by areas can range from protecting from flooding, offering pollution control to providing natural “air conditioning” and local climate controls (see [www.floridahabitat.org/wildlife-manual/wildlife-friendly-communities](http://www.floridahabitat.org/wildlife-manual/wildlife-friendly-communities) for a more thorough description). They are often inherent in the natural landscape and often undervalued and subject to loss or degradation.
  - **Payments for Ecosystem Services (PES), also known as Payments for Environmental Services (or Benefits)** broadly defined, is the practice of offering incentives to farmers, ranchers or landowners in exchange for managing their land to provide or maintain ecological service. These programs promote the conservation of natural resources in the marketplace and can help rural landowners have another source of income to maintain their properties through good production years or bad. PES programs are voluntary and mutually beneficial contracts between consumers of ecosystem services and the suppliers of these services. The landowner holds the property rights over an environmental good that provides a flow of benefits to the demanding party in return for some monetary compensation. The consumers of the ecosystem services are willing to offer to the service providers a payment that is greater than the cost of providing the services.
  - **Distributed” or “Dispersed” Water Management** - Describe landscape-level water management methods typically consisting of new or revamped water control structures in existing ditches and canals that are currently over-draining the landscape. Dispersed” water management potentially can store and treat more water on private working lands at much lower cost than sole reliance on large publically funded off-property engineered systems such as reservoirs, massive pump stations and drainage canals. Dispersed” Water Management is a managed system of smaller dispersed structures within a defined landscape that can restore the hydroperiod of previously drained wetlands, elevate ground water tables to take advantage of storage capacity in aquifers impacted

by drainage, and create shallow agricultural impoundments to manage water and re-create wetlands. Dispersed water management contrasts with the construction of large-scale reservoirs or conventional stormwater treatment areas (STAs) in that the components are much smaller, more numerous, and do not require the permanent acquisition of land to build large public works projects. Dispersed water management can complement and enhance performance of regional facilities necessary under programs such as CERP. Dispersed water management instead requires a managed and monitored landscape with smaller water control features linked to a system of payments for ecosystem services, or acquisition conservation easements and provision of technical assistance to landowners in exchange for managing their private land (can be on public lands too) to provide or maintain multiple desired ecological services.

- In addition, in the larger context of wildlife and habitat conservation, human recreation and economic development, the Everglades Headwaters Proposal moves to further the development of a regional and even statewide greenway system. 1000 Friends, Doug Alderson of the FDEP office of Greenways and Trails and others also recently completed an article addressing the prospects and benefits of such greenway linkages (see: <http://www.1000fof.org/PUBS/EcologicalGreenwaysFinalVersion.pdf>).
- The Oklawaha Valley Audubon Society endorses the proposed Everglades Headwaters NWR and adjoining conservation lands.
- Knowing who Ken Salazar is, we really have very little reason to believe he has the best interests of Florida citizens in mind, so we would like to move slowly with this.
- Florida is filling up with the human population fast. We need our wildlife, they need their land.
- I realize that your job is to regulate and protect, but stop. Enough is enough.
- This appears as another government land grab such as been happening throughout the west northwest. Does Agenda 21 ring a bell? Smart Growth? Sustainable Development? What is rightfully ours is being stolen from us. Tell me more what is in store for our rights to this pristine environment.
- This land reclamation is a terrible idea and there are thousands of sportsmen against this plan.
- We the people oppose this plan; acknowledge that this land has ownership, they belong to the people; will tirelessly fight to keep our rights to access and enjoy these public lands; are organized and will defend our cultural heritage and traditions; will campaign to elect those Floridians that are like-minded in preserving our heritage, and not re-elect those officials that aren't.
- The regular, every-day person, who tends not to speak up much, is for this proposal.
- The people at the 1.26.2011 public scoping meeting in Kissimmee who were representing the traditional uses and anti-government sentiment do not represent the community at large in Osceola County.
- This project is great news for Florida and the nation.
- I completely support the proposal being considered to turn 150,000 acres of land north of Lake Okeechobee into a refuge.
- This opportunity is too good to pass up. This proposal is probably one of the most exciting things I've seen taking place. For all those kids who wonder how things happen, this whole process is a great way to show them.
- The Everglades Headwaters idea is a progressive idea. It is a terrific concept. It is for the greater good, good for the greater environment. This is about landowners sharing their bounty with the public to protect, restore, and conserve the natural habitat and hydrology for the Everglades. This is the right thing to do.
- There are a lot of other things that could be fixed to preserve Florida and the Everglades than this (stop tearing up all the trees and building commercial developments – there are plenty of abandoned buildings around in foreclosure). I disagree with this proposal.
- A wildlife refuge in our backyard would be a blessing.
- I make an impassioned plea to save this land for my grandchildren and all generations yet to come. Oren Lyons, wisdom keeper for the Onondaga Indian Nation says it best, "We always keep in mind the Seventh Generation to come. When we walk upon Mother Earth, we always plant our feet carefully because we know the faces of our future generations are looking up at us."
- The greater Everglades is a national treasure. The very hard and expensive work of creating and protecting the headwaters is a great struggle now, but will be greatly praised and appreciated by the generations to come. All of us should be asked to contribute and sacrifice to protect these headwaters.

## Wildlife and Habitat

### General

- I support the development of the new Everglades Headwaters NWR. Secretary of Interior Salazar has stated, “the partnership being formed would protect and improve water quality north of Lake Okeechobee, restore wetlands and connect existing conservation lands and important wildlife corridors to support the Everglades restoration effort”. Secretary Salazar summed it up perfectly and what better way to get additional habitat for endangered wading birds, bald eagles, and the Florida panther.
- I support the proposed 150,000-acre wildlife refuge. It will provide much needed wildlife habitat. I am particularly hopeful that it will greatly enhance habitat for bird species that are either currently endangered or at risk of becoming endangered species.
- I cannot say enough about this wonderful purchase. This way the natural resource in Florida will be protected from developers, specifically in Highlands County where the Lykes and Smoak brothers plan a huge development that will annihilate the wildlife in that area. Lake Apthorpe in the Lake Wales Ridge Ecosystem is where the Lykes and Smoak Brothers plan a huge development. This area has black bears, wild turkeys, Florida cats. The clean water of this lake will be gone forever. This lake should only (have) sailing and small fishing boats, not motorized boats where the gasoline fills the air. I hope the federal government can stop the destruction of the environment in Highlands County.
- The proscribed areas affecting the Kissimmee River valley and flow into Lake Okeechobee of course overlap with a crucial south-north wildlife migration corridor that will prove life-saving to the Florida panther et al who would otherwise face extinction by isolation. We love and support this plan.
- Cows are part of the system and help maintain the ecosystem here. This part of Florida is a fire based ecosystem.
- Question: Would this area be used for red wolf reintroduction? There are red wolves at St. Vincent NWR and up in the Carolinas.
  - Answer: We are not aware of any plans to reintroduce red wolves to this area.
- Question: How would invasive species management be handled?
  - Answer: For an area under conservation easement, the landowner would be responsible.
- As noted the proposal is biologically based, targeting the cooperative conservation of an important Florida landscape, supporting various conservation plans and initiatives, and protecting, restoring, and conserving habitat for at least 88 Federal- and State-listed species and species designated by the State of Florida as Species of Greatest Conservation Need. The Upper Everglades landscape is one of the great grassland and wetland areas of North America and vital to the long-term health and sustainability of wildlife such as the Florida panther, Sand Hill Crane, Everglades Kite, Florida Crested Caracara, Florida black bear and many other species.
- The proposed approach seems to be fostering recognition of the high value of rural land for rural enterprises, rural culture, natural wildlife conservation opportunities and ecosystem services inherent to these landscapes. The proposed approach furthers the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Program (CERP) and the Lake Okeechobee Protection Plan (LOPP) move in the direction of utilizing the inherent water storage, attenuation and treatment potential of the Northern Everglades landscape as a means to achieve the ecological goals of Everglades/Okeechobee restoration.

### Florida Panther

- Cats are a large predator. They have been in this area all my life. FWS can't do anything for cats unless they start moving problem cats from the south. But, we don't want them moved here to start taking cattle and causing problems up here.

### Water Quality and Quantity

- The proposal to make an additional wildlife refuge as stated in the proposal can, and probably (will) create additional problems when it comes to a time that the State of Florida needs additional water supplies to maintain the population. Surrounded by water and drinking water has been, and still is critical throughout the state. The necessity to tap into and utilize (a) water control system with the government maintaining control of these areas, as always, create a problem. Therefore I am opposed to this project.

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- The study area is millions of acres. When does this acquisition stop? You say it's only 150,000 acres today, but refuges can be expanded.
- Question: Is this land private, State, or local land?
  - Answer: The predominance of the land that would be considered would be currently private lands. We are not talking about taking land from the State.
- Why should tax dollars pay for land that is already being managed well? The State of Florida has been trying to buy this land for years.
- Question: What is the value of land for fee title acquisition versus conservation easements? What are the rates? How does FWS value these lands? What is the cost-benefit analysis when an easement is no longer worth it and it would be better to just purchase the site?
  - Answer: We can acquire fee title or an easement in the fee area but only an easement in the easement area. Values of fee or easements would be determined by an appraisal. If acquiring an easement, only those rights being sold would be appraised.
- Please don't come in to our state and try to buy up rights to our land. We don't need another layer of bureaucracy nor do we need the federal government spending billions of dollars on land that the US already owns. Why don't you take the money and purchase land along the Mexican border. You can call it a wildlife sanctuary. Then you will be willing to heavily police the area because of animal rights.
- We suspect that the described approach of working with willing landowners to acquire, up to 50,000 acres through fee title purchases, leases, conservation easements, conservation and mitigation banks, lands set aside through habitat conservation plans, and/or cooperative agreements from willing sellers will prove over the long-term the most economically efficient.
- The State of Florida and the National Park Service has "purchased", "re-claimed", "confiscated", etc. millions of acres all over the State, Everglades National Park, Big Cypress, Ocala National Forest, Goethe State Forest, Loxahatchee Wildlife Preserve, Withlacoochee State Forest, Lake Butler Wildlife Management Area, etc., etc. The State has enough and the rules that were meant to "preserve" the wilderness are preventing access – you will no doubt take issues with that – But I point out that you never see people in remote access areas because they aren't going to walk 20 miles into the swamp, even if the proper permits are acquired.
- If a fee simple purchase is to be made we would like for Farm Credit to be consulted for available ranches. This could be of great help to Farm Credit, as they are the primary agricultural lender in Florida, and would most probably alleviate a rancher(s) who may be in economic stress.
- We suggest that the fee simple purchase be available for grazing lease(s). This would help off-set displacement of ranchers, keep the land on the local tax rolls, and maintain a healthy and safe food supply. Our lands are attractive because of the manner in which they are managed. Cattle grazing keeps the land healthy, protects green space and water quality, and is a benefit to wildlife.
- The program should be for willing sellers only. Those landowners who choose not to participate should have their property rights protected from any collateral issues resulting from the program, such as buffers or land use restrictions.
- A primary and overriding issue for our ranchers is the estate tax. Until it is addressed in a positive manner for the landowner we respectfully suggest that it will hinder your success in this program.
- I am a River Ranch Hunt Club property owner...I am writing to ask you to not take our land! Almost everything that is explained in the proposal is everything we already do here. Please take this into consideration when you make your judgment call.
- I am not a willing seller, but when the time comes they will make me sell my property or just take it from me like they have done before.

### **Less than Fee Title Acquisition**

- This is probably the best program I have ever heard about for preserving the rural farm and ranch characteristics of Florida. Since all of the land doesn't need to be purchased, but can be set aside for this use by the owners, it will benefit everyone.
- The leasing of land from ranchers and farmers for conservation will also provide income to these owners, permitting them a new source of income. This project is a win-win for nature and the economy.

- Question: If there are buffer zones around the property, how can we say that the proposal will not impact adjacent properties?
  - Answer: Any areas that might be buffer zones would be through agreements with willing sellers (e.g., through a conservation easement).
- Consider less than perpetuity agreements.
- Conservation easements could facilitate inheritance taxes and issues.
- If you do go into a conservation easement, make sure to pay attention to the details in the agreement.
- A conservation easement is confusing/misleading. It covers your whole property. Concern expressed about being able to sell your land if it has a conservation easement. You might only have interest from the government to buy it in the future.
- Ranchers have been protecting this land. But, not all landowners can sustain/persist because of inheritance taxes. This is a good option for the rancher to remain on the landscape.
- Question: Do these easements have to be perpetual? Could they be for 10 or 20 years?
  - Answer: The federal government is not often interested in less than perpetual easements, however, other agencies involved in this Initiative might be (e.g., the water management district).
- I cannot support my tax dollars paying landowners exorbitant amounts of money not to develop lands they will likely have never sold. Meanwhile they continue to hold all usage rights and even lease the land for cattle or hunting. They can be paid a small amount to guarantee they sell to the state should they ever sell...but nothing more. These deals where they're paid 75% of the value of the property, while they get to keep it with no public access are ridiculous.
- We commend your use of a variety of measures to procure this land through both private and public partnerships. It will set a good example for other government agencies and states to employ the same methods.
- We suggest the majority of the land needed be in the form of purchased conservation easements. (This would help off-set displacement of ranchers, keep the land on the local tax rolls, and maintain a healthy and safe food supply. Our lands are attractive because of the manner in which they are managed. Cattle grazing keeps the land healthy, protects green space and water quality, and is a benefit to wildlife.)

### **Contaminants - Evaluation of Properties for Inclusion**

- Question: What about old cattle dipping vats on acquired property? Is there a liability to the property owner?
  - Answer: Any property under consideration for the acquisition of any interest (fee title or less than fee title) would have an assessment of the contaminants and those contaminants would have to be addressed by the landowner prior to purchase. If a landowner knows of certain sites, the landowner might out those sites from consideration.
- Question: If we purchase land, who cleans up the environmental problems?
  - Answer: Any property under consideration for the acquisition of any interest (fee title or less than fee title) would have an assessment of the contaminants and those contaminants would have to be addressed by the landowner prior to purchase.

### **Specific Properties/Sites**

- I want to bring the Masterpiece ziziphus site to the attention of whoever is in the business of acquiring properties for the Everglades Headwaters NWR. The site is not only critical to the recovery of Florida ziziphus (via the genetic diversity of the population there), but is also important for protection of the Lake Pierce watershed. The Masterpiece site was the central component of a River to Ridge project proposed a few years ago by George O'Neil, a local wealthy conservationist, and taken up by the Green Horizons Land Trust. However, the project seems to have come to naught due to lack of funds to pursue the necessary groundwork. I think the Updikes, the owners of the Masterpiece site, would be interested in discussing some sort of deal that would allow us to protect the ziziphus population; they have allowed us to access the site over the last several years to monitor the population, and they have met with TNC and others to discuss possibilities for protecting the site. Maybe the current federal initiative can make protection of the site a reality.

The legacy of our generation must not only be that we decimated more natural areas than any generation in the history of humankind, but that we stopped and we saved a few natural treasures.

- The association I belong to is a better steward of these lands than many others. We protect the ponds and native estuaries, plant feeding lots, have annual tree plantings, and hold monthly clean up events. We ask for no money from any government for any of these things. We employ local people, shop locally, and pay taxes. We are preserving the land for everyone, protecting the environment, and planning to maintain the land for future generations of animals, plants, and people. Please stop this plant now. I am not a willing landowner or participant in this proposed refuge.

### **Economy**

- Please consider moving forward with this project as it will benefit all Floridians and benefit and attract continued tourism – Florida’s number one industry.
- This refuge should also provide a solid economic benefit as a major tourist attraction. Nature is one of the greatest tourist draws in our region. Bird watching, hunting, and fishing are all important economic activities of our state. This project is a win-win for nature and the economy.
- This seems like a tax subsidy for the landowners. Question: What about the local businesses (e.g., motorcycle shops and airboat mechanics)?
  - Answer: The Land Protection Plan and National Environmental Policy Document will include an analysis of those types of impacts.
- Protecting these lands and providing for recreation can benefit the State of Florida by becoming a taxable source of entertainment. Let’s preserve the land and wildlife, but let us also enjoy its bounty, within reason of course.
- This proposal will be devastating to the economy with a snowballing effect, from the State level to the private merchant. There are hundreds, if not thousands of businesses that depend on these areas remaining fiscally alive. The change of use will directly impact the sale of licenses and permits at the State level to gasoline and food sales at the merchant level.
- The proposal can be a viable tourist attraction.
- With the economy in the condition that it is in, this would certainly put a major strain on the local businesses and would greatly affect a lot of families in the area financially with the loss of revenue this area produces.

### **Greater Everglades Partnership**

- As a 3<sup>rd</sup> generation Florida native, I am thrilled by Secretary Salazar’s announcement and highly supportive of this cooperative effort and plan to secure 150,000 acres, including the 50,000-acre new national wildlife refuge. This is precisely the sort of meaningful large-scale strategic conservation effort we were hoping for from this Administration. No state is more in danger of being ecologically degraded, even destroyed, its identity as a beautiful eden buried, than our Florida. We look forward to advancement of this smart and exciting proposal to conserve key lands for all time, and provide added recreational opportunities for both residents and visitors, as well as the means to move safely for pressured native animals between habitat patches up and down the state, and protect the natural hydrological flow and water supply. All of the agencies and organizations cooperating in this effort deserve loud and vocal praise!
- This is not a partnership. Partnership means to share. The partners are not sharing in the costs. TNC is not sharing expenses. Audubon is not sharing expenses. Stop misrepresenting this project.
- Why do the feds need to tell the State how to do its job?

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- My family and I would support what the state wants to do in this area as long as there is open access to the public for bird watching, camping, hunting, and fishing, within reasonable limits.
- Allow the sportsmen's groups in the hunting and fishing areas to work with the State wildlife officers in setting times and limits for hunting and fishing.
- Use some of this land for recreation, including camping, dirt bike/four-wheeler tracks, and shooting ranges (e.g., for skeet). As it stands now, I have to drive all the way to Ocala to partake in these sports.
- I am very concerned about the future of usable water and recreational areas. Please consider the needs of thousands of residents and visitors in the proposed areas. There is a tremendous amount of money spent each year for permits, licenses, and taxes by boat owners in Florida.
- The establishment of protected areas is as much about keeping taxpayers out of the area than it is about protection.
- The conservation plan should contain a certain amount of recreational use.
- Please make hunting and fishing a part of the recreation on the new wildlife preserve.
- My children are getting to the age that you need to teach them about the local habitat and give them a place to enjoy nature so they don't become a nuisance to society like a lot of people in jail and/or hooked on drugs or worse, killed trying to hurt someone else. There needs to be a place where people can take their families to enjoy, where they can teach their children values and respect for others, and where they have a place to live if they fall on hard times (this is my backup plan).

## Hunting

- This is a great proposal and I would like to see it open to hunting.
- Question: For the 28 refuges in Florida, how much deer, turkey, and hog hunting has gone on?
  - Answer: We could gather that information. Merritt Island NWR has waterfowl hunting. Lake Woodruff NWR has deer hunting. St. Marks NWR also has hunting.
  - Clarification: Nine of Florida's 28 refuges do offer high quality opportunities for hunting: Chassowitzka NWR (duck and coot hunting), ARM Loxahatchee NWR (duck and coot hunting), Lake Woodruff NWR (deer hunting), Lower Suwannee NWR (duck and coot; squirrel, raccoon, coyote, beaver, armadillo, rabbit, and opossum; and deer, hog, and turkey hunting), Merritt Island NWR (duck and coot hunting), Pelican Island NWR (waterfowl hunting in State sovereign submerged lands in the Indian River Lagoon), St. Marks NWR (duck and coot; squirrel, rabbit, raccoon, and hog; and deer and turkey hunting), St. Vincent NWR (deer, raccoon, and hog hunting), and Ten Thousand Islands NWR (duck and coot hunting). However, many of the refuges in this state don't have huntable areas (e.g., are too small) or wildlife that can be legally hunted, such as Island Bay, Matlacha Pass, Caloosahatchee, Pine Island, Archie Carr, Pinellas, Egmont Key, and Passage Key NWRs. Many of the refuges in the State of Florida don't have huntable areas because they were set aside to protect wading bird rookeries and/or endangered species and offer habitat for species that are not legally huntable, such as Island Bay, Caloosahatchee, Pine Island, Matlacha Pass, Egmont Key, Passage Key, Pinellas, Crystal River, and Archie Carr NWRs. Other refuges are within areas of the State where it is illegal to hunt, such as the 4 refuges in the Florida Keys and J.N. "Ding" Darling NWR that is within the city limits of Sanibel where there is a State Law that prohibits hunting.
- Question: What about ATV use on conservation easement property?
  - Answer: Any public access to the property would be determined by the property owner during the negotiation of the conservation easement. Many property owners are likely not interested in opening up their properties to the public, since they might be actively ranching then.
- Wildlife First wipes out the hunters.
- When hunting in a national wildlife refuge, you have to be out by 7pm. If you shoot an animal and you can't get it out in time, you are wasting it, in violation of the law.
- As a hunter, I cannot support this proposal if the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) is not given sole authority to manage hunting activities on all publicly owned lands within the refuge. There is NO valid reason not to allow regulated hunting (via FWC) on any tract of land. This also means full access in all of the Big Cypress area, including off-road vehicle access. This means all current wildlife management areas are kept open with the same or more opportunities for hunting. This means any new

public lands purchased are open for full hunting seasons as deemed appropriate by FWS. If you are not going to support a full range of hunting opportunities with FWC authority on every acre of land purchased or secured with public funds, then I'm not interested. Hunters are sick and tired of getting the short end of the stick in regards to opportunities on public lands when it's the tax dollars on hunting supplies, ammo, and license fees that end up paying for a large portion of conservation lands. We're tired of being on the forefronts of the conservation effort and then shut out of the very lands we're helping to conserve. So, please protect these lands from development. Protect the headwaters of the Everglades. But be smart about the money you spend. And let the true conservationists (hunters) use the land they ended up paying for more than anyone else.

- Are ranchers to be paid for use of their land by hunters or will hunting opportunities be available at all?
- Will there be newly outlined wildlife management areas opening?
- Will there be restriction on types of ammunition and weapons? Hours, days, seasons, and game types?

### **Airboat Use**

- Eagles have expanded in this area with airboat use. (Airboat use did not stop the eagle population in the area from expanding.)
- Airboats are the only vessel that won't damage the substrate.
- Duck Stamp money goes into conservation for ducks. Where do registrations for airboats and ATVs go? Why can't we use that money for allowing access?

### **Lands of The Nature Conservancy**

- Question: How much hunting on Nature Conservancy lands?
  - Answer by TNC: TNC allows hog hunts on all acres and other hunts on about 40,000 acres across the State.
- For my property, TNC won't allow ATVs or hunting, only walking trails.

## **Administration**

### **General**

- Great idea. Best wishes for success on the project. I hope you will use solar or other renewable fuels for any equipment or facilities the project may require.
- The other situation that I see is the cost of government spending on this issue. The country is in dire need for funds to support immediate needs of the people. Schools closing, jobs lost, inflation about to be unmanageable, etc. Therefore, I am opposed to this project.
- Question: How is Avon Park adding restrictions going to affect this proposal or these lands?
  - Answer: These restrictions are fairly new and their impacts are still to be seen.
- Regardless of the alternatives, the FWS will do what it wants.
- What jurisdiction will offices like FWC have over the site?
- Keep working on partnerships. Government can't do it alone.

### **Funding/Budget**

- Question: Where would the funding come from?
  - Answer: Potential sources of funding include the Land and Water Conservation Fund and the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission Fund, from sale of Duck Stamps. However, grant funds and donations may also be used.
- Question: What is the budget?
  - Answer: The PPP outlines \$700 million, but it could be a billion. A land acquisition budget will be determined for each of the alternatives that will be developed during the NEPA process.
- Is the Florida and federal government planning to spend \$700 million taxpayer dollars on preserving land for animals? I'm an animal lover and enjoy wildlife, but to spend our money like this is unacceptable to me as a taxpayer. I would like to see some of this money go to help the women and children who are homeless.

- Question: If there are buffer zones around the property, how can we say that the proposal will not impact adjacent properties?
  - Answer: Any areas that might be buffer zones would be through agreements with willing sellers (e.g., through a conservation easement).
- Consider less than perpetuity agreements.
- Conservation easements could facilitate inheritance taxes and issues.
- If you do go into a conservation easement, make sure to pay attention to the details in the agreement.
- A conservation easement is confusing/misleading. It covers your whole property. Concern expressed about being able to sell your land if it has a conservation easement. You might only have interest from the government to buy it in the future.
- Ranchers have been protecting this land. But, not all landowners can sustain/persist because of inheritance taxes. This is a good option for the rancher to remain on the landscape.
- Question: Do these easements have to be perpetual? Could they be for 10 or 20 years?
  - Answer: The federal government is not often interested in less than perpetual easements, however, other agencies involved in this Initiative might be (e.g., the water management district).
- I cannot support my tax dollars paying landowners exorbitant amounts of money not to develop lands they will likely have never sold. Meanwhile they continue to hold all usage rights and even lease the land for cattle or hunting. They can be paid a small amount to guarantee they sell to the state should they ever sell...but nothing more. These deals where they're paid 75% of the value of the property, while they get to keep it with no public access are ridiculous.
- We commend your use of a variety of measures to procure this land through both private and public partnerships. It will set a good example for other government agencies and states to employ the same methods.
- We suggest the majority of the land needed be in the form of purchased conservation easements. (This would help off-set displacement of ranchers, keep the land on the local tax rolls, and maintain a healthy and safe food supply. Our lands are attractive because of the manner in which they are managed. Cattle grazing keeps the land healthy, protects green space and water quality, and is a benefit to wildlife.)

## **Contaminants - Evaluation of Properties for Inclusion**

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- Question: What about old cattle dipping vats on acquired property? Is there a liability to the property owner?
  - Answer: Any property under consideration for the acquisition of any interest (fee title or less than fee title) would have an assessment of the contaminants and those contaminants would have to be addressed by the landowner prior to purchase. If a landowner knows of certain sites, the landowner might out those sites from consideration.
- Question: If we purchase land, who cleans up the environmental problems?
  - Answer: Any property under consideration for the acquisition of any interest (fee title or less than fee title) would have an assessment of the contaminants and those contaminants would have to be addressed by the landowner prior to purchase.

## **Specific Properties/Sites**

- I want to bring the Masterpiece ziziphus site to the attention of whoever is in the business of acquiring properties for the Everglades Headwaters NWR. The site is not only critical to the recovery of Florida ziziphus (via the genetic diversity of the population there), but is also important for protection of the Lake Pierce watershed. The Masterpiece site was the central component of a River to Ridge project proposed a few years ago by George O'Neil, a local wealthy conservationist, and taken up by the Green Horizons Land Trust. However, the project seems to have come to naught due to lack of funds to pursue the necessary groundwork. I think the Updikes, the owners of the Masterpiece site, would be interested in discussing some sort of deal that would allow us to protect the ziziphus population; they have allowed us to access the site over the last several years to monitor the population, and they have met with TNC and others to discuss possibilities for protecting the site. Maybe the current federal initiative can make protection of the site a reality.