



Proposed Everglades Headwaters National Wildlife Refuge and Conservation Area
Summary of Public Scoping Comments - as of 3.31.2011

Comments were submitted in a variety of ways (e.g., at a public scoping meeting and by mail, fax, and email). Attendance at the public scoping meetings averaged ~440 per meeting: ~200 in Sebring, ~325 in Kissimmee, ~665 in Okeechobee, and ~580 in Vero Beach. As of March 31, 2011, the deadline for public scoping comments, over 38,000 written comments had been received. The comments were summarized and are grouped together by topic, as listed.

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

List of acronyms used in comments:

Table with 2 columns: Acronym and Full Name. Includes BLM (Bureau of Land Management), CERP (Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan), DEP (Florida Department of Environmental Protection), DOI (U.S. Department of Interior), DOT (Florida Department of Transportation), EH (Everglades Headwaters), ESV (Ecosystem Services Values), FDOT (Florida Department of Transportation), FWC (Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission), FWS (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, also USFWS), LOPP (Lake Okeechobee Protection Plan), NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act), NPS (National Park Service), NRC (National Research Council), NWR (National Wildlife Refuge), PES (Payments for Ecosystem Services), SFWMD (South Florida Water Management District), STA (Stormwater Treatment Area), TEV (Total Economic Value), TNC (The Nature Conservancy), and USFWS (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, also FWS).

Wildlife and Habitat

General

- If worried about the environment, we had more endangered species than anywhere in the State. We have the same amount of endangered species. We are good land stewards, so we don't need the government or anything else. Don't have the money to manage it correctly. Only place in the State like it. Preserved for his grandkids.
• Their water management caused the last droughts, shoot all panthers and bears. We all believe in conservation, kill all the wildlife so there is nothing to protect.
• I fully support the refuge for its protection of Endangered species such as panther, caracara, black bear, and it's a good opportunity for Florida to expand and protect its natural habitat for the use of all the public. 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.
- 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, sandhill crane, Everglades snail 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 Plan (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.
- I oppose FWS managing any additional properties in Florida because FWS will let the purchased land sit and be overrun with exotic plants and animals; Arthur Marshall NWR is an example of this. It is a detriment to surrounding property owners.
- Strongly supports these efforts. Upper Kissimmee Basin is high in wildlife diversity and stewardship is great.
- This conservation initiative will conserve biodiversity in areas that provide habitat to threatened and endangered species like Florida panthers, crested caracara, and the Everglades snail kite.
- Include the swallow-tailed kite in the list of species of concern for the proposed refuge. This species is characteristic of this region. There is a concentration area for this species in the Fisheating Creek basin where they gather before their fall migration to South America. They nest in spring and summer in tall trees in hammocks, swamps, and cypress stands within the study area. This nesting habitat requires some attention to prevent overdrainage.
- The proposal represents a great opportunity to accomplish important regional, State, and national goals, including to enhance the Kissimmee River restoration success with additional habitats surrounding the present restoration footprint.
- The Kissimmee Valley region of Florida is one of renowned, high-quality landscapes and natural communities, and abundant and imperiled wildlife resources. Indeed, no other area of Florida supports such a concentrated assemblage of rare and declining vertebrate species, with many of them federally listed. Habitat for 88 federal or state listed species and state Species of Greatest Conservation Need would be protected with this project.

- Landscape-scale protection in the Northern Everglades would maintain an unprecedented collection of rare and threatened species and habitats, create a matrix of conservation lands and critical wildlife connectors, buffer climate change impacts and protect the Everglades headwaters.
- We have a unique opportunity to rebuild a portion of natural environment that used to exist in our State.
- How this proposal can best achieve the conservation mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System: establish ecosystem-based refuge purposes; focus on large, contiguous tracts of properties, which can be acquired from willing participants; maintain the current approach to land protection options; and encourage and manage wildlife-dependent uses in a manner consistent with the conservation mission of the Refuge System.
  - The establishment documents should provide a clear statement of the refuge's purposes and these purposes should be consistent with the conservation mission of the Refuge System as a whole [16 USC 668dd(a)(4)(D)]. The purposes of the refuge should be ecosystem based. The current literature on land protection and ecosystem management promotes a conservation focus favoring biodiversity, conservation of representative ecosystems, resilience, and preservation of undeveloped linkages to facilitate evolutionary adaptation and range transitions [Robert L. Fischman and Bob Adamcik, Beyond Trust Species: the Conservation Potential of the National Wildlife Refuge System in the Wake of Climate Change, Research Paper Number 159 (November 2010)]. This is particularly important when climate change and sea level rise will pose new challenges to a number of different species who may need to transition and adapt towards the inland part of the state and away from areas closer to the coast (Fischman and Adamcik 2010). The northern Everglades region, with its vast array of representative ecosystems, rich biodiversity, and unique location, provides a tremendous opportunity to advance ecosystem-based approaches to wildlife management.
  - The land acquisition strategy should target large, contiguous tracts of lands from willing sellers.
  - Particular focus needs to be paid to establishing linkages between existing conservation lands, creating wildlife corridors and preserving a number of different types of representative habitats. We suggest coordinating with the South Florida Water management District to advance future dispersed water management programs.
  - The Service should also identify areas that advance the recovery of endangered species, particularly Audubon's crested caracara (which are found throughout many of the region's working ranchlands) and Everglades snail kite (which, due to drought conditions in recent years, has increasingly relied on waters within the Upper Kissimmee River Basin for foraging and nesting).
  - The land acquisition boundary should exclude small, less ecologically sensitive lands such as the River Ranch area and Suburban Estates, where it appears the land uses are a mixture of residential and recreational lands and where there would be few, if any, willing sellers and participants in the program.
- This is an opportunity to preserve connected tracts of land that may enhance the efforts to conserve and protect Florida scrub-jay, sand skink, Audubon's crested caracara, eastern indigo snake, American bald eagle, American alligator, and Florida black bear.
- Creating a refuge in central Florida will help species such as the Florida panther and Florida black bear adapt to the impacts of climate change.
- I support the creation of the refuge. This great area of open pine forests and dry prairie, interspersed with isolated and riverine wetlands, is home to the largest population of nesting bald eagles south of Alaska. Crested caracara, burrowing owls, red-cockaded woodpeckers, snail kites, and reintroduced whooping cranes hang on here, while sandhill cranes and many other wildlife species thrive.
- It must be remembered that creating an ecosystem like the one you are beginning to propose will necessitate fish and wildlife populations to be culled and because taxpaying citizens are paying for this refuge we should be allowed access for our outdoor interests.
- For multiple reasons, including the preservation of biodiversity, maintenance of green corridors, restoration and protection of wetlands, and sustainment of Florida's ranching economy and way of life, I support the formation of the refuge.
- The affects of future climate change, resulting sea-level rise, and increasing catastrophic storm events are going to be major challenges for the already struggling wildlife here in Florida. Many indications of sea-

level rise include evidence of vegetative habitat change resulting from rising water levels. Habitat change as a result of rising water levels is being observed throughout the coastal areas of South Florida. Even before more dramatic observations are evident, inland habitats are being impacted long before threat of inundation by sea-level rise because of groundwater intrusion, as well as by abrupt changes caused by higher storm surge. In Southwest Florida inundation of habitat on low-lying barrier islands of the Florida Keys and Ten Thousand Islands is expected to reduce or eliminate habitat for many endemic and rare species of plants and animals (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 1999. South Florida Multi-species Recovery Plan. Southeast Region. Vero Beach, FL). Also, more low-lying upland coastal forests will be lost during the next one to three centuries as tidal wetlands expand across low-lying coastal areas and the retreat of forests if blocked by urban development [Castaneda, H. and FE Putz. 2007. Predicting sea-level rise effects on a nature preserve on the Gulf Coast of Florida: A landscape perspective. Florida Scientist. 70(2): 166-175]. A balance between encroaching urban development and the environment that insures the health of citizens and our wildlife must be struck. Even without this balance we will see plant communities in tidal rivers and bay-heads that will be replaced by low-lying, flood-prone ecosystems or open water with increased saline flooding stripping upland soils of their organic content (Wanless et al. 1997; Williams et al. 1998; Raabe et al. 2007). All of this spells more and more stress on our very sensitive South Florida that we all depend upon for our livelihoods and survival. The resilience for our communities here in Florida are faced with a struggle to adapt to inevitable decreases in available freshwater, especially for low-lying coastal communities. The establishment of this newly proposed refuge will not only protect habitat and the wildlife that need it, but in turn we will be protecting the environment that ensures a clean place to live, a healthy environment for our children, and good clean fresh water that is already becoming a premium here in our state.

- Pass laws for better/more restrictions on keeping or importing non-native species here in Florida and fine people heavily when their non-native wildlife escapes their home.
- The Service must consider the impacts of climate change. Climate change will reduce the suitability of habitats for many species that have historically depended upon them. As ecosystem components shift in different directions, hydrological and disturbance regimes change, and land is lost to rising seas, land acquisition will be critical to maximizing ecosystem resiliency and to facilitating the transition of wildlife to more suitable locations. The proposed refuge and conservation area would limit habitat fragmentation and help to protect and restore corridors that will facilitate wildlife movement in response to climate change. The Service should consider these benefits in the action alternatives included in the LPP, as well as how climate change would impact the study area and beyond if no action is taken.

### **Florida Panther**

- The *Puma concolor coryi* needs access to lands north of the Caloosahatchee River, including the core areas in this plan, but also beyond, up the Econlockhatchee River to the St. Johns to maintain genetic and population health enough to survive and eventually recover the species. We need to secure them safe passage all the way to the POGO lands at the Florida-Georgia line.
- Sees panther tracks all the time. Over 650 pairs of bald eagles and we are already doing something right so we do not need this.
- If you want to preserve the animal's need to travel to new hunting grounds, install a pass-thru for them at appropriate locations, and also fence off the roads to protect them and us.
- Project to restore Florida panther, history demonstrates that the panther can't be restored by the feds or state lands. The panther is not an Endangered Species because it has crossbred with the cougar. As for the wood stork, ask yourself why there are so many wood storks on sewer pond? Are these the habitats they will restore? Feds have already messed up the Everglades by management of water. Constitution does not allow for refuges or parks or other lands to be established
- Panther has been extinct for a long time and have crossbred.
- Without hunters, the panthers are going to have plenty to eat and that'll drive us right off our lands. Historically and culturally we've been able to enjoy it, so let's stop them.
- Panthers will move into this area.

- 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.
- Cougars (Panthers) are here and have been here.
- Florida panther will be part of the gift that will be introduced when the refuge is established. If you have property now, the refuge will drop off panthers on your property and it is guaranteed.
- This is a plan to move panthers out of town that are overrunning Naples and Collier County. They (panthers) are heading this way.
- More and more we hear about Florida Panthers being hit by cars since the human population is creeping into their habitat.
- If the habitat is preserved for the panther, it is also preserved for its prey meaning there should not be a problem of prey on cattle.
- The proposal represents a great opportunity to accomplish important regional, State, and national goals, including to secure the breeding range and an identified dispersal zone of the Florida panther.
- FWS's inescapable and desired inclusion of panthers or any threatened species for this refuge will without doubt cause destructive restrictions/bans and lead to further taking of lands.
- The proposed easements and land purchases would provide a corridor for panthers to expand their range out of southwest Florida – there is simply not enough land there to support a viable population. I would love to see them expand their range into Georgia. I am also in favor of reintroducing them to the Okefenokee or to southern Appalachians.
- Building panther crossing corridors underneath roads is a great idea and has proved successful in many other areas.
- I support the designation of critical habitat for the panther in its present range and the expansion of its range and reintroductions up into Okefenokee NWR.
- Where depredation might occur from panthers, some form of control and compensation will need to be instituted. You can put a surcharge on my license or create something similar to the Migratory Stamp to fund the program.
- As part of the recovery strategy of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition of the Florida Panther Recovery Plan, the USFWS needs to identify, conserve, restore, connect potential panther habitat in hopes of expanding the southern panther population, as well as protecting potential habitat for translocation and reintroduction of panther populations into central Florida. This will help boost the southern panther population, as well as act as a stepping stone to help panthers expand throughout its former range of northern Florida.
- As an umbrella species, the Florida panther helps to maintain healthy and balanced ecosystem and thus maintain ecosystem services and protect wildlife.
- Studies have shown that lands within the project area could support additional Florida panthers, either through natural dispersal or reintroduction [Thatcher et al., 2006. An Assessment of Habitat North of the Caloosahatchee River for Florida Panthers. Final Report. and Thatcher et al., 2006. Identifying Suitable Sites for Florida Panther Reintroduction. The Journal of Wildlife Management. 70(3): 752-763]. This is one of the necessities of Florida Panther recovery (USFWS, 2008. Florida Panther Recovery Plan, 3<sup>rd</sup> Revision. Prepared by Florida Panther Recovery Team and South Florida Ecological Services Office).
- There are numerous instances of recent panther sightings in Osceola County, but the connectivity to areas south is rapidly diminishing. I strongly support the designation and acquisition of the refuge and conservation area.
- FWS is a hypocrite to claim there is even a Florida panther today, since Florida reclassified many years ago that they are only protecting the panther population in Florida after not being able to successfully prosecute a person who intentionally killed one due to the State's inability to prove the sub-species (*Felis concolor coryi*) existed. The book "Swamp Screamer" authored by Charles Fergus describes how panther researchers discovered the panther being studied in the 90s in Florida had already been hybridized at that point in time and since then hasn't legally qualified for Endangered Species Act funding. (Excerpts from pp. 118-119 of that book, an excerpt from National Parks Traveler website, and comments from an abstract were submitted to support the previous statement.) FWS and all of their so called partners are nothing more than a gang of co-conspirators engaged in a criminal enterprise by not shutting down this junk science based program.

- The idea of moving the panther/cougar onto the proposed refuge will only spread the problem created by the FWS. The feral hog has all but been eliminated in the Big Cypress by the panther/cougar. Now the deer herd is in decline as they continue to erode their prey base. The answer has to come to control the cat, not spread the problem into another area that will suffer the same consequences.
- The proposed refuge and conservation area will do little to save the Florida panther, since those areas provide lower habitat values than other habitats identified by scientists and the 2008 Florida panther recovery plan.

### **Water Quality and Quantity**

- I strongly support the Federal Governments plan to buy development rights in the Everglades because the State of Florida is breaking the rules by not enforcing the “clean water act” law, and is suing to continue polluting.
- Believe that the water fall to ground should be taken care of by each land owner; believe that if a tax incentive was given to landowners to create a natural flow by filling in ditches and drainage system/retention pond or area, the owner should be compensated thought tax rebates or reductions; so far in the 55 years been here no common sense solutions have been applied to the problems we have only big money and big interests through large corporations.
- I come from Martin County and I wanted to tell you that I live near the outfall of the St. Lucie River. It is filthy water. I’m here to say thank you to Secretary Salazar and the Department of Interior to figure out a way to clean the water. Florida needs the federal government to finally put some money towards the terrible drainage that devastated the Everglades. Stop the flow of nitrogen and phosphorous flowing into Lake Okeechobee.
- They talked about preserving water, protecting the quality of the water. The contamination in Lake Okeechobee comes from Orlando, not the farms. Any number of wildlife management areas is not going to change that fact and it’s not going to clean up the water. I would very much like to see more opportunity for people to give their opinions.
- I am concerned about Highlands County water - people are illegally spraying, if you are concerned about water, then why don’t you enforce the illegal uses. I have contacted the local DEP and nothing has been done to protect the water. I hunt and gig frogs recreationally and I would like to be able to continue. Some people frog commercially and that’s how they make their living and this use will be restricted through this project. Thank you for your time.
- Resident of Highlands County, landowner with horses. Grew up in a farm community. Something in Florida is at risk and that’s the water. We need to get control of what’s happening above Lake Okeechobee. Now it’s polluted with industrial waste. It would be nice if we could control the point source pollution and this plan gives us a chance to do that. Save Our Creeks applauds this effort and we are in favor of it.
- Everglades Law Center, appearing on behalf of Conservancy of Southwest Florida, more than 6,000 members. We stand here tonight in support of the proposed refuge. I think it’s important to discuss the nature of the proposed model here. The wildlife refuge system as it stands is particularly appealing framework because it values wildlife consistent with conservation values. It will not only approve water quality going into Lake Okeechobee but for those who fish in the estuaries further south it will provide much needed water storage north of the lake. I would like to thank the Service for its presentation, and we support the proposal.
- Neighbor of Ding Darling NWR for 15 years. Public access is great: I fish there twice a week. I boat in there. We are also very concerned about the water quality. We need to do everything we can to clean up our water. We’re 100 percent behind that. We have the opportunity to meet with the refuge manager any time we want. We have over 1,000 members. It’s a great forum to set policy and work with the refuge manager. In terms of small businesses, the only complaint they have is that the refuges close one day a week to maintain it. The restaurants notice a difference; the hotels notice a difference. I hope you will listen to the proposal with an open mind. They are available they will work with you. I would really urge you that this has an opportunity to improve our water.
- Nutrient load flowing into Lake Okeechobee. Runoff from farms has been a problem; excessive nutrients flowing into Lake Okeechobee. A lot more needs to be done. The conservation easements we’re talking about are part of the effort to control nutrients flowing into Lake Okeechobee. More people ought to be

informed about it and concerned about it. We hope this headwaters initiative will go forward and preserve Lake Okeechobee and the whole Everglades system.

- Ken Salazar is promoting certain individuals and every year puts human sludge on his conservation easements and that is what is ruining water quality and that needs to be stopped now.
- Scientist works on Lake Okeechobee. Lake is always way too deep to shallow or polluted. It is because of what happens in northern end of everglades. Will allow them to come and determine water quality studies, opportunities to get into creeks and do studies. Opportunity to keep landscape green, and keep ranching alive. This is a good idea and please keep an open mind.
- 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.
- I support the development of the new Everglades Headwaters NWR. We would be creating much needed natural water storage and sheet flow. This too would allow wetland development for Lake Okeechobee and stop dangerous and harmful releases to the estuaries and our fresh water being lost to tide. Most importantly, it would move the Everglades restoration process forward and “create jobs”, ultimately restoring water quality.
- I support the proposed 150,000-acre wildlife refuge. It will provide a great opportunity to provide water for the Everglades through storage. It will also help to recreate the natural flows of water that existed prior to the altering of the landscape. This recreation of natural water flows will have a positive impact on local water tables and reduce storm runoff. This refuge will also permit water to move through a process where impurities may be naturally absorbed, improving water quality in Lake Okeechobee. Further, the natural storage of water held on this proposed refuge could reduce the need to release as much water into the estuaries on the east and west sides of Florida. These estuaries are now receiving harmful discharges when the lake level is too high. These releases are causing harm to the economies of both these estuaries by degrading water quality and reducing property values. These releases have also resulted in the closer (closure) of water areas to the public for recreation because of toxic algal blooms caused by the high nutrient content of waters released during high rain events. In some cases lesions have been found on fish and other animals, such as dolphins.
- This area is where all the clean water comes from for the southern 1/3 of the state.
- Is the water that dirty? How are you going to clean it up more?
- The proposal for protected areas at the headwaters is the way to go to address water quality concerns. It addresses the “K” (Kissimmee) of the K-O-E (Kissimmee-Okeechobee-Everglades) system and is long overdue.
- Your proposed preservation of land north of Lake Okeechobee is a no brainer, as was the restoration of the oxbows for the Kissimmee River. As you know, water quality to the south depends upon saving this area.
- I think this is a great idea. Much of the surrounding land serves as the headwaters of the St. John’s. A short distance to the west, similar land serves as the headwaters for the Everglades. Both of these resources are extremely important to Florida and the country as a whole.
- I wish this was arranged 20 years ago. Let me tell you why this was arranged today. In size and engineering you cannot short circuit. When a half billion dollar reservoir south of the lake becomes a white elephant and they (the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers) leave it incomplete, I think this area’s lucky that the Fish and Wildlife came to the rescue. I like the idea. The government will not use the eminent domain. Similar projects have been proposed in other counties: Desoto, Charlotte, Glades; the water goes to the Gulf. But they do have priorities. They were planning to spend \$1 billion for a cut off to have a higher water level in the lake. With this project they don’t have to do that.
- 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.

- This conservation initiative will restore and protect wetlands to support water quality and quantity from the Everglades headwaters to South Florida.
- The refuge proposal will bring better water quantity and quality to many refuges.
- The FWS needs to coordinate with the South Florida Water Management District to restore wetlands and to slow the flow of pollution toward Lake Okeechobee.
- The proposal should include water storage in the natural system as much as possible. Storage of water by correcting overdrainage by agricultural ditches is one of the best means of water storage, since much of the storage is underground or in shade and not subject to the powerful evaporation rates of open water.
- The proposal represents a great opportunity to accomplish important regional, State, and national goals, including to permanently increase natural water storage capacity and nutrient reduction on a landscape scale in the headwaters of Lake Okeechobee and downstream estuaries and Everglades. Everglades restoration, including meeting legal water quality targets and managing water supply, water deliveries to estuaries and flood protection for over seven million residents of South Florida, depends on the success of aggressively addressing these issues. The South Florida Water Management District is an able partner in these efforts.
- I support this project since it will ensure water flows freely through the upper Everglades basin to feed the Kissimmee River and Lake Okeechobee.
- The proposal will help protect and likely improve the quality of water flowing south into Lake Okeechobee. By working with local landowners (perhaps as part of the World Wildlife Fund’s Florida Ranchlands Environmental Services Project to provide seasonal water storage) the refuge and conservation area will complement other projects that will reduce the need to discharge polluted water from Lake Okeechobee into our state’s fragile coastal estuaries.
- I support the formation of the proposed refuge and conservation area. Hydrologic restoration of fallow agricultural lands or pasturelands can increase the amount of surface and ground water and expand the mosaic of wetlands and xeric uplands as has been successfully achieved on the nearly 400-acre site owned by Gulfstream on Old Avon Park Road, south of Frostproof.
- Farmers should be required to install stream buffers in order to keep the cattle out of the streams, thereby preventing cattle runoff and water pollution – eliminating the bacteria and nutrients in the water resulting from cattle. These buffers could be comprised of fencing or trees and could be modeled after the agricultural buffer program in the Shenandoah Valley. It would be worthwhile now to begin recruiting farmers now to participate in such a project, since forested buffers would take years to grow.
- Proper management of the watershed requires being able to control hydrology and minimize pollution in the headwaters. Protection and continued restoration of the Kissimmee River and Fisheating Creek will improve the hydrology and water quality of Lake Okeechobee and the Everglades as a whole.
- This proposal is a win-win. It is a great adjunct to source control for phosphorus and nitrogen. Wetlands provide many ounces of prevention worth many pounds of cure.
- Protecting the headwaters at the northern end of the Everglades system will assist overall Everglades restoration and the water resources Floridians depend on.
- This proposal seems to benefit the fresh water necessities of South Florida almost to exclusion. Those citizens in South Florida have already exploited the Everglades and Lake Okeechobee beyond repair due to their overpopulation and water diversion techniques. Why should Central Florida give up its natural resources to accommodate the greed that promulgates the exploitation of fresh water in South Florida? Let them sleep in the bed they made. They have access to use other fresh water sources if they could curb their development and demand without encroaching on areas in Central Florida.
- The proposal will permanently increase natural water storage capacity and nutrient reduction on a landscape scale in the headwaters of Lake Okeechobee and downstream estuaries and the Everglades. Everglades restoration, including meeting legal water quality targets and managing water supply, water deliveries to estuaries, and flood protection for over seven million residents of South Florida depends on the success of aggressively addressing these issues.
- The proposal will enhance Kissimmee River Restoration success with additional habitats surrounding the present restoration footprint.

- Restoration of water quality and survival and continuance of the cattle ranching heritage cannot be met simultaneously due to the fact that the cattle remain in the Northern Everglades Headwaters region, as cattle waste has been historically one of the main water quality problems.
- There are reasons for serious concern about the quality of the water flowing into Lake Okeechobee, including too much phosphorus and too much sediment. The excess phosphorus going into Florida's largest lake largely comes from fertilizer.
- The ecological health of Martin County is closely tied to the quality, quantity, and delivery of surface water from Lake Okeechobee. The proposal is an ecosystem-level approach that allows willing public and private property owners to work together to address shortcomings of the existing plumbing system.
- Water quality protection and the water management value of the proposed refuge as it relates to Lake Okeechobee, the Everglades, and coastal estuaries are of critical importance and should be one of the core purposes of the proposed refuge. The proposed refuge can, with proper planning, complement the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Program and the Lake Okeechobee Protection Plan by promoting and protecting the use of inherent water storage, attenuation and treatment potential of northern Everglades landscapes as a means to achieve the ecological goals of Everglades/Lake Okeechobee restoration.

### **Wildlife Corridors and Migration**

- This proposal will conserve biodiversity and habitat for panthers, snail kite, etc.; creates wildlife corridors. This is the best chance these species have for survival.
- Wildlife Corridors are already there, we don't need this plan.
- Fourth generation resident. I'm speaking in favor of the national wildlife refuge. There's a foundation for the last 30 years between federal and state government, private landowners, and non-governmental organizations to conserve land and wildlife habitats. What this proposal means is tying up loose ends. The conserved lands don't form the corridors that wildlife need to move from one area to the next. Many of you who are against this proposal are probably also against the alternative: regulations on land use. This proposal is bringing money to the table for wildlife and recreation opportunities. One suggestion I would make is to leave Indian River County in there, specifically the Kissimmee to St. John's corridor. We need that corridor protected, especially for panther migration. I hope you would consider putting that corridor back in the study area.
- This NWR will provide habitat connectivity for Florida black bears from the southern population (Big Cypress), the south central population (Glades/Highlands) and populations further north (Ocala).
- This conservation initiative will protect a land base of sufficient mass and continuity to enable wildlife to migrate and adapt in response to climate change and other natural and man-made threats.
- 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. that would otherwise face extinction by isolation. We love and support this plan.
- The proposal represents a great opportunity to accomplish important regional, State, and national goals, including to provide a large and connected ecological landscape supporting the Florida panther and a host of other Everglades species.
- The refuge will provide the opportunity to link already existing conservation lands together, which will reduce habitat fragmentation and create much needed wildlife corridors. This approach is supported by the FWC study which recommends acquiring and protecting large parcels of land for conservation, while promoting compatible agricultural activities and using alternative protection techniques such as conservation easements to give Florida wildlife a fighting chance.
- Corridors that will allow wildlife to migrate and maintain genetic diversity and areas big enough that will be able to remain wild are just what is needed.

### **Ecosystem Services**

- Wetlands have been destroyed for short sighted human endeavors; these wetlands serve such an important service, to recharging the aquifer, filtering out pollutants, and providing ecotourism and habitat.
- Whatever areas we set aside for our natural resources, will benefit mankind with clean air, wetlands filter water, and trees clean the air. Wildlife, as panthers and gators, can maintain a healthy balance, and perhaps control invasive species.

- 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.

- Valuing Ecosystem Services of the Proposed Everglades Headwaters (EH) National Wildlife Refuge

This analysis uses The Costanza Synthesis [Costanza, et al, Paper 1994], that provides ecosystem services values (ESV) of 18 biomes (ecosystem types), based on 17 services and functions, converted to dollars per acre per year in current dollars. A first cut at the potential value of the proposed EH NWR over a 40 year life-cycle is calculated. Based on the value of 130.8 million acres over 40 years, the value is calculated as \$109,112,340,708. Yes, that's \$109.1 Billion with a capital B.

This is mostly a number-crunching exercise, per the accompanying spread-sheet. The one item that involves a judgment call is matching the EH NWR biomes categories provided by the Fish & Wildlife Service with the Costanza paper biomes.

Once that decision is made the ESV calculations flow from Costanza Paper Table 2 synthesis (Google *Nature* 387). Likely most readers will require some familiarity with the Costanza, et al, (1994) approach and methodology before accepting a first estimate calculation of ESV, especially a calculation that results in such large dollar calculations on the order of magnitude of  $10^{10}$ .

For those in Costanza values we trust (or not), it might do well to mention that the Costanza Paper declares that the total economic value (TEV) of the planetary natural capital averages on the order of \$33 Trillion in 1994 dollars, or an inflated  $1.4583 \times \$33$  Trillion = \$48 Trillion in 2010 dollars.

No matter how one chooses to calculate ESV, the dollar amounts come out mind-boggling BIG to those not familiar with such an approach. A 2005 National Research Council (NRC) study amplifies that the TEV approach is a must. The NRC 2005 study also notes with emphasis, that if such calculations are not made, ESV takes on a default value of zero (0). Thus the challenge is to get on with the TEV calculation, so wetlands don't get zeroed out.

The calculated value of \$109.1 billion is considered conservative (undervalued) because:

- Costanza Paper position is that most of the Table 2 values are conservative, or undervalued, due to complexities that are difficult to calculate (repeated three times in the Costanza Paper).
- A lower Costanza equivalent biome value is used, when the EH NWR biome might be of higher value.
- The estimate is based on a life-cycle of 40 years, rather than 50 years used by other estimates (and 50 years carries greater uncertainty).
- Cost avoidance is not included in the Costanza (1994) ESV/TEV calculations, but is considered in discussion that follows.

That said, total value is not necessarily the value referenced for decision making, when many of the services would be furnished by status quo anyway, and the ESV benefit is that gained by cost of acquisition or actual dollars invested.

The real value of preserving 130+ million acres, is the protection in the far future (perpetuity?) of some percent of the preserved acres from future development and associated negative externalities (i.e., loss of some or all of the 17 ecosystem services and functions called out by the Costanza paper, increasing water demand necessitating more water treatment, and additional nutrient pollution of the environment from storm run-off, etc.).

No one has a crystal ball, but: Consider that at least 20% of the 130+ million acres would be lost to development if the land was not protected. Protecting the land thus takes on an estimated value of  $.2 \times \$109,112,340,708$ , or \$21,822,468,142 as a cost-avoidance in terms of an avoidable reduction in ESV.

In this case note that any cost associated with acquiring the land for EH NWR, and thus "saving" \$21.82 Billion is similar to paying not to cut down a tropical forest in the cap and trade scheme. That is in terms of avoiding the long-term costs of carbon emissions that would ensue, relative to removing the forest for

economic pursuits, there is a cost trade-off whereby it makes more economic sense to pay the forest owner for preservation in perpetuity, rather than incur the negative externalities of excessive carbon emissions for a purely economic return. Generally developers and industrialists in a greed-based society do not accept this trade-off. Instead they go for the short-term economic gain. This results in future generations having to pay the piper.

This concept and a general review of Costanza, et al (1994) paper are provided by a Costanza, et al, paper (1998)

Since Costanza paper synthesis is in Hectares (Ha) and 1994 dollars, conversions to acres and 2010 dollars as noted apply. The spread sheet allows some flexibility such as changing the inflation rate (1.4583) or changing the life cycle in number of years (40) by changing one number at the top of the applicable column.

Regarding the desire to calculate a benefit-to-cost (B:C) ratio: Thus far an exact cost estimate is not available for acquiring the EH NWR lands. Note that the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) uses B:C go-no-go criteria. When B:C is calculated at 1.5 or greater by USACE, the project is normally declared a go. Given this, and the 20% criteria, any cost less than \$14,548,312,094 to acquire the land would make this project a go. Of course given B:C (benefit divided by cost), decreasing cost results in increasing B:C.

Anecdotal information indicates that the costs of acquiring the EH NWR may approach \$1 Billion dollars. Using the \$21.82 Billion dollar estimate of benefits relative to costs – by ‘inspection’ – the B:C ratio becomes 21.82:1.

High B:C ratios on this order should come as no surprise. The 2010 Arthur R. Marshall Summer Interns provided calculations based on the B:C of a River of Grass flow-way, revealing the best case as ~26:1.

Recent findings publishing a B:C ratio of 4:1 significantly undervalue ESV by not considering TEV per NRC 2005, and not considering Costanza’s synthesis of ecosystem services values (1994). The current national economic situation begs for consideration of benefits in terms of TEV, as is calculated herein.

Wakefield (2002) notes that investing in the environment pays 100-1 return on investment (ROI). The paper cites that: An annual investment of \$45 Billion in preserving large tracts of wild nature would yield an annual return to society of between \$4.4 and \$5.2 Trillion in “ecosystem services” like water filtration and climate regulation, an 100-1 ROI, i.e., B:C = 100:1.

Given the TEV of the EH NWR as an economic benefit of \$109.1 Billion and the projected cost of \$1 Billion, B:C = 109:1. The B:C calculations are spot on in agreement with Wakefield/Costanza TEV observations. QED?

**CONCLUSION:** This analysis indicates that the proposed EH NWR is a go in a BIG way!

We will take this as adequate peer review for the time being. As of the header date (2/10/2011), peer review is on-going by the Arthur R. Marshall Foundation/FL Environmental Institute, Inc., Science & Technology Committee, with our Senior Scientist, Dr. Tom Poulson, taking a first crack at this resulting in Version 2.0.

Any comments appreciated.

#### REFERENCES:

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Costanza, et al; *Forum on Valuation of Ecosystem Services: Putting the issues in perspective*; Ecological Economics 25; 1998; See: <http://www.uvm.edu/giee/publications/Costanza%20et%20al.%20EE%201998.pdf>  
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## Resource Protection

### Land Acquisition/Protection in General

- Landowners need to be contacted directly in order to build a coalition (based upon trust) to represent the interest, provide a source of correct information, organize conservation activities designed to help the small land owner to manage their land, and provide resources (equipment/materials) to fix issues and problem for small landowners.
- 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.
- You say you have willing sellers but there are more unwilling sellers.
- It's only a land steal.
- Property is not for sale or lease; leave us alone.
- I support this. I used to go to Homestead and pick on farms down there. But those farms are gone now because the government took them. For this project, if the owners don't want to sell, they don't have to.
- Question: Does the FWS have a minimum amount of acreage before it is called a refuge?
  - Answer: No. The approval of the creation of a refuge happens before any land interest can be purchased or donated.
- I am opposed to fee title acquisition.
- 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.
- 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.
- Question: I'm wondering if we're going to be given money for our land. That's my concern.
  - Answer: Land will be appraised by local appraisers.
- I am a hunter that believes in conservation and is for this project. Most of large landowners need more tools in their tool box to stay in business. Conservation easements will give them extra funds to stay in business. If landowners want to hop out then that is fine but if they want to be in they should be able to be in.
- Do you have a feel for how acres might be donated versus purchased? Is each refuge unique or is there a pattern from the past that could help explain this?
- Audubon is not pushing to acquire River Ranch properties and we need to focus on the problems of the watershed instead of worrying about the FWS trying to buy up River Ranch.
- First concern: 50,000 acres designated for a wildlife refuge.  
Question: Where is that 50,000 acres? It's not defined anywhere.

- Answer: We're currently in the early stages of project planning. After these public scoping meetings we are going to draft the land protection plan. It's at that point that we identify the specific properties we're interested in acquiring. You'll have a chance to comment on that.
- Charles Lee, Director of Advocacy in Florida for the Audubon Society. We support plans to move forward. With that said I think it's important to talk about what the priorities should be. We believe the priorities should be to work with large ranch owners so the ranches can remain in production essentially forever because they have been good stewards of land which is why the wildlife is there. There's a chance to work with the South Florida Water Management District to slow water going into Lake Okeechobee. The Service's proposal should focus on lands that will do the most good. The lands that will do the most good are not places like River Ranch or Suburban Estates where you have thousands of one or two acre lots. You can't obtain environmental benefits on those lands. The reality is it would take just as much to negotiate for a one acre or five acre or ten acre tract as it would to negotiation for a five-acre tract. Let's focus on what would most benefit the environment.
- Keith Fountain, Director of Land Protection for the Nature Conservancy. We strongly support the efforts here tonight. This is an area with incredible wildlife diversity. One of the reasons is the stewardship ethic displayed by the ranchers in Florida. You really need to support the open process going on here. It's not today, but 50 years or 100 years from now that I'm personally worried about. We've worked for decades with ranchers in this part of the state. A lot of ranchers are excited about this proposal to keep their ranches intact to allow them to pass on that resource from generation to generation. You know this landscape well. Without programs like this, maybe 50 years from now areas you now use to recreate are going to be subdivided and developed. The quality of life that you're fighting for here tonight is going to be gone. Think about what conservation programs like this can do to keep central Florida the way you love it.
- Florida Audubon Society and has been working with landowners to establish protections for wildlife. Strongly believe and support in this project. Believe primary activity should focus on easements on large continuous properties and put \$ in hands of ranchers. Believe FWS should focus on lands with large continuous ecologically important tracts. FWS should not focus on tracts of land like River Ranch which is broken up into small acreages.
- Consider quick acquisition of any cattle ranches experiencing acute panther depredation pressure, in addition to the establishment of a fair compensation program in cooperation with the State of Florida – all based on best science of this phenomenon.
- The proposal represents a great opportunity to accomplish important regional, State, and national goals, including to collaboratively engage ranchers and major landowners in habitat and watershed protection and restoration using full fee and less than fee acquisition tools and agreements.
- Because of the large expanse of connected watersheds and habitats required for both the Headwaters Refuge and expansion of Florida Panther NWR, the usual approach to federal refuges is not adequate. Bringing Farm Bill restoration tools such as the Wetland Reserve Program, easements, and payment for environmental services, in addition to more typical full fee acquisition is a smart strategy which we believe can succeed.
- The proposal is a wonderful idea and one that we in Portland, Oregon have been implementing for a number of years along the Willamette River to preserve and restore wetlands and other habitats. There were difficulties in getting started. Our biggest problems were fears and suspicions. Our program now has approximately 160 partners, including our yacht club of a floating home moorage of 38 homes. Restoration has allowed the ecosystem as a whole to become healthier. We found that it is to the Oregon Yacht Club's advantage to continue as partners in the program, good stewards, and neighbors.
- In TNC's experience there have never been as many willing sellers of land with great conservation value aligned as there are today. They want to keep the way of life of their ranching families and unique culture from quickly disappearing across Central Florida.
- The location of Florida's Turnpike in the study area and potential refuge and conservation area does not present a fatal flaw from the Turnpike's operation and maintenance perspective. The Turnpike is bounded on both sides by Three Lakes Wildlife Management Area (WMA) from approximately MP 211 to approximately MP 223 and management activities within the WMA and on the Turnpike have coexisted for many years without additional requirements for either. The Turnpike's long range plans indicate that this portion of the Turnpike will need to be widened from the current four lanes to six lanes by 2035. As you

may be aware, there are no specifically designed wildlife crossings or wildlife fencing in this section of the Turnpike, as very few improvements have been made since this section was constructed in the 1960s. There are some cattle crossings (above-grade box culverts) used by adjacent landowners (including the WMA) for vehicle, livestock, and wildlife access. Standard Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) fencing is located through this section as well. Because of the potential management activities associated with this proposed refuge and conservation area, the Turnpike requests inclusion in the process to develop the draft LPP and environmental document. Although the Turnpike supports the creation of refuges and conservation areas, the maintenance activities of these newly created areas must account for the existing and planned operations of existing facilities. If these new refuges and conservation areas promote or enhance wildlife habitat linkages that are currently bisected by an existing linear facility, then the resulting wildlife interaction (crossings or habitat management) with the existing facility should be addressed by the new refuge/conservation area with planning support from the existing facility.

- It could cost as much as \$115 million to acquire Suburban Estates (~10,800 acres) and the O'Berry ranch. The area has about 24,000 owners. This is a lot of taxpayer money to spend on such a small area. A better use of the money would be buying large one owner tracts of land.
- By working with local ranchers to conserve their lands, through easements or through acquisition of the most sensitive and vulnerable lands from willing sellers, the proposed NWR will help preserve lands that otherwise would be lost to development and save ranching in Florida.
- The FWC strongly supports private landowners' rights and would oppose any action that would impose land-use restrictions that are not willingly agreed upon by participating landowners.
- It appears that the only people this proposal is really advantageous to would be the large landowners, getting a supplemental income from the government, but not really giving up their property. I don't think this is a good idea. If this land is purchased or leased, it would become public property, paid for by tax dollars and should allow taxpayers access to the property.

### **Eminent Domain**

*Note: The Service's policy is to work with willing landowners.*

- What they're not telling you is that they'll be taking Okeechobee all the way down to the Everglades next. They don't want you to live good; they don't want you to have a good life.
- I don't want my land taken away from me or my son. There is a reason the land is private property, we maintain roads and do what we want to do.
- Last thing: when they take it, it's done. I hope that doesn't happen. That's all there is to it.
- I oppose the project completely, I don't think that any money should be spent toward the taking of property
- There is fear of immanent domain among ranches and other land owners, but you were very clear about that not occurring in this proposal; this is a win-win for all of Florida.
- You are not partnering or participating with us, you are taking land away and I am not selling my land.
- Is there any stipulation through the taking by eminent domain? A: No. Is there anything outside the parameters of the proposal that will allow the use of eminent domain? A: No, there is no percentage.
- We support this project but do not support the taking of anyone's property. Eminent domain is not possible here and we can only hope there is truth to their word.
- Speaker believes FWS will use eminent domain.
- I represent several thousand landowners in proposal area. They are not willing sellers. In summary here are my two major concerns: one is this country is broke. Don't have \$1 billion for this. No.2 I'm concerned with the number of times willing seller projects turned into eminent domain.
- I don't support this. Farmland in Miami was taken by the government and given to developers.
- Select the No Action Alternative. Under federal jurisdiction, whenever this project necessitated the use of eminent domain, consulting and attorney's fees would not be paid by the federal government, these costs would be absorbed by the property owner. Under Florida law, these costs are paid for by the condemning entity if it is a non-federal project.

## River Ranch Concerns

*Note: Based on the Service's criteria for a land acquisition program, there must be a threat to resources of concern and/or a need for further conservation efforts. Neither of these criteria seems to be the case for the River Ranch area.*

- River Ranch property owner. Question: What will happen if 50% of land in River Ranch sells, are you going to change the boundary? We are not interested in fee title acquisition in River Ranch, only interested in conservation easements.
  - Answer: We are only interested in development rights.
  - Question: So if easement, then you would only buy land as it is now?
  - Answer: Correct.
- 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. My concern here is I'm one of the landowners that has property you want. Question: Can you guarantee me that at a later date when you own all the property all around me that you won't take my property?
  - Answer: Policy is to work with willing landowners.Question: So you will guarantee me that you won't force me to sell at a later date?
- River Ranch property owner – From Texas now lives in Florida. Never seen place like this before and believes it is very well organized. Indians couldn't fight for themselves, government killed buffalo to build railroad tracks. Please take River Ranch out of this because if we do not fight this then we will end up just like the buffalo, we will no longer have lands to hunt and recreate.
- What was the purpose to target the River Ranch and Suburban Estates in phase 1?
- River Ranch Property Owners Association. Attended all meetings, presentations and maps have changed. Newspaper had River Ranch presented in red and suggests to please take us off your map. River Ranch property owner. Thanks to all River Ranch property owners to come to meeting. Called over 100 people to come to meeting. You already have over 150 million acres, please leave River Ranch alone.
- River Ranch property owner and Suburban Estates. America is fed up with Federal government. Been sorely disappointed by management on FWS lands. Not in Florida, not today and not ever.
- Big Threat, money factor, threatening to take away our land from us. 40% of the funding for this proposal comes from duck stamp money. I say we all need to hunt illegally and not buy duck stamps. Do not buy duck stamps and support the duck stamp fund so they don't have money to buy these lands. Totally against this and please take river ranch off the map.
- I am a 10 year old and want to keep River Ranch the same. Learned how to survive and have fun with family on River Ranch. Likes to see all wild animals and they don't need to be told where to poop. Please leave River Ranch alone.
- Under attack by these folks. Preliminary and detailed planning. During preliminary planning they said it was in the works since 2007. Question: Isn't that right Laura (Housh, FWS)?
  - Answer: No, I meant and said 2010.
    - In phase 1 you say you are going to leave River Ranch alone, are you going to say the same in phase 4? Leave River Ranch alone.
- River Ranch property owner. Bought property 2 months ago and like to recreate out there. Cleared 100X100 part of land. We bought this land so we could use it in our own way. She does not support this proposal. The people that manage RR do an excellent job and government has other bigger problems to worry about.
- River Ranch property owner. I oppose the Everglades Headwaters Project.
- There are people that don't know what River Ranch is about. There are many thousands of people that own property out there. We go to drive our trucks, four wheelers, buggies and we hunt. We camp on our properties where we teach our kids about the environment. So I want everyone who thinks they know what river ranch is about, you don't get it. I'm not 100 percent sure that this plan is right. You made it clear please take River Ranch off your map.
- River Ranch owner. Let's describe this proposal in one word: it's unconstitutional. The state wants to spend \$700 million on land that working Americans already own. And they want to tell us what to do on their own property. Whether you own boat, a mud truck, or four-wheeler, we spend a lot of money to do this so our family's can go have fun. It's pretty sad the government makes you pay to go hunt or fish. You spend a lot

of money on equipment and gas, etc. You catch a fish that's too big to keep because there's a law against it. For \$700 million you could sure feed a lot of starving kids in America. We go out there to be away from government people because they suck.

- River Ranch property owner. We've been at every meeting. Let us continue doing what we've been doing for 35 years. You're saying no condemnation, and that easements would include current recreational use. We may be able to use your help to make sure no one is going to build out there. There's been no meeting in Polk County. Most of the meetings were out of the target study area. We would love to see meetings in Polk County. I'd really love to see one more meeting, especially after last night's. There are other Polk County people that would like to know more.
- I've called 500 or 1,000 of ya'll. I am a proud River Ranch owner. Growing up my daddy taught me a lot of things. He taught me don't try to fix things that aren't broke and stand up for what you believe in. There's nowhere around where me and my family can load up on four wheelers or swamp buggies and go for a day long ride, with no destination, and stop under a tree and eat lunch and check out the scenery. I'm here to ask you to leave River Ranch alone. Thank you.
- River Ranch owner. I understand that you're not going to take land. You're only going to buy from willing owners. How many of you want to sell your land to these people? (Many people raised their hands.) Please take River Ranch off your list.
- One thing I would like to ask supporters is where is their land in the study area? I'm adamantly opposed to this project. If River Ranch and Suburban Estates get left out I don't think the federal government is going to be a good neighbor. This is a government solution to a problem that doesn't exist. We have dire predictions that we're going to be overpopulated, wildlife species disappearing. I encourage you not to buy into the hype. The scariest words in the English language are I'm from the federal government and I'm here to help.
- Two men were concerned that their way of life at River Ranch could be compromised if the Service solicited landowners in River Ranch to sell their property. They asked that we stop targeting River Ranch. They felt that the way River Ranch is currently managed and the deed restriction were sufficient to protect fish, wildlife, and water resources. They are not allowed to place permanent structures in RR nor fences. They would rather be partnered with rather than bought out.
- Property in Hollow Pond and if people are stupid enough to sell, will I be able to hunt or access lands in River Ranch around me? A lot of these areas will be reduced if the refuge comes in. This will also affect local business that deal with ATVs. What is going to be done to replace the income?
  - Answer: Fee title and conservation easements lands with landowners will maintain all rights except development rights. River Ranch will only be conservation easement from willing sellers.
- River Ranch landowner not willing to sell and has concerns about what happens when her neighbor puts land in a conservation easement and she doesn't want to. What is preventing the federal government from taking her land if surrounding lands are put in a conservation easement and the government is interested in buying the land? She is also concerned about land being taken off the tax rolls. This project is one-sided, toward environmentalism and not reflective of landowners and citizens that have lived there for many years. The people that have lived there want to be able to participate in mudriding and other activities that environmentalist would not approve of.
- 1962 or organization negotiated voluntary agreements with ranchers in Kissimmee River Basin for protection of the bald eagle. Fifty-nine landowners covering 500,000 acres of land for the protection of the bald eagle. We believe the potential of this refuge lies primarily in the partnership of existing landowners. Landowners want to ensure continuation of ranching into the future and receive fair compensation for development rights of their land. We know that many are interested in these kind of partnerships. More are interested in these partnerships (conservation easements) than in fee simple sale. Some landowners are interested in fee simple sale. I would hope that USFWS would find ways to most cooperatively work with the desires of the land owners in the basin and focus on largest parcels for easements. In the end, whether hunter, fisherman, bird watcher or just love the Kissimmee River that future generations can keep it like it is and that's the outcome we are seeking.
- Small business owner, River Ranch property owner, hunter. Send a message to FWC, director and Congress When they take out Disney, get rid of dyke built 40 years ago, and get rid of Alligator Alley, then the Everglades will be restored.

- River Ranch: We maintain our properties like you want it maintained. We have forestry and feeding programs. 60,000 people come through our property every year. You'd never have that many on federal land. We do a good job without any money from the federal government.
- Very slick presentation and you presented your idea of what we ought to do very well. I'm still disturbed because you didn't mention an endangered species: the Florida traditional outdoor family. I founded a ranch; the roots and bond to the outdoors with my kids and grandkids go very deep. You don't do that in an educational center. You do that by getting dirty. I wish this plan had been better thought out. Airboats, swamp buggies are what made the Kissimmee valley the Kissimmee valley. Some of the thoughts here take more than two minutes to express. It's very emotional.
- Question: Which landowners are your partners? What if we do not want to be your partner?
  - Answer: If the folks in River Ranch are interested in selling, that's fine. I applaud the folks at River Ranch for their stewardship just as the ranching community.
- I'm a property owner at River Rancher. We've been around for over 30 years and we haven't needed your assistance yet. You can't do anything for us. If you want – where your average working man can take his family and spend his week and be able to afford it. River Ranch is endangered. You're affecting a lot of lives and a lot of ways we raise our kids. They aren't out doing crack; they're in nature. We take care of our own. I would ask leave us alone, we're not interested in selling.
- We were at Kissimmee. Do you trust your federal government? Right answer. We have experience with Nancy Pelosi, Harry Reid and President Obama shredding our Constitution. Marion County has 60 percent of property owned by federal, state and county government. We've got a lot of water. They want it all. They want you off the land because you're considered a blight. You get in the way of the wildlife. You're polluting the water. They're telling you that you're the bad guy. Hunters have paid into this fund. \$1 billion. What they're proposing right now is Phase 1. You think they're going to stop at 150,000 acres? You've got to be kidding. Send these people away and send them back to Washington where they came from. We don't need them here.
- Resident of River Ranch. I don't know where this came from. The notification for this process is completely inadequate. I don't know if it's done purposefully that way. Now we're going to have 4 meetings right in a row. There should be something done with that process so it's long enough to involve more people. Your projected project costs don't make any sense. That lets me know that your costs are wrong. 150,000 acres you plan to appropriate; 50,000 in simple fee and 100,000 in non or less than fee. But your maps don't describe where those areas are. If you were to leave the River Ranch properties alone, the whole room would empty out. This project is supposed to cost \$700 million. Why isn't it spent on employment or industries or something? These meetings are just way too much in a hurry. 6 priorities it doesn't include are swamp buggies. They have to study it.
- Property owner out at River Ranch. Family has developed love and need to visit this land. You will never convince me that looking at pretty pictures on a wall (development of visitor center or taking into federal ownership) will ever replace their personal experiences. Law will dictate the fact that they will take our land no matter what. A: Every federal agency has right to eminent domain but FWS policy is only willing sellers. Not good business but within agency they have the ability to change policy and are worried that the FWS will indeed change policy.
- Once you give it to them you are never getting it back. When the next director comes in, you will not get it back. Don't sell and never give up. Write congressmen and keep them out of this area.
- River Ranch property owner, American and you cannot have my property. Strange that they have a 50K acre area and it is river ranch. Highest priority lands are on River Ranch. Don't let them have it. If some go, they will deem it fragmented land and it will be the tip of the iceberg. Same thing happens in Ocala, they say they manage land better, but trails are blocked off and sees 2 square miles of clear cut land. The cost, is a start up cost, nowhere does it say what is going to take to maintain lands.
- State Issue, the most negative comments are coming because the State has never honored anything they have said, but this has made the idea of this project seem very negative.
- Woman decided to take a verbal vote and most (the vast majority) in crowd said no to the project. 7<sup>th</sup> generation Floridian and camped at East ? and Ocala, very passionate of River Ranch, lots of events for children who get to ride, camp, learn about the wildlife, very passionate. We have clean-up rides and that

we are family. We have been going there since we were 6, go out and spend lots of money in the community. We should keep River Ranch open and the FWS should not come in.

- Everglades Coordinating Council – A lot of people had questions and said comment. They never said they wanted project or not. Page 21 talks about a project for special consideration and FWS has done an informal review and lands do not contain all wilderness components but FWS doesn't have to achieve all components. Elected officials want to instigate the refuge in an administrative manner instead of what the people want manner. Use the people's way not Charlie's Way.
- Everglades Coordinating Council down in south Florida and Council covers whole state. Our position is that it is an unequivocal no to the entire process. FWS has no choice to go by federal policy. Every environmental wacko will put comments in favor of this. This is not a vote, even if they get 12,000 comments in one way or another they still have to make a decision and the local community votes count. If you have problems with the state, they depend on you for money. What happens to a rancher that gets the free money and the rancher that decides not to enter program.
- Why is the map constantly changing, why are you taking out colors. Why are you taking river ranch out of picture, it originally showed as a Florida forever project? Your map has changed from the original and keeps changing. Charlie response: The reason why the map is changing is because we receive interest or disinterest from landowners. Also because of conceptual design and now is becoming further refined.
- Conservation Fund. Great opportunity for private landowners to sell to anyone they want. Conservation easements are a wonderful tool for State planning, future generations, keeping land on tax roll, providing a good stewardship and maintaining it. We should have had this here in the valley a long time ago.
- New member at River Ranch son and grandson got involved recently. We have our own destiny in own hands, if we do not sell to them, they will be all around us and don't miss the forest thru the trees. Tell your neighbors not to sell. Everyone loves the place and if there is eminent domain, then we need to all just stick together. River Ranch can stand together as a community and fight the FWS.
- River Ranch property owner and my land is not for sale. Last week in Kissimmee, we have the bull by its horns. We are the property owners and all we have to say is no and send them back to Washington, DC.
- Lake Placid and live within easement area and bought it 83 years ago, had lots to do with environmental matters and it is a great opportunity for this community. In the long run this will be better for your families.
- River Ranch property owner. One of the alarming things is that in other states FWS have snowballed them and said conservation easements are good. Now out west, ranchers are being kicked out of the lands. The same thing is going to happen here where they say it is a great idea and will come and kick us off the land.
- National Wildlife Refuge Association. Not often that the government asks your opinion. In favor for 3 reasons. 1 – keeping ranching community strong. 2 – keeping hunting and fishing alive in area 3 – willing sellers. Only willing sellers lands will be bought. Look to the friend groups, a lot of the area's friends all actually have the same interests. This is a good idea.
- Lawyer with Owens Law Group. Scary when the federal government comes into to say that they want to buy your land. 5<sup>th</sup> generation born Floridian. He represents several 1000s local landowners and they do not want to sell. The cost of the project is so high, what cost of that will we be responsible for when the government can't pay for it? Willing seller policy will most likely change into eminent domain policy. The project has been justified by saying it will relieve the Ranching community of estate taxes and he disagrees with that.
- Family came here in 1829. He is a FL cracker and an Endangered Species. Born on the ridge. Heard about expansion lands on Big Cypress and still have not been let into refuge. Hunters cannot get into areas to kill hogs and hogs are running out onto 98. Constitution, says U.S. Government exercises authority to buy land in our state only to build forts and barns. You are sovereign, never sell your land.
- Board of Directors for River Ranch. Great to see standing room only. Conservation easement is forever, it does not go away. They have control and say whether you can build a barn, shed or anything. How many landowners are within that boundary? How many of the landowners have been notified? None of them have been notified. Why didn't you have meetings in Polk County? Majority of landowners live there and she had to drive over 1 hour and leave work early.
- River Ranch property owner and anyone that doesn't own property should keep out of our business. Ken Salazar does not know conservation, federal government could sell a quarter for 50 cents. Need to stay out.

- Came to learn, didn't expect to be called. See a lot of people who really love their land and passing onto families. Iowa farm family live near wildlife refuge on Mississippi River to recreate. Never seen so many wildlife. This sounds to me like an interesting opportunity to hold onto your land and increase water quality and keep water supply on land and in southeast Florida. I hope a good decision is made.
- In reviewing the map of the land being considered for inclusion and current land use, we urge you to remove those areas popularly described as the River Ranch community that has been developed as small acre home-sites and campsites. We have ample experience with efforts to assemble land platted and developed into "small" parcels (Picayune Strand is an example 17,000 parcels acquired over 40 years at a cost of \$250 million) and believe that its continued inclusion will needlessly upset landowners and divert energy and resources.
- I think you should not take people's property away from them. My family owns land in River Ranch. My grandfather taught me the proper way to shoot a gun, and what happens when you shoot a gun. Would you rather me go out in the street and get in trouble or spend time with my family having fun?
- Does a lot of youth hunts, every week. Took out 9 and 8 year old. Very happy to get hogs. She was hunting on her land not the State's land, see eagles, hear coyotes. I trap hogs, the State wants every piece of game out of their property. On River Ranch you can drive ATVs, have a smoker on back of truck, have good ole time. Please tell us you don't want River Ranch so we can go home.
- We respectfully request that you remove River Ranch from this map. It has caused enormous disruption and the people are fearful.
- River Ranch property owner and I too am concerned. I'm a disabled veteran. If we lose this land, I won't be able to hunt or fish anymore.
- River Ranch. Grew up in everglades, Indians and FWC are kicking us out. Bought land so he could raise daughter around wildlife. Bought my land so it will not be sold out from underneath me. My land is not for sale and we are all here for the same reason, so don't sell it.
- River Ranch opposes the Everglades Headwater Refuge Project.
- River Ranch is our heaven on earth.
- I oppose the project completely, River Ranch should be excluded from this project.
- River Ranch lawyers want to meet with Charlie or at a minimum he should meet with them.
- I own property in River Ranch. I haven't been there in years, but I wouldn't want the state to take control of the land. If any agency was to regulate it, I wouldn't mind it being a federal refuge as long as it still allowed hunting for those who owned land in the River Ranch property.
- Thousands of property owners in River Ranch do not want to sell.

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

- 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.
- What restrictions if any will be placed on conservation easements?
- 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.
- 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.)
- The concept of paying for environmental services is coming into its own and should be open to all landowners wanting and able to participate, i.e., dependent on the value of the service that can be provided not the size of the holdings of a landowner.
- Bringing Farm Bill restoration tools such as the Wetland Reserve Program, easements, and payment for environmental services, in addition to more typical full fee acquisition is a smart strategy which can succeed.
- The announced ratio of fee to easements (50,000 acres fee/100,000acres easements) should be more flexible for the Audubon's work with landowners in the basin has proven that there is a significantly greater interest in easements.
- There should not be non-permanent forms of protection. The only alternative to a fee-title purchase of ownership should be considered during implementation of this proposal is permanent conservation easements.
- I'd also like you to consider sovereign immunity for conservation easements. If you would extend the liability, it may encourage more to utilize it.
- Any landowner considering grazing rights, you better read this. If you don't you're going to get screwed. If you own property, you can't make any money on it. Everybody's talking about how great these ranches are out here. I manage my property well. I've got panthers and bear on it. We hunt it. I don't need any help. I know how to burn my grass.
- Florida's ranches provide some of Florida best wildlife, so conservation easements protecting the ranching way of life in Florida protects wildlife.
- The primary approach for the proposal should be the purchase of easements.
- Protecting these large ranch landscapes with conservation easements will provide several beneficial results: The lands will continue to be owned and managed by ranchers who have been stellar conservationists over the years; easements are less costly than outright purchase; and the money paid will allow the family business and way-of-life to survive. Additionally, many of these lands may be candidates for the restoration of hydrological resources vital to the ongoing restoration of the entire Everglades ecosystem, including those lands south of Lake Okeechobee.
- FWC recognizes that private landowners are some of the best stewards of fish and wildlife resources, so we are supportive of federal funding for conservation easements that would allow them to continue their farming and ranching practices, while gaining long-term conservation assurances.
- The concept of this new wildlife refuge is an excellent idea that will both preserve our natural resources, while allowing agricultural interest in the State to be sustainable through the use of conservation easements.
- The Florida Chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation recognize that private landowners are critical stewards of natural resources in Florida and we are supportive of the natural resource benefits federal

funding can produce through conservation easements so long as they could continue their income producing practices.

- The strategy of working collaboratively with ranchers to use less than fee mechanisms to protect habitat and provide environmental services, such as water storage, should remain the core vision of the project and continue to be stressed as part of the unique plan for the refuge.
- Conservation easements must be regularly monitored to ensure compliance with the easement restrictions. This is particularly important as properties with conservation easements change ownership. Lacking sufficient resources to do this should not preclude the purchase of perpetual easements; however, the Service should consider its capacity to monitor the proposed easements and enforce easement restrictions as it prioritizes acquisitions.

### **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 omit those sites from consideration.
- Question: If FWS purchases 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.
- Question: What is the ranking system when considering specific properties?
  - Answer: The Service would determine the criteria to rank areas of highest priority for acquisition. Staff would send letters to the owner or owners in that area to determine who is a willing seller.
- Lake Apthorpe and its surroundings need to be protected. Lykes and Smoak brothers plan a huge development around Lake Apthorpe.
- There is a crucial need to include the parcels within the Panther Dispersal Zone approaching the Caloosahatchee River from Okaloacoochee Slough (especially the 1500 acre American Prime parcel directly on the River)
- Request that the USFWS expand the boundary to the east to include the Walpole Ranch (2,200 acres). This is outside the current study area boundary.
- I oppose this project. I am for wildlife and refuges, but get areas around Orlando and Kissimmee.
- Friends of Istokpoga
  - Would appreciate then remembering that the Istokpoga watershed is the second largest watershed for Lake Okeechobee and that Arbuckle Creek is still a very pristine and wonderful resource for the Dept of Interior. Take a serious look at the overall watershed for preservation.
- If they really want to buy property go buy Disney World.

- The area from Kissimmee Prairie Preserve State Park to the City of Okeechobee holds ranch land that is close to returning to its original state of dry prairie. If this area was to be included in a NWR, it could be restored to its natural state.
- We encourage the inclusion and purchase of the land connecting Mt. Lake Corp. property to the Catfish Creek Preserve (Ridge to River) not only for the protection of the endangered *Ziziphus*, but also for the protection from development of this valuable wildlife corridor to Lake Pierce.
- Target properties that add to the problem, such as Disney and all the golf courses that fertilize on a regular basis.
- Preservation of Natural Florida, Inc. owns approximately 6,000 acres of land located in Township 31S and 32S, Range 31E, Polk County, Florida, which is roughly bordered on the North by Highway 60, on the East by the Kissimmee River and Florida Water Management District and on the South by the Avon Park Bombing Range. We are very pleased with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service's interest in this property and would like to cooperate with your plans in any way possible.
- The Nature Conservancy identifies numerous properties owned by willing sellers in the upper Kissimmee River basin for inclusion in the refuge. TNC has obtained willing seller letters from landowners interested in participating in the new refuge, based on location specifications such as highest quality natural community and wildlife resources; connectivity for the movement of large, wide ranging species; and greater habitat needs associated with the ongoing threat of climate change. TNC has arrived at a series of the best and highest quality lands coupled with willing-seller status in the upper Kissimmee River basin, lands available for establishment of the new refuge. (See map submitted by TNC for details.)
  - Include TNC's Bombing Range Ridge property.
  - Include TNC's and Hatchineha Ranch, LLC's Hatchineha Ranch property.
    - This property serves as an excellent platform site for the refuge, since it is in the greater Orlando metropolitan area, is easily accessed by the public, provides access to the waters of Lake Hatchineha and beyond, contains a wide diversity of natural communities (ranging from ancient scrub and cutthroat flatwoods to the marshes of the Kissimmee River) and listed species (including Florida panther, Florida scrub-jay, sand skink, crested caracara, and southeastern kestrel), and contains improvements that may serve as the refuge headquarters.
  - Include Poinciana Properties, Avatar, Creek Ranch, Camp Lonesome, Overstreet, Escape Ranch, Lost Oak, Adams Ranch, Hayman, Destiny, Tiger Cattle Co., Durando, Triple Diamond, Corrigan, and Goolsby properties.
- Why don't you go buy the US Sugar's 180,000 acres?
- We propose the inclusion in the proposed refuge of a network of properties lining the southern shore of Lake Pierce and extending from near Bok Tower Gardens in the west to Allen David Broussard Catfish Creek Preserve State Park. This is about 2,000 acres of undeveloped lands that, in combination with property owned by Bok Tower Gardens (a National Historic Landmark), the Mountain Lake Corporation, and Green Horizon Trust, would provide an almost continuous corridor of undeveloped lands from Mountain Lake Cutoff (Lake Wales Ridge Wildlife and Environmental Area) to Catfish Creek Preserve State Park, providing an almost continuous stretch of undeveloped uplands spanning the width of the Lake Wales Ridge; protect a large portion of the Lake Pierce watershed, including ~100 acres of forested wetlands; protect the largest and most genetically diverse population of the federally listed endangered shrub Florida ziziphus (*Ziziphus celata*); and protect the southernmost population of the federally listed endangered herb clasping warea (*Warea amplexifolia*).
  - The Upco parcels (owned by the Updike family) are of particular interest from the perspective of protecting federally listed species, specifically Florida ziziphus. Florida ziziphus is known from only seven sites on the Lake Wales Ridge between Lake Wales and Sebring. Over half of all Florida ziziphus plant occur on the Upco parcels and the population represents 60% of the genetic variation known from the wild. The Updike family has been receptive to previous overtures.
  - The Nguyen property is of particular interest because it has Florida ziziphus and it has not been converted to pasture, containing a large remnant of the original sandhill vegetation. The presence of other listed species is probably for this site, but has not been confirmed.
- Bok Tower Gardens supports the acquisition/conservation of the Mountain Lake-Catfish Creek corridor. The land consists of approximately 2,000 acres on the south shores of Lake Pierce, extending from the

Allen David Broussard Catfish Creek Preserve State Park to the Grassy Lake Preserve. (300 acres in this area were preserved around Bok Tower Gardens through a Florida Communities Trust grant.) This area is a valuable corridor with both uplands and wetlands, but it also has populations of two extremely rare plant species: *Warea amplexifolia* and *Ziziphus celata*. Both of these plants are truly on the brink of extinction with severely reduced genetic diversity. This would be a significant corridor to connect the Kissimmee River Valley with the Lake Wales Ridge.

### **Specific Boundary for the Proposed Refuge and Conservation Area**

- The conservation chairman of the Audubon of Martin County supports the proposal and the Audubon of Martin County requests for the record that this plan contain provisions for a conservation land corridor running east of Lake Okeechobee that would connect the Everglades Headwaters NWR with over 100,000 acres of land already preserved as wildlife and environmental management areas in western Martin County and northern Palm Beach County.
- We're here to support this, including Fisheating Creek and expanding Florida Panther NWR. We have worked with conservation partners, with most major landowners in Collier, Henry and Glades counties on ways to protect panther habitat that also rewards landowners. It's important for all of us, whether we're outdoor recreationists, hunters or we're interested in clean water. In Collier County, we protected 56,000 acres without buying any of it. I think that's a really good model and that's the collaboration that this is trying to be as well. I hope you can think about that and be open minded about it. There are landowners in Henry and Collier counties who say they are willing to sell right now, either easements or fee simple. That recommends that the Florida Panther NWR and Fisheating Creek need to be as urgently put forward as the Everglades Headwaters. For water supply, hunting recreation, for keeping ranches in Florida.
- Question: Original map my neighborhood was in the study area. Now it's not. How can we get back in if want to?
  - Answer: We received criticism for this. The original map was conceptual, a broad marker placed on the map to give folks in Washington an idea of what we were talking about. Since then, we listened to public and looked more closely, and now we've drawn the boundary specifically for the watershed that flows into the Everglades. The line will go away when we come back in June. If there is an interest by somebody and you fall close to line we'll take that into consideration.
- Question: Has the project boundary been firmed up? The large maps posted at the meeting are different than the maps in your materials.
  - Answer: The study area has been refined a little, but we are conducting scoping and are here at this meeting to help determine which areas might be proposed for the 150,000 acres.
- Question: Are project boundaries subject to the influence of individual landowners?
  - Answer: All comments are being considered. Study area boundaries may be modified based on public input. All properties to be included in the project will be subject to the ranking system currently under development.
- Question: Can project boundaries be amended to exclude specific landowners?
  - Answer: The Service will only work with willing sellers. Study area boundaries may be modified based on public input. All properties to be included in the project will be subject to the ranking system currently under development.
- Question: Are we talking one refuge or a bunch of little refuges?
  - Answer: The proposal is for one refuge and conservation area established within the Everglades Headwaters Study Area. However, there may be several individual units situated across the landscape.
- Regarding the proposed boundary for the new National Wildlife Refuge and Conservation Area, we suggest that it should consider inclusion of the lands in the northeast portion of the Kissimmee River basin presently under the ownership of Farmland Reserve, Inc. (otherwise known as Deseret Ranch). These lands represent an important part of the headwaters areas that are experiencing development pressure.
- The proposal should include lands around Econlockhatchee River (Upper Econ Mosaic) which have been on the Florida Forever's A-list for acquisition. It affects the Kissimmee River, Everglades headwaters, and the St. Johns River. If the Upper Econ Mosaic is developed, which is being proposed by Osceola County, much will be compromised about the FWS proposed plan for Everglades and wildlife health.

- Does this include Blue Cypress Lake?
- We suggest that the proposed boundary should consider inclusion of the lands in the northeast portion of the Kissimmee River basin presently under the ownership of Farmland Reserve.
- The lands surrounding Econlockhatchee need to be included; if the Upper Econ Mosaic falls to development, which at this moment is being proposed by Osceola County, much will be compromised about the FWS proposed plan for Everglades and wildlife health.
- The potential acquisition boundary should be contracted to focus on large, contiguous tracts constituting the properties of “willing sellers” of fee or easements. Fee simple acquisitions should be considered primarily where this would complement existing fee holdings of the State of Florida and non-government entities such as the Nature Conservancy’s tracts at Disney Wilderness Preserve and Hatchineha Ranch. Overall, we believe that the initially announced ratio of fee to easements (50,000 acres fee/100,000 acres easements) should be more flexible. It is our view based on working with landowners in this basin that there is significantly greater interest in easements.
- Tracts of land constituting large numbers of small parcels containing numerous “unwilling sellers”, or which are partially developed in residential subdivisions, should be specifically excluded from the acquisition boundary. Prominent among these is the “River Ranch” area. Other examples include the “Suburban Estates” tract. The inclusion of these parcels, which would likely be impractical targets for acquisition even if the private landowners were willing sellers, has resulted in much distraction and unnecessary animosity toward the Headwaters refuge concept. A clear public announcement should be made excluding these areas from further consideration, and we believe this should be done immediately.
- The USFWS should consult closely with the South Florida Water Management District in designing an acquisition boundary. The objective should be the identification of a core group of tracts which present the greatest utility in actually slowing the flow of water toward the Kissimmee River restoration and Lake Okeechobee through the restoration of wetland features on these tracts. SFWMD is in the early stages of implementing a “Dispersed Water Management” program through collaboration with ranchers in the Okeechobee drainage basin. Certain tracts are more suitable to wetland restoration and the installation of low level water control structures than others. We believe that collaboration between SFWMD and USFWS could yield a result in which the “whole is greater than the sum of the parts”. The planning, scientific, and hydrologic science expertise of both agencies should be incorporated in planning for the Refuge and Conservation Area in the Everglades Headwaters. One example of the benefits of this approach is to combine the financial resources of both agency programs toward a common result. SFWMD “Dispersed Water Management” programs, using a “payment for environmental services” concept, could initiate the conversion of ranchland areas into more restored wetlands and equip existing canal and ditch systems with restoration oriented water control structures, and lease the land for this purpose on a temporary basis under the Payment for Environmental Services program. At some point in the future, USFWS could step in with the acquisition of permanent easements or fee title. This would augment both agencies’ financial capabilities for these allied programs.
- We support the proposal. We are disappointed that counties east of Lake Okeechobee that are within the historic Everglades watershed and that have been so intimately involved with public land conservation initiatives and Everglades restoration have been excluded from the proposed study areas. We propose that additional lands within Martin County be included in this proposal, including Lakeside Ranch STA, Dupuis Wildlife and Environmental Area, the JW Corbett Wildlife Management Area, and westerly portions of the Pal-Mar Wetlands, as well as private landowners within this mosaic who are willing to become involved. (See map attached to comment.)
- Audubon of Florida makes several specific recommendations, as listed.
  - The potential acquisition boundary should be contracted to focus on large, contiguous tracts constituting the properties of willing sellers of fee or easements. Fee simple acquisitions should be considered primarily where this would complement existing fee holdings of the State of Florida and non-government entities, such as TNC’s tracts at Disney Wilderness Preserve and Hatchineha Ranch. Overall, we believe that the initially announced ratio of fee to easements (50,000 acres fee/100,000 acres easements) should be more flexible. Based on our experience, there is significantly greater interest in easements.
  - Tracts of land constituting large numbers of small parcels containing numerous unwilling sellers, or which are partially developed in residential subdivisions, should be specifically excluded from the

acquisition boundary. Prominent among these is the River Ranch area. Other examples include the Suburban Estates tract. The inclusion of these parcels, which would likely be impractical targets for acquisition even if the private landowners were willing sellers, has resulted in much distraction and unnecessary animosity towards the proposal.

- The FWS should consult closely with the SFWMD in designing an acquisition boundary. The objective should be the identification of a core group of tracts which present the greatest ability in actually slowing the flow of water toward the Kissimmee River restoration and Lake Okeechobee through the restoration of wetland features on these tracts.
- It appears that some of the proposed refuge lands would be the same lands that have already received protection as a form of mitigation for development projects that destroyed vital habitat; taxpayers would pay a second time to achieve the same protection that was already “purchased” during the development approval process.

### **Cultural Resources/History**

- What is the status of the Section 106 review for cultural resources under the National Historic Preservation Act? It’s required under NEPA and needs to be done as soon as possible. Need to put in the 13007 about minorities and low income and the social economic structure could change and this needs to be considered.
- Traditional and cultural usage of the area was more than just ranchland. Tribal ancestors hunted and fished these properties and all future generations of Floridians should be allowed to do the same.

### **Wilderness**

- Letter from US Congress to Ken Salazar and FWS is part of DOI. We are writing to express concerns over Secretarial Order 3310, Wilderness Policy with BLM. Congress is concerned that this process has damaged cooperative working relationships with landowners. This order represents a considerable departure from original intent and instead is an underhanded way of achieving wilderness protection. They say one thing and they go about it a different way. They say it with good faith tonight but it does not hold up. They will change policy through backdoor ways.
- Representing the Kissimmee River Valley Sportsman Association. Cheri said every comment counts but that’s not true. There were comments from representatives of the FWC, Audubon and NWRA. Every one of them gets paid for what they said out here. Their comments are out the door. The Interior Department is attempting to bypass Congress to designate potentially millions of acres of BLM land out West as wild lands. This was in a Congressional letter to DOI Secretary Ken Salazar on December 22. He is using his authority to designate areas wild lands to protect wilderness values. Publicly owned lands identified by BLM that are not already part of national wildlife designation. You’re not allowed to set foot in wilderness areas. The Obama administration that the act of 1964. New policy will have significant impact on economy, jobs, and recreational opportunities.
- The proposal promises wilderness review.
- Wilderness values means no access. We want access.
- The website has a document that discusses Wilderness Review. If this becomes Wilderness, we won’t be allowed on it. Wilderness consideration is a concern.
- Intentionally deceptive language contained in USFWS’s project proposal at pg 21, section XIV that have attempted to conceal USFWS’s intent to declare Wilderness in un-specified areas of this project are unacceptable and further verification of nefarious plans to deceive we the people.
- 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.

- FWS's language contained in the project proposal (Preliminary Project Proposal) on page 21, Section XIV is convoluted to the point of almost concealing FWS's intent to recommend/designate Wilderness in unspecified areas of this project is unacceptable.
- FWC has heard the concern of some stakeholders that the lands within the new wildlife refuge or Initiative boundary could eventually be designated as "primitive backcountry" or even "federal wilderness," similar to the recent proposal for the Big Cypress Addition Lands. Similarly, we have heard the concern that the state-owned public lands within the Study Area boundary may be placed into federal management that would result in public restrictions or even closures. The FWC would be adamantly opposed to any of these actions.
- We oppose this proposal. The proposal indicates that over 150,000 acres will be reviewed to determine their wilderness characteristics. During this time of review, that land will not be open to hunting, fishing, or any type of use by the general public.
- USFWS' expressed intent to recommend Wilderness in areas of this proposal is more proof of restrictions that will only allow foot access to any Refuge which is totally unacceptable in this region of Florida due to weather and terrain conditions.

### **Florida Panther NWR**

*Note: A proposed expansion of Florida Panther NWR is not part of the specific planning effort for the proposed Everglades Headwaters NWR and Conservation Area. These issues and comments are outside of the proposed refuge and conservation area.*

- I support expansion of the Florida Panther NWR through purchases of easements in coordination with the South Florida Water Management District.
- Pursue acquisitions for the proposal and for Florida Panther NWR at the same time.
- Conduct immediate land acquisition of the American Prime parcel, 1,500 acres right on the Caloosahatchee River at the top of the Panther Dispersal Zone (Kautz et al. 2006). It is under severe economic pressure to subdivide and develop.
- Regarding the Florida Panther NWR proposal, it is particularly urgent to permanently protect several key pieces of habitat in the region of the Florida Panther NWR because of current needs. First, there is the critical need to secure remaining parcels within the Panther Dispersal Zone approaching the Caloosahatchee River from Okaloacoochee Slough. The 1,500 acre American Prime parcel directly on the River is one such parcel under significant threat of subdivision. Second, rising panther-commercial livestock conflicts in the form of depredation is a serious threat to the collaborative and productive relationship Audubon, its conservation partners, and the wildlife agencies have enjoyed with the ranchers to this point. Acquisition of easements or fee title to especially beleaguered ranchers' lands could help alleviate some of this conflict. Clearly, additional measures are also needed, such as a fair compensation program, or additional payment for habitat stewardship (environmental services).
- TNC proposes the expansion of Florida Panther NWR to include property called Alico/Devil's Garden, where willing sellers have been identified (see map submitted by TNC for details).
- Acquisitions to expand Florida Panther NWR should be purchased on the same timeline as the Everglades Headwaters NWR or even sooner.
- Just like the Babcock Ranch, I think that the land southwest of the Lake adjacent to the Florida Panther NWR should never be developed into urban areas.
- It is particularly urgent to permanently protect several key pieces of habitat in the region of Florida Panther NWR. First, there is the critical need to secure remaining parcels within the Panther Dispersal Zone approaching the Caloosahatchee River from Okaloacoochee Slough. The 1,500 American Prime parcel directly on the River is one such parcel under significant threat of subdivision. Second, rising panther-commercial livestock conflicts in the form of depredation is a serious threat to the collaborative and productive relationship Audubon, its conservation partners, and the wildlife agencies have enjoyed with the ranchers to this point. Acquisition of easements or fee title to especially beleaguered ranchers' lands could help alleviate some of this conflict. Clearly, additional measures are also needed, such as a fair compensation program, or additional payment for habitat stewardship (environmental services). (See maps and tables submitted.)

## Proposed Fisheating Creek NWR

*Note: A proposal to establish a new Fisheating Creek NWR is not part of the specific planning effort for, nor is it part of the proposed Everglades Headwaters NWR and Conservation Area.*

- TNC proposes several properties with willing sellers for a new NWR in the Fisheating Creek area (see map submitted by TNC for details):
  - Blue Head Ranch,
  - Hendrie property, and
  - Lykes Brothers property.

## Recreation

### General

*Note: Priority public uses for national wildlife refuges are: hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation.*

- When you reopen the Big Cypress National Preserve Addition Lands to the uses we were promised, when you stop the current and future Federal Wilderness designation from taking place, when you reopen the Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge to public hunting and public use of swamp buggies, when you include more hunting and airboat use in the 10,000 Island NWR, when you reopen deer hunting and airboat use on all of the Loxahatchee NWR, when you return managed commercial fishing to Everglades National park, Florida Bay areas, when you build the all three recreational access facilities from I-75 in Collier county as described in Collier county, then I would perhaps consider supporting the idea of a new Huge NWR in Central Florida.
- The Loxahatchee NWR is a shining example of prohibitive recreational measures and mismanagement commonly employed by the Federal Refuge system. This refuge has become an overgrown jungle of invasive plant life.
- The proposal insinuates that it will combine a bunch of purchased and already State-owned property into one and then regulate how, when, and who uses it based off your own assumptions. We all know what happens when the government gets involved in public land deals. I'm all for conservation, but to mandate the public on how they can use their own land seems a bit controversial to me!
- There is enough government owned land; the preserves and conservation areas have been manipulated into park-like properties which contradict existing cultural activities.
- Florida Audubon Society is not opposed to hunting and fishing, this proposal should take into consideration these rights in the state of Florida.
- Have you guys ever heard we're here from the federal government and we're here to help you?
- I have a vested interest in River Ranch and Suburban Estates. If the neighbors on four sides of my property go with your plan, how do I get to your property?
  - Answer: How do you get to it now? (Four-wheeler) Do you have an access agreement? (No)
  - Answer: We're still in the proposal stage. We haven't made any decision. That said, for River Ranch, and Suburban Estates, the management of any type of activity there would not involve fee title. Fee title in those areas would be too complicated, too complex. We could be interested in conservation easements. We would not control access or use.
- I believe there's a percentage of a national wildlife refuge can be used for consumptive use. What's the percentage? Who determines what land gets used and what gets set aside?
  - Answer: The percentage limitation on recreational use on refuges is tied to Migratory Bird funding. That funding level is 40 percent of Duck Stamp monies. When the Duck Stamp money is used, they wanted a certain percentage used to fund sanctuaries for waterfowl. With other funds, up to 100 percent can be used for recreational purposes.
- Three words: Trail of Tears. The government didn't like the Indians so they just got them out of the way. They don't like that we use four wheelers. This is the root cause. They're trying to do away with ORVs. They don't agree with the way we use nature. Four miles from here there's a center for the arts. I don't use it, but I don't have a problem with people who do. They're trying to shut down ORV use in a roundabout way. It's not right.
- On behalf of an airboat association. If the refuge is created, they won't let you on it. It's happened before it's going to happen again. We need to control it, not the federal government. Say no to the federal land

grab. Go on the website for Freedom Advocates and watch it before you make a decision. He realized it was communist. I can't figure out whether I'm fighting the right battle or not because it's different every time I go in.

- I support the process and designation of a national wildlife refuge. I grew up hunting and fishing on a lot of these. The national wildlife refuge in Sacramento supports 40 percent of the Pacific Flyway population. There are a lot of ducks to hunt out there. There are 73,000 visitors ever year. Public-private partnership works.
- Are you going to allow us and use ATVs, trucks, airboats?
- Hunting lease on large cattle farm, state and feds came in and said we can hunt, can't use ATVs, can't use gas. What about other waterways other than state waterways. Are you going to let airboat etc. access to get to State waterways? Hunting camps, if we sell land or easements lands is the state going to cut off access? Still have right to access property.
- Florida Trail Association – plan build and maintain hiking trails. Florida National Scenic Trail. Very interested and supports project that provides recreational activity. Trail goes right thru main part of project and looks forward to working with the FWS to plan and maintain trails.
- Generally NWRs have 200 foot don't fly low, will this refuge have a fly zone? Until refuge is approved, we cannot apply for funding for 2 years. Flight restrictions that apply to existing NWR will apply but will not apply to conservation easement lands.
- 4<sup>th</sup> generation Floridian and an endangered species. Do not sell your land, the devil is in the details.
- I don't understand all this negativism against this refuge. This refuge protects the wildlife. It's going to be a great thing for this to be protected. Course we won't be able to see it be protected. Help me understand. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has stiffed us out of Loxahatchee. I used to take my son duck hunting there; you can't do it anymore. Some is allowed, but not much. US Fish and Wildlife Service had money in purchase of Picayune Strand. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is not friendly to recreation. You've got to go deeper than not selling River Ranch lands. As far as them not taking over other sovereign land, I don't believe it. They've got other things on the map, including Fisheating Creek. This is just the first in a series. You've got to drive a stake through the heart of this thing through the state, through Washington.
- In Okeechobee 25 years, I come from down south. I remember years ago and the refuge was going to be done. It was the Arthur R Marshall NWR. We used to take airboats into the sawgrass and hunt. You can't do that anymore. You can walk in. I'm here representing my grandkids and I want them to have a place to hunt.
- The Florida Wildlife Federation strongly supports the establishment. We see this as a way to increase public access to hunt and fish and to improve water conditions and storage of water in the Kissimmee River Valley area. Ding Darling is an economic driver. We think this will be an economic drive in this area augmenting, not supplanting agriculture. We would like FWS to make it very clear and build into your planning that recreational access is part of your planning, outreach and that airboating, hunting, fishing and hiking be among the allowed uses. We think the fee simple and conservation easement combination is a good way to do this. It establishes public and private ownership. It keeps the public involved in what happens. Recommendation: Change the study area map.
- Concerned with Track records, willing sellers only, acquisitions, and airboating. Certain lands that were sat on for 22 years only restricting hunters and allowing only hikers, upon a proposed agreement, maintain land, good stewards. Boating access will continue the same on sovereign lands/waters.
- Witness the feds take over the Big Cypress Preserve where he hunted. Had a lease; was land swap deal then went after other land owners; limited what people could do on the property; ingress and egress and couldn't use it like they did before. Now only a few hold-outs are able to have access.
- Hesitant to believe that the properties they acquire will allow the public use as they did in the past; rights will be taken away and won't be able to use the property like they did in the past.
- land was not improved; promised access to big cypress stair steps off loop road Fakahatchee Strand, and zero access to most limited access to some over the last 30 years; promises are empty and the next FWS director will change the rules and the people of FL have no recourse;
- I don't think you'll find a person in this room that doesn't support conservation easements. My concern is about accessibility. We have Flamingo Villa on a national wildlife refuge and there's no parking areas, no walk-throughs. Merritt Island restricts hunting to certain days and times. To say you allow something but

then restrict it in such a way, that's a problem. Having the ability and freedom to use the lands that you acquire.

- We don't want a refuge. Charlie Pelizza can sit in the turkey blind with me every time, but I disagree with him. The Picayune Strand: USFWS kicked all the ORVs out of it. We're locked out of Lake Wales Ridge. Water catchment 1 at Loxahatchee: melaleuca grew up because the sportsmen weren't in there. DOI – Big Cypress – got 147,000 that we still don't have access in. Over half of it is going to be wilderness. You heard the final decision will be made by a Director who's so new he hasn't even been confirmed yet. What kind of process is that?
- Disabled American veteran. Need off road vehicles and will need access to all government areas. Government is the one who messed up Everglades in the first place. Need a true set of restrictions and put it on paper. At the end of the year FWS is going to make up a new set of rules. The devil is in the details and we need to stop them from implementing this plan.
- Florida Wildlife Federation – Glad we are having meeting. We like this is a great opportunity for public/private partnerships. How in the future will FWS cooperate with management on other lands? This proposal will increase opportunities for public use. Will benefit everglades restoration and water recharge. Look forward to working with FWS and public. Will support public hunting opportunities on FWS land. Everyone who hunts on the refuge is lucky to have the use of the NWR.
- Kissimmee Valley Sportsman Association. Florida native. What kind of access do we have on Lake Wales Ridge? We do not have any access. Have you ever used the no action alternative or is that just a make you feel good alternative? Last week you said you would put all your comments in a PDF on the web site.
  - Answer: All the comments will be put on the website but are not yet. There are 11 pages of comments so far and all comments will be put on the website after all the public meetings.
- Ensure that responsible hunting, fishing, and outdoor recreation on these premises (proposed refuge) are unaffected. We do not need to go the way of California by banning all such activities from more and more beautiful reserves in the name of conservation.
- You need to stop the guy doing the wrong thing out there. Don't punish all of us.
- The value of traditional recreational uses hasn't been mentioned.
- Question: Will there be other meetings on recreation before or after the land is purchased?
  - Answer: Both. The FWS will write a plan with input from the public and the partners. When the Land Protection Plan comes out, planned for June 2011, it will include a conceptual management plan and interim compatibility determinations. Those will then be available for public review and comment. Later a Comprehensive Conservation Plan, a 15-year management plan, would be developed through an open process similar to the one in which we are currently involved.
- Is all of this going to push boaters off the water because of the Clean Water Act?
- Concerned about being locked out with no access.
- 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).

- Without the opportunities to visit public lands such as State Parks, National Parks, and National Wildlife Refuges, I would not have had the opportunity to learn about nature and gain a conservation ethic because you lived in a city and my parents didn't own natural areas.
- 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>).
- I ask you do what is best for our wildlife and conservation of our natural environment and NOT what is in the best interests in human recreation.
- Wildlife corridors and clean water are vital, and should not be sacrificed or even compromised for the sake of personal pursuits such as hunting and fishing.
- I am a firm supporter of providing safe habitat for our native species to survive. There are enough places left in this state and around the country for hunters/anglers/recreational riders/etc to enjoy. It is not ok to kill off an entire species just so that we have recreational areas; this is not the message we want to send to our children.
- Sportsmen who are opposed to this plan of land reclamation will gladly welcome it in the future when all of our land is built up and none is left for the wildlife and recreation that the sportsmen now take for granted.
- The refuge proposal will increase wildlife-oriented recreational opportunities for Floridians and their visitors.
- The FWS understands that wildlife-oriented recreational opportunities on the refuge are important to local economies.
- The proposal represents a great opportunity to accomplish important regional, State, and national goals, including to provide additional resource-based compatible recreational opportunities, such as hunting, fishing, hiking, birdwatching, boating, and other traditional uses.
- This proposal will undoubtedly destructively restrict/ban most if not all important existing traditional activities (ORV, ATV, hiking, dispersed, camping, general dispersed access, etc.) on any and all lands acquired by fee simple purchase, since FWS cannot allow any activity that will negatively impact any of the purposes that a refuge is established to protect.
- As in the management of St. Marks NWR, keep in mind the importance of recreational use and permit overnight camping by hikers, kayakers, and airboaters throughout the corridor.
- Include the Florida National Scenic Trail in management plans for this new refuge, since the current route runs through a patchwork of public lands along the Kissimmee River basin.
- Humans do not have the right to expect every creature to just die off because they get in the ways of their fun. The life of panthers and other wildlife that would be protected by this refuge should be considered before any selfish human concerns.
- Hunters, anglers, and ATV operators have plenty of areas to hunt, fish, and do whatever it is that ATV operators do. Those sports are hobbies that should be secondary to wildlife needs.
- The proposed refuge should provide a variety of wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities, including hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, photography, environmental education, and interpretation. The Service should work closely with the FWC in managing wildlife-dependent recreational uses in a manner that is consistent with the refuge's purpose and the conservation mission of the Refuge System.
- It was evident at the Kissimmee meeting that the recreational impacts of this proposal need to be explored and solidified.
- The establishment of the refuge would increase the number of outdoor recreation opportunities for the public.
- This plan flies in the face of the traditional Florida sportsman and denies him the opportunity to share with his future generations his love of the land.
- We are concerned that thousands of acres will lose state sovereignty.
- Any areas where tax dollars are used for purchase or lease should be open to such activities as power boating, airboating, camping, hunting, fishing, hiking, horseback riding, kayaking, canoeing, etc.
- I believe the million or so dollars on a visitors station could be better used through printing pamphlets like those currently available at governmental centers such as the tax collector's offices. Check stations, if

needed, may be a more appropriate and less expensive proposition, such as the one at Bull Creek WMA, mostly manned by volunteers.

- Incorporate the Florida National Scenic Trail into the proposed refuge. The proposal should recognize that the Florida National Scenic Trail provides significant outdoor recreation opportunities and connectivity of public and private conservation lands within the study area. The Florida National Scenic Trail passes through or is proposed to pass through: Avon Park Air Force Range, Three Lakes WMA, Kissimmee River Conservation Lands, Catfish Creek Preserve State Park, Bull Creek WMA, Triple N Ranch WMA, Upper Lakes Basin Watershed, Lake Kissimmee State Park, and Florida Forever Preserve.
- DEP encourages FWS to include passive and active recreational user groups as partners in the planning process, including hunting, fishing, and off-road vehicle groups. Land acquired in fee title or through easements should have multi-use management plans that continue existing or add to recreational opportunities, where appropriate.
- Consider horse trails as part of the plan. The equestrians in this area have a long established reputation for being excellent land stewards, and horseback riding would provide recreational opportunities in this area. Basic amenities would be a well, even a hand pump, at the trailhead with sufficient parking for at least a dozen horse trailers.

## Hunting

- The Federal government's management of our lands in South Florida has left us with 28 years of no hunting on Big Cypress National Preserve which is required by law to have hunting and traditional activities.
- During the creation of FL Panther NWR we were told by the USFWS that there would be hunting on that new NWR. But currently there is none allowed.
- The prospective document for this new NWR does not give any assurance saying these new NWRs will be hunted in the local customary and traditional manner; it is clear that before hunting of any kind will be allowed on these new NWR's, the agency will have to follow NEPA and do Environmental Impact Studies on the land.
- Hunters should not take precedence from saving what is left of our natural Florida for the benefit of the wildlife that it supports and for the enjoyment of those Floridians who help support, as well as enjoy its existence. Please do what the majority of Florida citizens expect of you and preserve this refuge.
- I support the proposal and the objective but I strongly recommend the specific acres in the refuge be selected in a manner that does not significantly impact the rights of the public to hunt and fish on public property currently available for public hunting and fishing.
- Please keep unpermitted hunting in the Kissimmee River Public Use Area.
- It's going to be locked up. There's a concern that the federal government has a credibility problem. The fact that you say there is going to be hunting, well let's look around. Merritt Island: hunting 3 days a week, paid permits and only in certain. When you say there's going to be more, we're seeing less and less and less.
- My concern is with the added pressure this is going to cause on the hunting areas throughout the state. Along with added pressure this will cause increased poaching in the refuge area. My other concern is safety in other hunting areas. As more people flow into a more concentrated group of hunting locations more accidental shootings and other various injuries will occur.
- Concerned that feral hog hunting will no longer be permitted, resulting overpopulation.
- I agree with the conservation of the land but concerned about access rights being limited to no access, I hunt, airboat, fish, and would like to continue to do so and I have seen this happen on big cypress. I don't think we need to be spending money on this project, the ranchers have been ranching a long time and they need to continue. I am concerned about the takeover of water access, transferring from SFWMD to federal government and changing access to the river, not allowing airboats in the marshes, and only allow airboats in the river channel which would restrict recreation like frog gigging because you need the marsh access for this kind of recreation.
- 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: Chassahowitzka 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?
- Please do not allow hunting on the (proposed) refuge.
- The FWC Wildlife 2060 study (FWC 2008) estimates that Florida might lose approximately 25% of private lands currently providing opportunities for hunting to development by 2060. These lands in the northern Everglades study area provide some of the best hunting and fishing opportunities anywhere in the state. Without the proposed refuge, where hunting is one of the six wildlife-dependent uses, privately owned hunting lands will be lost when the property owner sells the land for development.
- FWC supports the expanded opportunities for public hunting that a new NWR could bring to the area, provided the major concerns expressed by Florida's hunting community can be addressed. Hunters continue to tell us that one of the biggest reasons that hunting is declining in Florida is the lack of access to quality public hunting opportunities. The proposal is an alternative to the state providing additional public hunting opportunities at a time when Florida is no longer in a financial position to acquire large tract of public lands. We note that some of the NWRs in Florida do provide quality public hunting.

- Of paramount concern to FWC is the level of public access that would be allowed on lands that would be acquired fee simple. The FWC strongly advocates for them to be opened to public hunting with access similar to that which we provide on wildlife management areas (WMA) in this region of Florida. We encourage the FWS to consider developing a cooperative agreement with the FWC to establish fee simple acquisitions as WMAs, whereby FWC would have the lead responsibility for determining and implementing appropriate public uses and be provided resources necessary for administering those uses including hunting. We strongly encourage the FWS to develop a Public Hunting Plan as a component of the Land Protection Plan so as to accommodate opening of fee simple lands to public access, including hunting as soon as possible after acquisition. We urge the FWS to incorporate this into their preferred alternative for this Initiative.
- The Florida Chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation supports the potential conservation benefits and additional opportunities for public hunting that a new NWR could bring to south Florida, so long as the concerns of Florida's 13,000 plus National Wild Turkey Federation constituents and that of Florida's general hunting community are addressed.
  - According to the 2006 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Report, Turkey Hunting in 2006: An Analysis of Hunter Demographics, Trends, and Economic Impact, 84% of wild turkey hunters and 91% of all other hunters do not own the land for the purpose of hunting. The issue of public access is a major influence in the trending decline of hunting in Florida. The Florida Chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation will not be supportive of any actions that will generate a net loss of public hunting lands in Florida.
  - We do take into consideration that several NWRs in Florida provide public access for hunting opportunities. We will be supportive of lands that are acquired fee simple to be opened to public hunting similar to other NWRs in the state or state WMAs.
  - We would further support a cooperative agreement with FWC to establish WMAs, where FWC is the lead agency in developing, implementing, and administering public use, including hunting on the WMAs.
  - We are supportive of youth and community involvement in outdoor activities, especially those of which that will promote hunter recruitment and retention. We are strong advocates of FWC's Get Outdoors program and the Florida Youth Conservation Center Network.
- Kill off the pythons and non-native snakes and lizards that are adding to the destruction of the Everglades and our canals. Allow open hunting year round without permits on these non-native snakes and lizards.
- Hunting in Central and South Florida includes unique vehicular systems (e.g., airboats, swamp buggies, ATV's, mud boats, etc.) to access remote hunting areas in difficult terrain. Without the acceptance by USFWS of these unique vehicular access systems that come in many forms being declared compatible within the proposed refuge, any public access or hunting plan developed by USFWS or Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission is a farce and will not be supported in any way by the well informed public.
- My personal belief is that we have sufficient hunting lands in Florida without any Federal help to get more. If we need more hunt land at some point, the State is quite able to acquire it when economically feasible. In view of current economic conditions. It is not proper for Federal or State agencies to be suggesting any land acquisitions for any reasons such as the ones mentioned to justify the Headwaters bad idea.

## **Fishing**

- I fish for a living; will fishing opportunities become more limited?
- Some boat launch areas now charge fees, will that also be the case on refuge/conservation lands?

## **Wildlife Observation and Photography**

- The refuge/conservation lands would increase opportunities for bird watching and photography.
- I support your efforts to make this proposed Refuge a reality. The hook and bullet club is waning and watchable wildlife is waxing. There needed to be representatives from Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission Watchable Wildlife group present.
- As a potential Florida tourist and eco-tourist interesting in photographing and painting Florida wildlife, I hope to see this wildlife refuge created.

## **Airboat Use**

- Florida airboat association opposes this because there are 1000s of acres closed to airboats. Lands that Johnny Jones fought for are not available to airboaters. Fight for Fund Florida Forever so we can get recreational use. Keep DOI out so we can continue. Took away the airboat rights and land has gone to heck. Fund Florida Forever. Cancel this plan, don't wait for tomorrow, call your congressman now.
- 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?
- Refuge would prevent access to waterways.
- I would like to speak about tract records, acquisitions, willing sellers-only, and airboating. Boating access will continue the same on sovereign lands/waters.
- Audubon of Florida. I've been in Florida for 22 years. Audubon is very much in favor of this proposal. Those of you like me who airboat on Okeechobee, it's either too deep or too shallow. Part of the reason is the drainage area above Lake Okeechobee. We can catch some of this water and have it not get into the lake; then when it's dry we will have water flowing into the lake. This one thing won't cure that but it gives us a chance to restore wetlands and get hydrology back on a better track. This gives us a chance to conserve ranches. This is a chance for these guys to sell development rights and keep their property there's real opportunity for these ranchers. It will open areas for airboating. 50,000 acres. Give this a chance. There are opportunities in here for us: recreational opportunities, water conservation, and wildlife protection.
- Development and commercial airboats in Osceola County are damaging the wildlife habitat in this county. The commercial airboats invade every peaceful habitat area, over and over, every day. The great numbers of commercial airboats have total disregard for Everglades snail kite nest signs and no interest in wildlife habitat, other than for personal financial gain. These commercial airboat activities are not regulated.

## **ATV/ORV Use**

- Landowners should be compensated for revenue lost due to ATV/ORV restrictions.
- Establishment of refuge/conservation areas would limit ATV/ORV opportunities.
- I don't care how many welcome centers or educational centers with pictures on the wall and pamphlets about nature and boardwalks you build, it will never replace traditional riding and education to your children to respect wildlife in the outdoors on a off road vehicle or airboats.
- The refuge should not be open to ATVs, hunters, or airboats; it is not natural to nature or wildlife.
- Concerned about ATV use on private lands. Meeting answered a lot of questions.
- Question: Want to know if ATVs or off-road vehicles will be allowed on properties.
  - Answer: If a landowner enters into conservation easement, the landowner would be able to run and allow others to run ATVs/buggies.

## **Camping**

- There would be less camping opportunities.
- Camping opportunities have been lost due to the government taking land south of the project area.

## **Public Use on The Nature Conservancy's Lands**

- Question: How much hunting on Nature Conservancy (TNC) 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.

## **Access**

- Areas in this land should be accessible by 4-wheel drive in order for the elderly to hunt as well.

- The economic impacts would involve cessation of purchases of items associated with multi day excursions to the area and even maintenance and parts purchases necessary for upkeep of specialized motor vehicles utilized to access remote areas that lack roads.
- There are refuges in other places that completely landlock some property owners and they still have complete access and control of their land.
- It was stated the roadways should be restricted due to the possibility of harming endangered animals; we can build parks, zoos, and wildlife preserves for them less expensively than the proposal would spend.
- Worried about landowners becoming land locked by surrounding owners selling (hole in the donut).
- As a sportsman and taxpayer, I am opposed to the government buying private land and then closing it off to the public. You are using tax dollars to buy this land, therefore the public should have recreational use on this land, without exception.
- This proposal will eventually prohibit sportsmen from using the area. Two FWS examples that apply to this proposal are: Lake Wales Ridge NWR (no access) and the Arthur Marshall NWR (minimal access and traditional usage gone).
- Another reason for our concern is the misleading statement that recreation of sovereign waterways will still continue. While that may eventually be the case, that does not mean hunters, fishermen, and other sportsmen will be allowed to leave those sovereign waterways and venture into the marshes, creeks, or semi-dry land that adjoins the waterways. The result of this will be that sportsmen will not be able to reach landlocked lakes by portaging over semi-wet ground.

## 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's (Bombing Range) 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.
- How is the final decision made – by referendum? Or by unilateral decision.
- As a private sector natural gas transmission facility, Gulfstream Natural Gas System works with multiple state and federal conservation agencies for permitting and mitigation of natural resource impacts.
- When Florida fish and game and water management came in there were no longer any deer or hogs.
- All of this can be accomplished by enforcing current existing laws; we do not need the government buying up more land.
- Refuge laws do not allow for most of our traditional activities, no matter how many times a USFWS representative may say so.
- FWS could provide a recycle/waste collection facility (for oils/fluids, etc.) in our area on land already owned by one of the existing conservation partner's lands.
- FWS could help the local communities by: providing conservation training/workshops, identifying wetlands, providing signage, identifying/repairing drainage issues, and indentifying/removing invasive species.
- Since the study area closely resembles the boundaries of the Lake Okeechobee Watershed, DEP encourages FWS to continue to coordinate closely with DEP, SFWMD, and Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services to avoid duplication of effort and to build on current initiatives and progress in the Lake Okeechobee Watershed, including the Lake Okeechobee Protection Act, Lake Okeechobee Protection Plan, Northern Everglades and Estuaries Protection Program, and the Lake Okeechobee Watershed Construction Project-Phase II Technical Plan.
- The SFWMD encourages FWS to protect the property rights of adjacent landowners and ensure continued public access to lands owned and managed by the SFWMD.

- The State of Florida should be the lead agency for such an effort.

### **Funding/Budget**

- If this Headwaters vision is allowed to continue to fruition USFWS and their Partners will be forced to cause unending delays escalating costs necessary for highway construction and or/enhancements as well as green energy projects due to the endangered species act.
- 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.
- There is enough federal land now, we need to sell some, not buy some. My tax money should go to pay our debt, not to increase it. Buy no land at all, and do not create any more federal lands!
- You already have enough land. You don't need this.
- State, local, and federal governments don't need more land.
- There is a possibility of a compromise here. A lot of people have confidence in the FWC. If you have a goal of this great deal why don't you give \$100 million of the \$700 million and give them some specific goals. Once the federal government buys land the general public is off of it. If you take money and give it to a organization that has earned our trust. We don't trust you. Understand America is bankrupt. And when you start talking about \$700 million to start this thing, we can't afford it. You might be able to achieve your goal through another method. If you really want to achieve your goal, look at an alternative method.
- How will ongoing maintenance (management) costs be addressed once the lands are acquired?
- 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 Preliminary Project Proposal 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.
- I have no problem with the proposal on the surface. However, I do have some concerns. In this time of economic uncertainty, I don't believe the money is there to fund this project. If it is there, it probably shouldn't be.
- Who does the money go to in a project this big (ranchers?)?
- Federal and state governments are broke. Most certainly the feds, being 14 trillion in debt have no business buying or controlling any more land. As a matter of fact, they should be selling the land they have stolen from the states to help pay down the nation's debt.
- The Department of Interior will be faced with more and more budget cuts. The result will be millions of acres of lands that cannot be managed or properly protected by the government. More land will be removed from the state and local tax lists and added as a management cost to the federal government. Stop the expansion of federal lands to focus diligently on the wonderful areas that are already under the responsibility of the Department of Interior. We have no money to spend on expanding federal control and ownership of land. The funding projections in the Preliminary Project Proposal are vague and speculative. Even if one presumes that the cost in the Preliminary Project Proposal is correct, there are no projections on what the loss of tax revenue is for the treasury of the State of Florida or for the federal government. Perhaps a way to solve this problem is to sell off other federal lands and real estate so as to fully fund this effort? If it is that important, then sell something to pay for it.
- This is just phase 1 of many. Don't we need to stop all the spending in government? I do not support this plan or any like it. The taxpayers will have to pay for this.

- The projected cost for this proposal is estimated to be \$700 million. I am a taxpayer and I greatly disagree with this proposal. The federal, State, and local governments are not in a position to spend money on this project. The changes made in the last ten years in the southern Everglades have taken the use of land away from everyone. When that land was taken, promises were made to open new lands for our use. Those promises were never met. There are now reports that the State is trying to sell the land taken in the southern Everglades to golf course developers. This proposal is couched to be the same as the southern Everglades program and will probably result in the same problems.
- We now have parks on ½ staff open only part of the time with only a limited amount of activities. Instead of spending more dollars on more land, our land, utilize what we have and make it more publicly friendly. How many rangers did we lay off last year? How many parks are not running at full use? Fix what we have available.
- What is estimate of cost on the annual budget for management of the new national wildlife refuge? Specifically on the fee simple land.
- Is there a recent example in the NWR System that would demonstrate the potential split in funding between user versus taxpayer?
- How many years do you anticipate the acquisition of the 50 – 150 thousand acres to take? It might help the people opposed due to financial concerns if they understood it can take many years to acquire this land and the dollars would be appropriated over many years, not spent in one lump sum.
- I am a 5<sup>th</sup> generation Floridian; born in Brevard County. Lived around NWRs all my life and I have to say I have several oppositions to this. One is funding. Why are we buying when we can't pay the debt that we have now? We've indebted our great grandchildren at this point. We don't need to indebt them anymore. Our founding fathers said we were not to indebt our children. I think the state of Florida should take the example of Utah and begin imminent domain to take back federal lands.
- Even if buy land you don't have the money to manage it properly.
- Please allocate the funds necessary to preserve our Everglades.
- The State of Florida has 255 wildlife management areas. All of these are funded by our tax dollars. When does this stop? Deny funding for this proposal.
- USFWS should give the money to the state of Florida for Florida to manage without the overreaching intrusion of federal strings and the regulation that come with all federal dollars.
- USFWS should grant the \$700 million to the FWC. The FWC currently manages many more acres than the USFWS and is doing a great job. Currently the FWC is the only agency that has the legal charge from the Florida Constitution to manage all wildlife in Florida. The FWC will have to do most of the management activities on the lands that the FWS wants to purchase and/or control. The state should not accept any money that gives the federal government and any of its agencies oversight of the management of these lands. The only direction and requirement in the granting document from the federal government for the use of this money must be that the funds can only be used to purchase in fee or via easement within the yet to be determined boundaries of the proposed refuge and conservation area.
- It does me proud to see some money and effort going into this at home type of project, instead of wasted on international big brotherhood in countries that have no appreciation for it.
- While protecting wildlife is an admirable and deceiving goal, it is not worth the millions of dollars we do not have that this project will cost the taxpayers and the citizens of Florida. That money would be much better spent assisting and protecting the needy children of Florida, not the transplanted non-native Texas panther.
- We prefer Farm Bill and Land and Water Conservation Fund monies be spent anywhere but the Headwaters project and we support Congress to create a prohibition to prevent this from happening.
- The goals for this proposal can be accomplished at the state and local level with much more efficiency and with considerably less cost than if the FWS was advancing this collaborative approach.
- Select the No Action Alternative. The state and local governments can effectively regulate future development at zero cost to the taxpayers, compared to \$700,000,000.00 for Phase 1 of this project. As a country, we do not have money to waste, and it would be a complete waste to hire biologists, land managers, park rangers, maintenance, and administrative staff needed for a project like this when the state and local governments already have these employees on the payroll. If the federal government has this money and is going to spend it regardless, ask the governor and the cabinet to negotiate a deal with a Florida agency to lead the project and give them the federal funds. Considering that the federal

government was willing to hand over \$2 billion to the State of Florida to lead a high speed rail project, I'm sure there would be no problem allowing the state to take the lead on an environmental project.

- Because of the large expanse of connected watersheds and habitats required for both the Headwaters Refuge and expansion of the Florida Panther NWR, the usual approach to federal refuges is not adequate. Bringing Farm Bill restoration tools, such as the Wetland Reserve program, easements, and payment for environmental services, in addition to more typical full fee title acquisition is a smart strategy which we believe can succeed.
- The Service should consider the value of ecosystem services, such as soil stabilization, water filtration, nutrient cycling, carbon sequestration, pollination, and insect pest control. Protecting these naturally provided services supports wildlife populations, as well as human health. Without protection, these services may need to be artificially replaced at high costs to governments and taxpayers. The LPP should include an assessment of how the relative value of ecosystem services will be affected by the various alternatives and land acquisition methods.

### **Property Taxes/Refuge Revenue Sharing Payment**

- We will lose more tax dollars to the local tax revenues.
- Question: Is the Refuge Revenue Sharing Payment perpetual, \$0.75 on the \$1?
  - Answer: The federal government does not pay property taxes. For refuges, we pay an annual Refuge Revenue Sharing Payment to the counties in lieu of taxes. For rural areas, this is often higher than the previous property taxes. Funding for the payment comes from Congress.
- Member of airboat club. Last night I asked questions about the Revenue Sharing Act. How much of the revenue sharing, this obligation, is actually being paid. Yes, we are not getting 100 percent and congress is making up money. If there is a shortfall, the counties are getting a prorated portion. How much money is in each of these accounts? Amount of money we estimated for the purchase price for start up costs. The Revenue Sharing Act gets over \$50 million/year. Is Congress approving to implement any of this project? Congress will not act to approve this. However, congress must approve funding in order to purchase fee title lands or conservation easements. Commenter: All money we are spending is borrowed money. What can we do to stop this proposal now? NEPA process allows you to comment and talk to your congressional members.
- Maintain 100% of the county tax revenues as a positive aspect of the No Action Alternative.
- We do not need more land taken off the tax rolls. The country is bankrupt and cannot even afford to maintain the federal lands we already have.

### **Management Plan**

- The FWS needs to work with us by providing conservation training/workshops, helping to identify wetlands, providing signage, helping to identify/repair drainage issues, and helping to identify/remove invasive species. This approach would be more appealing to many landowners and it would improve our conservation effectiveness.
- Question: Who will write the management plan?
  - Answer: The FWS will write a plan with input from the public and the partners. When the Land Protection Plan comes out, planned for June 2011, it will include a conceptual management plan and interim compatibility determinations. Those will then be available for public review and comment. Later a Comprehensive Conservation Plan, a 15-year management plan, would be developed through an open process similar to the one in which we are currently involved.
- Question: Who will approve the plan?
  - Answer: The Service Director. Our Director died last year. Dan Ashe has been proposed and is undergoing confirmation.
- We need information on what the FWS plans to do with the lands they want to buy.
- Question: Will people in any other state be able to determine what we can do on property in Florida? Concerned about people from California outvoting people in Florida.
  - Answer: This is a national resource, but there is not a vote.
- Much of the acreage owned by the federal/state government could be restored using fire/chemicals.

- Ranchers make money off of this, if you have government regulations come in you will run ranchers out of business and decrease food supply. Need to write these ideas into plan about importance of food supply and keeping ranchers in business.
- Do not include landowners that are not willing sellers, i.e., River Ranch. Make it very clear that the FWS will not condemn land and that they will work with state and private partners in order to co-manage the land.
- Request there are provisions in plan that links and connects NWR with all preserved lands in Martin County and others. Already many lands conserved in this area and linking will help keep FL healthy.
- The details of fire management need to be worked out among the cooperators.
- The predicted prohibitions that go along with this proposal would be unavoidable due to Federal laws, executive orders, international treaties, etc that limit management flexibility of every Federal agency and land manager including USFWS prior to any detailed plan.

### **Partnerships/Outreach**

- The refuge proposal is not unilateral but a partnership with Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission;
- Bring county, state, and federal elected officials with districts in the study area to next round of meetings.
- Do you have an outreach group in D.C. or Atlanta that helps craft the presentation and meet with stakeholder groups upon appointment during the scoping process?
- I belong to a Property Owners Group of 6000 strong. We are active in our community donating to local causes. We are active in our environment planting food plots and working with our neighbors (SFWMD and Avon Park Bombing Range) in keeping fence lines up.
- We oppose this or any proposal from the Service that has any jurisdiction over the state. Opposed to any proposal that doesn't give 100 percent authority to the state. Loss of sovereignty of the state of Florida when the federal government takes control.
- I am glad to see the State taking a proactive stance at acquiring more land for Refuge use.
- The refuge proposal is not unilateral, but is a partnership with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.
- The FWC and its partners already have many programs that identify this area as a high conservation priority, and we have a long history of working to conserve it. We recommend that the Service take the adequate time to become familiar with these efforts so the Initiative can make the best use of conservation benefits that they already provide. Example programs include: Landowner Assistance Programs; State Wildlife Action Plan; Cooperative Conservation Blueprint and regional pilot work; Florida Landscape Conservation Cooperative effort; Regional visioning initiatives such as the Heartland 2060 effort; Natural Resources Conservation Service's programs and focus; County resources through their comprehensive development planning process; and Florida Forever land acquisition programs and assessments.

### **General/Other Comments**

#### **Economy**

- The purchase of this property is taking this land out of the hands of private enterprises which will certainly eliminate some jobs.
- Job creation will be greatly enhanced when the USFWS and their partners choose the NO action alternative; the USFWS and their partners will then lose their ability to use the proposal as a tool to block and escalate costs of necessary highway construction or enhancements and green energy production.
- Massive potential job creation will be thwarted or prevented by this Headwaters proposal causing incalculable economic loss to Florida and its citizens.
- Serious local and regional negative economic impacts will very conceivably occur due to folks from as far South as Miami/Dade and many other counties discontinuing customary and traditional visitation to the Headwaters area after it is established due to unavoidable prohibitions of activities they go to the area to enjoy. The economic impacts would involve cessation of purchases of items associated with multi day excursions to the area and even maintenance and parts purchases necessary for upkeep of specialized motor vehicles utilized to access remote areas that lack roads

- 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.
- This is not good idea for will landowners or not, this program will cost through direct purchase of land, through money to offset loss in tax rolls which will be sent annually to municipalities affected, and through ongoing maintenance costs. We do not need more spending or taxes to maintain natural wildlife lands.
- 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.
- A plan should be developed to regulate agriculture/farming/grazing so they can coexist with wildlife objectives.
- If you really care about jobs, then you must protect our environment. 58% of all tourists come to Florida for our outside.
- Land values will be decreased by the implementation of conservation easements thus lowering the tax counties will receive. In turn, increasing taxes for local businesses and the public.
- County residents will have to make up the tax revenue shortfall caused by this Federal Sprawl.
- Concerned about accountability and transparency; concerned about “refuge” putting Highlands County at an economic disadvantage; concerned that “willing sellers” will adversely impact adjacent landowners (PES – FRESP – Lykes West Watering Hole – Stocking 2 ac.ft/ac. next to our land – we’ve spent \$80,000 to date on consultants so PES landowner gets paid, but impacted adjacent landowner pays the price? What kind of environmental ethic is that?
- I’ve lost one job to a land acquisition. Lake Apopka buyout 1996. Reestablished my life in Okeechobee. What do you intend to do to replace the jobs that will be lost and the lives that will be ruined in this process. The Lake Apopka acquisition costs over 600 jobs at the farm (Zellwin) I row crop!
- Many of the local businesses in the Lake Wales area depend on the expenses of those who travel to that area to partake in recreational activities.
- Opposes all of this project. Born here and for 55 years have spent hunting and fishing. Own property at RR along with 6000 families. With a start up cost of \$7million why are we spending this kind of money when we are in these difficult economic times. I want to respect wildlife and if this land becomes a refuge he will not be able to teach his children because the FWS will take that right away. Visitor Centers etc. will never replace traditional outdoor experience. I again stress that I oppose the Everglades Headwaters Process.
- I’m down here from Ocala. Part of why I’m down here is because of the documents I’ve got in my hand. This is part of the United Nations plan for our country. We will not be allowed on these lands, and we’ll be forced into areas that you won’t care to live in. This is all part of a great plan. I don’t know if you read the paper or not, but yesterday \$28 million was spent to buy 185,000 acres for a wildlife corridor through Volusia County. With a \$14 trillion debt seems like we have an awful lot of money to buy land that you already own and you already take care of. This is happening all over the county. You have to call your representatives, all your elected officials and get them to try to stop this. This thing is already planned to be finished whether you like it or not.
- Also, it all comes down to money. We don’t have it; we won’t have it. \$700 million for all of it. That’s a lot, a lot we don’t have. It’s a bad idea. When the economy turns around come back and talk to us then, when people are actually buying houses in Florida instead of foreclosing on them.
- You’ve got a lot of people that are very concerned. No. 1 I think generally people feel this is moving too fast and there’s no funding in the budget for this for at least two years. This seems like the horse before the cart. You can’t adequately fund the national wildlife refuges you have now, like Merritt Island, why are you moving forward? The Indian River state preserve – they can’t even fund that.
- Represent River Acres Airport you list several sources of revenue, is the revenue there or are you going to have to find money for it.
- Spending \$700 million, by buying property and easements, open ranch land is going from \$3000/acre. They should be paying \$1500/easement and more for fee title land.
- Remind us that federal government is over \$14 trillion dollars in debt and pay tons to pay interest on debt. Why on earth is federal government buying more land when they should be selling land to be paying off debt?

- River Ranch property owner. Put some figures together. When I go out on the weekends, I spend \$800/month. If that is the average, multiply that by over 6,000 people and times that by 6% sales tax equals lots of money into the local economy, why can't you take the money that RR puts into the economy and conserve land that way. Why buy land you can't even afford to maintain or take care of?
- River Ranch property owner. Look who pays attention to who speaks tonight in favor, it'll be mostly government people it secures their jobs. Local businesses will suffer. I spent about \$300 every time I go to River Ranch, and I go twice a month. Will lose that money going to your local businesses.
- Airboat Club – The proposal cost is \$700 million. It might be as much as \$1 billion. In fact you have no idea how much you plan to spend. This may be 150 1,000 acre lots. This could be hopscotch all over this area. No one benefits this except for ranchers. This should be dead on arrival. Who's responsible for the payment in lieu of taxes? How does the law really work? There's not enough revenue generated to pay all these obligations. What is the pro rata share?  
Question: How much of those payments are you actually paying?  
  - Answer: Congress is going to make up the difference.
Question: Since 1995 how much as the Congress actually appropriated?  
  - Answer: Not sure.
- If this is a planning conservation proposal, why to do you keep the bombing range?
- Economic concerns regarding our federal deficit- the money could be spent better on other national priorities.
- With the financial condition of the nation don't need to buy anymore; government supposed to be cutting back spending not buying land; if the purpose is conservation, it's already under conservation because Polk County has declared it conservation area already and cannot be built on so the government doesn't need to do it. Waste of money.
- Country is in debt don't need to spend the money to buy land. The reason why Lake O is in trouble is because of the canals and the Corps of Engineers. Concerned that the government will be taking properties- just like Southwest Florida Water Management District took the properties in the Lake Istokpoga area- there were people's homes there; afraid that the government will take the property. Better things to do with the money.
- Think It's a waste of tax payer money; every area the feds get involved access was eliminated
- One of my biggest concerns is the \$350 million you have earmarked for conservation easements that no one will be able to utilize when it's spent. We won't have access to that property. It's taxpayers money and we have no rights and no access and I think that's wrong. Thank you.
- We do support the refuge. I learned a lot at the Kissimmee meeting last week. Some things need to be corrected. The ranching economy in the state of Florida is the No. 2 economic drive in this state. That's jobs, that's beef that you all eat; it's land that you would never access otherwise if it's turned into houses. You'll never airboat it, you'll never hunt it. Conservation easements are good things; prevents development and the land stays on tax rolls. You can't restore the southern part of the Everglades without restoring the northern part of the Everglades. Tourism – if I was in River Ranch I would start doing tours out there and charging them. Keep an open mind on this please.
- 7<sup>th</sup> generation Florida, 4<sup>th</sup> generation citrus grower, believe in private property rights. We have a situation in Glades County, next to water storage – it adversely impacted our property. If you're adjacent to these properties you can be impacted. Nutrient loading, etc. We've spent \$80,000 over the last year and a half on consultants trying to get someone to hear us, to do the right thing.
- River Ranch property owner. What is financial impact on small businesses? Is there something being done on how it affects your local businesses?  
  - Answer: Several studies on public lands and the financial benefit it brings to local community.
- 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.
- The refuge will be good for local economies – for every dollar spent on the refuge more than 4 dollars will be generated in the local economy.
- Has there been an economic impact study done to research how this will affect the local owners in Okeechobee that depend on farming? Will there be any compensation for the businesses that are put out due to losing their farming customers?
- This proposal will also be a boost to the local economy. People will come to your area and will use your restaurants and your hotels. For every \$1 spent on the refuge you get \$4 back to the local economy.
- Lifelong resident working as hunting and fishing guide for 16 years and concerned about business loss due to people not being able to airboat or fish on these properties. I am opposed to the project as a registered voter and tax payer in Florida. Thank you for having this meeting.
- If you laughed at a \$4 to \$1 return on a national wildlife refuge, you're really going to laugh at \$20 to \$1 if you take in the entire value of the ecosystem. It comes out to big dollars.
- The impact on the local businesses and revenue would be severe.
- This proposal needs your utmost support to enable wildlife to migrate and adapt in response to climate change and other natural and man-made threats and to sustain Florida's ranching economy and way of life by bringing conservation dollars and best management practices to bear – thus maintaining private land ownership.
- This conservation initiative will sustain Florida's ranching economy and way of life by bringing conservation dollars and best management practices to bear – thus maintaining private landownership.
- The refuge will be good for local economies. For every dollar spent on the refuge, more than four dollars will be generated in the local economy.
- The proposal represents a great opportunity to accomplish important regional, State, and national goals, including to protect the heritage and economic contribution of Florida's ranches.
- Well able to take care of own property at no cost to Federal or State government. There is no way you could put a price on River Ranch property and you do not realize the economic impact on Florida. If you shut us down, we spend lots of money on ATVs and that money would no longer be in the economy.
- 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.
- If it weren't for these protected lands, wildlife would be decimated. Ding Darling NWR brings in over 1 million dollars per year, working with the FWS is great, the refuge is a wonderful economic driver, and is the number 2 in supporting our local economy. If we don't start watching what we do with the development, your grandchildren or theirs may sell and develop their lands. We need NWRs to conserve the land and keep this land open.
- Property owner that is interested in maintaining rights to hunt, riding, and recreation without being limited by federal government regulations. This project will limit what we do on our land. Being a landowner provides revenue to the Okeechobee area from buying hunting licenses and paying taxes. We are particularly concerned about the revenue in Okeechobee – we buy hunting and airboating equipment which contributes to the local economy.
- Save the Everglades and the wildlife. It's that wildlife that lure people to that magnificent place.

- This will be good not only for wildlife and the ecology of the State, but will also be good for business, as it will be a significant tourist draw, adding to what we already have with the Everglades.
- A new NWR could also serve as a much needed stimulus to the local economy with the creation of new jobs. The refuge would employ a number of local residents and refuge visitors, in turn, would help further stimulate the local economy by purchasing fuel and goods from local businesses. Over 40 million people a year visit NWRs and the Refuge System contributes more than \$2 billion annually to our nation's economy [see US Department of Interior, Economic Impact of the Department of Interior's Programs and Activities (2009) and Department of Interior, Banking on Nature 2006: The Economic Benefits to Local Communities of National Wildlife Refuge Visitation].
- Restoration and conservation projects in the past years have already caused a considerable loss in revenue for my business.
- Our tourism – thus, our economics – is affected by the health of the Everglades.
- The Everglades are an important part of the Florida economy. A large number of the people I meet camping, hiking, and touring are from out of the state or are international visitors. They are spending money of hotels, restaurants, campsites, souvenirs, and tours. The opportunity for small business is tremendous.
- Job creation and economic recovery in Florida will be stifled by this proposal due to USFWS' unavoidable mission statement; federal mandates; and duties to obstruct, block, and inflate the costs of necessary infrastructure improvements (e.g., highway construction enhancement, renewable energy projects, power transmission lines).
- Select the No Action Alternative. Thus, private property owners will no longer be threatened by known future federal actions that will devalue and make their properties less useful for the purposes they acquired them for.
- If implemented, one of the first casualties of this project would be the small tourist-related businesses found throughout Central Florida.
- We do approximately \$26,000 per year with River Ranch. If the federal government bought out River Ranch, it would have a negative economic impact on my business and on all the small businesses in the area.
- Do not ignore the economic impact that the current recreational use is providing. We travel to our property in this area at least twice a month and spend money on gas, toll charges, new truck to pull the new trailer, three ATVs, camping equipment, fishing and hiking gear, etc. This is contributing to the local economy.
- Inheritance taxes are claimed by ranchers nationwide to be the main problem in securing ranching into the future. This is not addressed by the proposal.
- There are a variety of positive economic impacts derived from the refuge proposal, including those listed.
  - General impacts in the local economy. It has been reported a total of \$8.50 total economic effect per \$1 budget expenditure in a NWR in Florida and a national average of \$4 per \$1 expenditure [St. Marks NWR, documented in Banking in Nature 2006: The economic benefits to local communities of national wildlife refuge visitation, a report from the FWS, based on the FWS National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife Associated Recreation (2007) and the Division of Refuge's Annual Performance Plan (2006)].
  - Potential reduction in land acquisition and infrastructure costs for water treatment and storage, plus additional benefits on improved water quality and quantity.
  - Economic benefits of land preservation compared to the cost of treatment and storage or land development costs.
  - Positive economic impacts of preserving the culture and sustainable practices of a low density activity such as ranching. For example, the Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences at the University of Florida reports that rangeland production contributed more than \$348 million to the State economy in 2003 in an approximate area of 10.2 million acres dedicated to farmland (Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. 2004. The Ecology and Economics of Florida Ranches. Florida Cooperative Extension Service).

### **Greater Everglades Partnership Initiative**

- 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?
- 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.
- South Florida Water Management District has a terrible history of deforestation, reduction of biodiversity and increased release of Carbon into the atmosphere; so it concerns me greatly that they may have a hand in your project.

### **Development Patterns/Pressure**

- I am thrilled to see this under consideration and support it completely. It is crucial to conserve land in Florida, especially since the current mindset in Tallahassee is deregulation to allow unfettered development under the guise of job creation.
- Please do this. Please include as much land as possible. There is so little natural land and wetlands left on planet Earth it is depressing beyond words.
- I support this. Development threatens farms and birding area.
- I hear a lot of people moving down here in 20 to 30 years. How many building codes are calling for dual flush toilets? How many local codes are calling for reclaimed water? They're building \$5 million McMansions everywhere. Stay out of my land, don't come take my water.
- They're talking about saving land from development. You really think this is going to be a top priority for tourists from up north? This proposal will cost \$700 million. Ranch land sells for \$3,000 an acre so they're overpaying for it. This is not being developed, folks, this won't be developed for 20 or 30 more years at least. We shouldn't even be talking about this.
- The new refuge will also protect the headwaters of Everglades. If we have uncontrolled population growth rather than conservation, there will be a drain on the natural resources.
- I think what's being proposed here is wonderful. We are losing in this country from 10 million to 30 million acres every year to development. We can't stand this in this world. We've got to save our country. I think you are interested in saving the United States. Not just Florida.
- This whole thing is about development versus protection. Urban sprawl is bad for hunting.
- We've seen what development does and I don't like what it did.
- 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%.
- Florida is filling up with the human population fast. We need our wildlife, they need their land.
- The real estate market will return and this area will be marketed as an affordable alternative to the built out, high price coast. I would hate to see the area turned in to a suburb of Orlando. Action needs to occur.
- There is little nature left in South Florida; farms are the only buffer to the Everglades and they too are disappearing. This will happen in central Florida if conservation efforts fail.
- 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.
- Explored FL all life. Boon docks was swamps with alligators and mosquitoes. Developers came in and built and now Briar County is filled with development. Many moved because the developers ruined the area.

Rapid population growth is endangering FL more than anything else. If we preserve EHNWR it will give the everglades a chance to heal, increase water quality. Water quality and fish populations have suffered because of all the development.

- Elected official in Martin County. Same interest in preserving as much land as possible. When the population of Florida doubles, where will these people live? If big landowners get together and sell out to developers, where are you going to recreate? When lake gets to high, it spills bad water into our neighborhoods.
- There is a report on population growth, the Florida 2060 report that took current projections of where people are going to move to. They evaluated alternatives and Okeechobee and Osceola counties were the counties that experienced the greatest population growth and changes. Please consider this proposal to conserve our way of life.
- Florida has enough golf courses, subdivisions, parking lots, and big box stores. Protect Florida's natural character for both man and wildlife.
- If we do not continue to preserve environmentally sensitive lands, we will lose them forever to urban sprawl.
- TNC values this partnership effort to get this land into permanent protection and provide for Florida and the nation into the future. The time to protect is now while development has slowed: It may be too late if we wait for the widespread threat of development to return.
- 150,000 acres is not even enough, the reality is Florida cannot take any more residential building and the resources are about tapped.
- Florida is such a unique state, even with the economy people are still moving to Florida at a rapid rate, and I feel that it most important to keep as much land and waterways from being developed.
- Preserving open space and curtailing development should be out top priority for the future.
- The development patterns predicted in the Florida 2060 (Zwick and Carr 2006) and Wildlife 2060 (FWC 2008) studies could fundamentally alter the rural lifestyles that many in the community want to maintain for future generations. While some members of local hunting clubs and airboat associations have expressed concerns, and even opposition in some cases, to the project as an encroachment on their way of life, the proposed NWR lands are actually essential to continuing this way of life. The refuge would provide outdoor recreation areas that are not currently available to the public and would function as a necessary buffer between development areas and preserve natural soundscapes, open spaces, and local watersheds.
- Conservation lands are a compatible use with the citrus groves and other agricultural operations in the area. Further, they help maintain the rural nature of this part of Florida.
- Use regulation of urban sprawl to preserve native lands.
- Protect the wilderness we have left so it is not lost to development.
- I strongly support the designation of the refuge and conservation area. I hear over and over people say they miss how it used to be before developers built cookie cutter subdivisions all over this state and the "special" atmosphere that Florida once had was almost destroyed. Please leave something for our grandchildren and the generations to follow.
- All development should halt until restoration of underground water tables occurs.
- Florida's urbanization and development rate is one of the highest in the country and this is one of the last chances to conserve the last pieces of wilderness in Florida.
- Osceola Count was once one of the rapidly growing counties in the country and now has one of the highest foreclosure rates in the country. Yet, new developments are still being planned for this "open space" wildlife habitat.
- Just like the Babcock Ranch, I think that 90% of farms and ranches located in the environmentally critical areas north and west of Lake Okeechobee should never be developed into urban areas.
- Without additional acquisition and conservation, these areas will be degraded by increased habitat fragmentation.
- By 2060, seven million acres of wildlife habitat may be converted to urban uses (FWC 2008, Wildlife 2060: What's at Stake for Florida?). Endangered species, such as the Florida panther, may lose 300,000 acres of habitat, if not more (FWC 2008, Wildlife 2060: What's at Stake for Florida?).

- Additional conservation and acquisition of lands within the study area may also increase the viability of landscape linkage corridors, not just for the Florida panther, but for other wildlife species as well. This is critical, as fragmentation of habitat is one of the greatest and most immediate threats to species' survival.
- I have seen our heritage of ranching and our unique landscape whittled down to what the developer have not yet got. It has to be stopped as this area has one of the richest ecosystems and most vibrant heritages in the nation. The most sensitive habitats for our most imperiled animals cannot be lost for the recreational and business activities of a few.
- The State of Florida and local agencies have plenty of resources to regulate growth and preserve our environment, we do not need unnecessary duplication of services and red tape forced on us by the federal government. There are plenty of local, State, and federal rules and regulations already on the books to accomplish the same goals outlined in the FWS proposal, there is no need to burden the taxpayers further.
- Select the No Action Alternative. Future intense housing developments are the only possible threat to this area at this time. Each county in this study area has a process and procedure for zoning and development, there are currently environmental rules and regulations that have to be followed and are enforced by both the state and federal governments for new developments. The State's Department of Community Affairs ensures that new growth complies with the state's vital growth management laws, while also helping establish communities revitalize their older or traditional neighborhoods. If our elected officials and government employees do their job and follow the rules currently in place, these rural agricultural lands will remain zoned as they are and the status quo will remain.
- I strongly support the proposal. The development of this area could jeopardize the benefits of restoration in other parts of the greater Everglades.
- Two recent publications predict that seven million acres of wildlife habitat may be converted to urban uses across Florida by 2060, with some of the greatest land use changes in the rural counties found within the proposed Everglades Headwaters study area [Paul D. Zwick and Margaret H. Carr, Florida 2060: A Population Distribution Scenario for the State of Florida (2006) (research project prepared for 1000 Friends of Florida by GeoPlan Center at the University of Florida) and Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Wildlife 2060: What's at State for Florida? (2008)].

### **Other Examples of Federal Management**

- The Granting Document for the money used in the Southern Golden Gates (Picayune Strand State Forest) proved that USFWS has the final say in the land management plan and the final say on much more land than just that one project. The Federal Government is steadfastly gaining control over all of South Florida via CERP project funding structures.
- Opposed to project and want it to stop. Meeting last night got broke up and lady explained how it was a great proposal and it was a new deal for FWS. Problem is that FWS needs support but you all have made a lot of mistakes. So if you want our support, fix Conservation Area 1 and other areas that you manage. For example, there are areas that are taken over by the FWS that had 10% exotic species until they took it over. Now there is over 30% exotic species. If you want our support, then you need fix what you have broken.
- I'm from Blue Cypress Lake. The only thing I would like to say is about 100 years ago this all happened then and what they do is ruin Lake Okeechobee. Don't let it happen again. Thank you.
- Conservation Area No. 1 is sovereign waters. We can't get in there. That's the most filthy and is full of exotics. We can make things happen. We're on the right trail. They're out of money. Quit wasting money. They can't even run their own parks. We get more from NPS than FWS. Don't be fooled here. They do not buy one acre of land in River Ranch. If they're not going to buy an acre of land, not even the Nature Conservancy's land.
- You actually believe the federal government is going to do what they say they're going to do. These people are in charge of Indian Affairs. How's that working? The environmentalists view you all as pollutants. They don't want you on the property. This is phase 1 of four phases. How much land are they going to take? I want to remind you all that the first tenant of the communist manifesto is the taking of private land. Either you have the right to own property or you are property.
- Grazing money, kicked cattleman off of refuges, system is unique in that it places wildlife first. WA NWR concluded that cattle were detrimental to wildlife.

- Opposed because this process was chosen to avoid the Congress.
- Isn't the 1,000s of acres already in the Everglades National Forest enough?
- Concerned citizen. She knows of at least one property in the Everglades that was taken by eminent domain. In the National park, the birds have left due to the management procedures. Know private managed property, government came in and took over and it was trashed in a year. Private citizens can manage lands better. How many acres of lands are purchased just because of an international treaty with other countries?
  - Answer: The Migratory Bird Treaty Act passed in early 1929, only involves lands to be acquired in the United States.
- If the headwater lands are acquired and set aside, they should be managed by the state of Florida and not the U.S Wildlife Service. The State should keep these lands fully accessible to the public.
- The FWS has demonstrated with its management of the Florida Panther NWR the long term objective to close the public out with the exception of a few boardwalks.
- The federal government's intervention in the Picayune Strand recreational management plan has removed from any state agencies, even the managing one, the ability to make decisions on land management.
- There was even a proposal to ban windmills. Windmills are often used to pump water or supply some power. This plan to use this to stop property owners' abilities to supply water for their cattle or farming operations. It can also be used further down the road as this sprawl continues to stop existing uses of the land. This has already been done on other federally controlled lands. Wells and tanks supplying water for wildlife and cattle were ordered taken down as long as there was hunting allowed on that land.
- The changes made in the southern Everglades have impacted the landowners to the point that most of the recreational use of the land is closed.
- Examples of promises broken are the Florida Panther NWR, Picayune, The Blocks, Big Cypress National Preserve, the Addition Lands, and Ten Thousand Islands NWR. These are just a few of the many places in this country that DOI has either eliminated traditional uses of severely limited the activities that once occurred and we were assured would continue.
- Our recent experience with the 27-year wait to be allowed on the Addition Lands in the Big Cypress leads us to believe that this project too will force sportsmen from some of the country's premier hunting and fishing areas. Florida is known as the Fishing Capitol of the World. It will certainly lose that designation if this plan is implemented.
- Select the No Action Alternative. The federal government has a long history of inefficiency, bureaucratic red tape, private property rights abuses, and a very anti-recreational attitude in the State of Florida. When lands are managed at the local level, there is often a better chance for property owners and recreationists to be afforded due process, rather than at the federal level when the burden of bureaucratic red tape and politics often forces its way on society. Federal employees are constantly promoted and reassigned to other areas of the country, and new employees that take their place never know the area, the culture, or the history. When it comes to managing lands, and regulating activities the federal government is second to none. The Endangered Species Act, Clean Water Act, Clean Air Act, Wilderness Act, and National Environmental Policy Act are just a few of the red tape items that would burden property owners and recreationists forever if the federal government took control of this project. Public Law 100-301 was passed in 1988 authorizing the Big Cypress Preserve Addition Act and authorizing hunting and recreational activities to take place on those lands. As of this writing, these lands are still not open to the public.
- Select the No Action Alternative. We do not need the federal government to maintain anything in the State of Florida. Federal employees are often rotated in from other areas of the country and know nothing of the culture and history of the area in which they are serving. The pencil pushing bureaucrats in Washington D.C. know even less. Please visit Loop Road, Everglades City, Big Cypress Preserve, Florida Panther Wildlife Refuge, and Everglades National Park if you would like to see what federal intervention has done to the glades-man culture in South Florida. The ranching and agriculture interests of Central Florida are well served as they are, if the federal government was so concerned with cultural preservation they would begin to reverse the wrongs they have done in South Florida and other places across the country.
- Past mismanagement of Florida lands by FWS and DOI have resulted in removing ORVs from the Picayune Strand State Forest, closing hunting in Florida Panther NWR (which previously supported hunting), creating Wilderness areas within Big Cypress National Preserve Addition Lands, creating an

exotic farm in Loxahatchee NWR, and creating a nuisance with the cross-bred panther/cougar in South Florida.

## Planning Process

- It would be advantageous to review the 2010 Land Acquisition Strategy prepared for the South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force to help with the design of the area(s).
- More research is needed, approval by the people that it will affect is needed, and the Director of the USFWS needs to be at the public meetings to answer questions.
- 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 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.
- 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?
- 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.
- Mayor of City of Fellsmere. Timeline has been very quick and encourage us to slow down the process. We would like for you to work with the city. Concerned about limiting access and uses on property. We are there, willing, and would like to be a part of this process.
- Jason Nunemaker, City Manager for the City of Fellsmere. I’m not here to speak for or against the proposal, but to request that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service directly engage with local governments. We were caught off guard by this proposal. I’d like to ask you to make a presentation to the city councils and other governments involved.
- Strongly urge that meetings be reheld, especially the Okeechobee meeting that was split up.
- Everglades Council. Elected officials should make decisions like this. Tell your local representatives that you do not support this proposal. The FWS wants to divide and conquer.
- All the environmentalists should be embarrassed. None of the information printed on recycled paper. I oppose this project. I’ve been to 3 out of 4 the information has changed every meeting. There should have been someone providing sign language so if you have deaf people they can understand what you’re saying.
- Two people asked - Why are there two different maps? The one in the paper showed that showed that River Ranch was a target for acquisition while the map shown here tonight did not. Also, the map in the paper included a portion of Indian River County while the map shown tonight excluded Indian River County, so why are you even here?
- How much do these public meetings cost?
- This is only a proposed area and government workers work for us. The only way to defeat this is to inform your congressmen and governor’s office. Dennis Ross’s office was not invited to these meetings. You have a responsibility to tax payers to take their representatives comments into consideration.
- Unfair that the slide show was not shown at the first meeting. You should show the same show everywhere.
- Who are we talking to here? Is there anyone here that can make a difference? Are you taking notes and are we just talking to ourselves?
- River Ranch Area representative – FWS is here doing their job and all of us are all emotional and attacks on them are needless. Timing is very suspicious, August in 2010 and get done by this time next year in time for election. He thinks we are doing this at presidential level to get votes for south Florida. If you don’t want to participate, don’t sell your land. US Congress sent a letter to Secretary Ken Salazar asking him why he took away grazing rights and shut down businesses on the federal lands and why took away livelihood. They are not running this through U.S. Congress like they were instructed to do and U.S. Constitution says they should do. I encourage you to go online and read this.

- This is just part of the system. You're not going to make a difference here. You will have to write a letter to Congress. We stacked these houses, we've got to go to the next step.
- 9<sup>th</sup> generation FL and seen this with NASA. FWS is going to do it and the only way to stop it is to call your legislators. Start calling legislator. FWS is violating Fire Marshall codes, violating codes at first three meetings, and can't even follow the rules they already have. If they are already violating rules, how are they going to be trusted in managing lands? People have gotten properties separated out and either kill it now or fight it the rest of your life. Start calling and if they don't listen to you then don't vote for them again.
- I'm a Florida citizen, born and raised, spent 65 years here. I believe in conservation, but I am strictly opposed to federal conservation. What they are proposing is absolute control of every square inch they get a hold of. We'll lose all right to have any say-so over what they do with it. This comes down to one question: credibility. If you believe these people standing up here will do what they say, and have your best interest at heart, then support them. If you don't they you have to continue to fight and don't let it stop here. We're going to have to have our meetings to put this to bed formally.
- Representing 160 members of Friends of Tampa Bay Wildlife Refuges. We fully support this proposal. We're not in your area but we do work closely with Fish and Wildlife and we know some things about working with them. They will work with willing landowners, along with state and federal agencies. They do listen; they are responsive to concerns with public; they don't have a hidden agenda; they will follow through with what the promise.
- We're not for this. Everyone needs to contact your Congressmen and Senators.
- I want to read you something that's in their own documentation. Lands and waters are closed to public use and specifically opened for compatible uses. They establish a refuge. If you live in the boundary of their refuge, you are in their control. Participating in the process that you are doing right now, it will get done. You need to come together, take legal action and every action you can. Every wife that doesn't work should be calling their legislator every 10 minutes. Organize together, put together some money and go after it. If you do, and sit here and follow their rules, you will lose. Comments will not win. Fight them in court, fight them in the legislature. Get together you can defeat this. You will defeat it, but not by standing alone. We only win the same way we created this nation and that's when we stand together.
- If anybody out here is buying into what they're telling you meet me in the lobby I've got some real estate in the Everglades for you. I am definitely and absolutely against this proposal because these people cannot be trusted. I heard somebody ask a question about will be able to vote on this? No. One person has the final say-so it's Ken Salazar. He has his own private dictatorship up in Washington. He doesn't care what we say.
- Question: Who makes the final decision?
  - Answer: The Service Director will make the final decision on this proposal.
- Question: Who is the Director?
  - Answer: Dan Ashe. He's going through confirmation hearings this week.
- They say this policy is for willing sellers only. This Dan Ashe guy makes the policy. One person can change this. I've got his e-mail address. They have not provided me his phone number yet. This one person makes the policy for USFWS and his name is Dan Ashe. There's no access in Lakes Wales Ridge NWR. They say wildlife first. How are they going to allow hunting? FWC officers should be the ones taking care of the game in Florida. We don't need the feds taking care of what we have. They said they'd post comments on the web site. That hasn't happened yet. They cannot even plan for a meeting this size.
  - Answer: Comments received through February 3 have been posted. Others will be posted ASAP.
- I'm from Miami speaking on behalf of children, family and friends. Worked with us fish on other projects. I oppose what you have presented here. The Service conscientiously chose this administrative process to avoid Congress to spend our tax dollars.
- Comment period needs to be extended. Adversely affects south Florida so there should be meetings down south.
- Short notice of meeting times and places, inadequate mapping data supplied by the USFWS for review prior to commenting at scoping meetings, and not enough detailed data was given before the meetings which brought about wasted time asking questions that could have been answered.
- I believe you violated NEPA by failing to provide detailed information. So they spend their time asking questions instead of informing you what they need.

- We should have used the civic center with 3,000 seats.
- What I see here tonight is tremendous because you're all interested in it.
- Found the meeting to be informative and the Service did a good job.
- Should include in the presentation the date the last time that the FWS or Fed government took property via eminent domain.
- Meeting not noticed properly
- Need more handouts; add a sheet with only the website address
- Need a public meeting in Polk County.
- One of the things we heard here tonight is this is not our policy.  
Question: Who sets the policy?
  - Answer: USFWS policy is set by the Director.
 Question: And it can be changed when?
  - Answer: Service Director has the right to change policy yes.
 Listen to that, it's important.
- The guy who's been appointed your Director is going to get fired in two years. We're done with him.
- In the meantime, when you do your PowerPoint, you do a beautiful thing about the people – show some respect for people in this room. We have airboats, buggies, ATVs and the love of the land that we've protected for years and years. We're the eyes and the ears that discover the problems first. When you take the people off the land that love the land, you get problems.
- 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.
- 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.
- News channels cover story for free. Why aren't they here?
- Defenders of Wildlife who work to conserve landscapes for wide ranging species. Supportive of process and please keep an open mind and please don't shoot it down before we know all the details. Landowners and ranchers want to be involved and want to work with them to conserve habitat.
- FWS does what it says, is approachable, and listens to the concerns to the public.
- Property owners, spoken to about 500 property owners and no one has said they would sell, so there is no chance that the land will be developed. River Ranch owners were not informed of these meetings. Why were there not meetings in Polk County? When we look at the boundary, we try to pick locations that would make it easiest to get the most folks to the meetings. Have notified as many as we can at this time but will extend comment period by 2 months.
- Please submit written comments. Process is moving too fast. No way final plan by September, no reason for it to move at this pace. No funding available. Sportsman have to be on board with this, there will not be a new NWR in Florida without sportsman support. No existing state lands will be included and firmly believe that this is the federal commitment. Fear that State lands will be surplused to the Federal Government. Submit comments to the State regarding this fear.
- Select the No Action Alternative. Taxpayers will save \$700 million. The US Congress and taxpayers will not be disenfranchised that the FWS chose this particular process to avoid legislative debate on the proposal. State sovereignty will be maintained. Private property owners will no longer be threatened. Counties will maintain their full tax base. Job creation will be greatly enhanced by the FWS not blocking and escalating the costs of highway construction or enhancements and green energy production. Florida's elected officials' oaths of office will be fulfilled. FWS will lose the ability to conduct a Wilderness Review. Continuation of customary and traditional uses and means of access will be assured. Maintaining local rural cultures will be assured. There has been no economic impact study.
- The mapping data supplied by the FWS prior to commenting at the scoping meetings was totally inadequate. There was not nearly enough map detail to develop substantive comments prior to being forced to by short notice of meeting times and places. This lack of necessary data forced attendees to waste limited speaking time allotments on asking questions of FWS staff. Detailed data should be made

available as to the exact land parcels targeted by the FWS for purchases and easements to facilitate detailed analysis of this project by the public.

- This program has unilaterally chosen a refuge establishment process that avoids the scrutiny of the US Congress that I consider to be upper limit of bureaucratic arrogance exposing FWS's intent to circumvent the foundational institutions of the US government.
- Why this refuge is needed now more than ever: the case against the No Action Alternative. We submit that the No Action Alternative is not a viable option because maintaining the status quo will not produce the landscape-scale protections necessary for the preservation and restoration of the headwaters of the Everglades ecosystem.
  - A recent University of Florida study found that between now and 2060 the State's population is projected to more than double from approximately 18 million to 36 million people. Assuming that development patterns do not change, there would be the need to convert an additional seven million acres of undeveloped land into urban land uses. Of those seven million acres of land, 2.7 million acres of native habitat, an area the size of the state of Vermont, would be lost to development. [source: Paul D. Zwick and Margaret H. Carr, GeoPlan Center, University of Florida, Florida 2060: A Population Distribution Scenario for the State of Florida (2006)]
  - In the wake of this University of Florida study, the FWC prepared a report that analyzed what these development patterns would mean to the state's fish and wildlife. The FWC report found that of these seven million acres, more than 1.6 million acres of woodland habitat would be lost, wetland habitats would become more isolated and degraded, and "for the most part, the animals and fish that currently live in these habitats will disappear". More than two million acres of black bear and wild turkey habitat will be lost and gopher tortoises may lose a fifth of their existing range. The federally listed Florida scrub-jay will have lost all but 64-square miles of remaining habitat. [source: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Wildlife 2060: What's at State for Florida? (2008)]
  - From a regional perspective, population growth and development is predicted to be explosive in the counties making up Central Florida (Zwick and Carr 2006). For instance, Osceola County is among the counties that will experience the greatest changes over the next 50 years as it shifts from a largely rural area to a largely urban area (Zwick and Carr 2006). This is already evidenced by the number of developments of regional impact (DRIs) slated for Osceola, Highlands, and Okeechobee counties [see Florida Department of Community Affairs, South Central Florida Existing and Proposed Rural Land Stewardship Areas, Large Scale Future Land Use Map Amendments, DRI's and FDOT Road Corridor Study Areas (2007)].
  - A study by the International Panel on Climate Change estimates as much as a two-foot increase in sea level by the end of the 12th century (US Environmental Protection Agency, Climate Change-Health and Environmental Effects, Coastal Zones and Sea Level Rise at <http://www.epa.gov/climatechange/effects/coastal/index.html#ref> citing International Panel on Climate Change, 2007, Climate Change 2007: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability. Contribution of Working Group II to the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change). As a result, development patterns could shift dramatically over the next several decades as more people move inland to build houses and raise their families. Thus, places like the Kissimmee River Valley and the Heartland are at an even greater risk of losing their ecological resources to development.
  - Recent funding shortfalls for state land acquisition programs; the inherent limitations of federal, state, and local regulatory mechanisms to conserve lands; the inability of private land trusts to acquire the state's most sensitive lands; and the continued expansion of local urban development boundaries are all factors chipping away at what remains of historic Florida. Existing approaches will not be enough to reverse this trend.
- FWC believes that the scope and scale of the Initiative is large and ambitious. The proposed timeline does not appear to allow for adequate FWC and partner input and participation. The importance of a thoughtful and thorough vetting of issues among the potential partners cannot be overemphasized, and we believe we can help communicate and advocate for the issues that are central to fish and wildlife conservation and are important to Florida's hunters and anglers.

- The FWS needs to start building a relationship with all of the landowners in the region in order to make this proposal occur.
- Please slow this process down. Give the public the opportunity to fully understand what it is the USFWS proposes.
- The FWS failed to notify all landowners affected by the proposal. How can FWS expect to have useful scoping meetings if all the landowners are not aware of the proposal? Comments of the landowners should be weighted more heavily as they are directly impacted by the proposal.
- Scoping meetings were held prior to distribution of any meaningful accurate detailed information that would have assisted attendees that weren't already collaborating partners with USFWS. USFWS partners such as The Nature Conservancy (TNC), Audubon of Florida, Defenders of Wildlife, and Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, to name a few, were well prepared to provide coordinated comments to assist in generating the administrative record USFWS was looking to have established at their scoping meetings. TNC's comments of March 2011 to USFWS verify they have been involved for over 2 years to develop the suite of properties they recommended to be targeted for inclusion. On the other hand the general public who the meeting schedule was sprung on with short notice had no comprehensive detailed information to base comments upon except the USFWS's Headwaters deceptive propaganda available at USFWS's project web site. This intentional USFWS tactic deprived a large segment of scoping meeting attendees the ability to actually provide comments during their allotted speaking times. Instead they were forced to ask questions due to lack of available information rather than providing substantive comments regarding the Headwaters planning process. USFWS did not even attempt to provide accurate consistent mapping of their Headwaters proposal proven by major changes during the meeting schedule. The National Environmental Policy Act was seriously violated by these USFWS actions which discriminated against many locally concerned citizens who took the time to attend scoping meetings. The bottom line result is that all of the meetings should be held over again after real information upon which to comment upon has been provided to the general public.

### **General**

- Disney or Sea World is a fact of what we have. As Floridians, we should be able to sell land to whoever we want to. We are not preventing waterflow. I didn't put dams up. Get rid of project, does not like the project, and we need to get rid of the project.
- Supports proposal and wanted to explain that working with FWS is positive experience and very important to restoring wildlife. Conservation for these area needs to happen, will increase hunting and fishing, good for local economies, better water quality. Do listen to our concerns. FWS approachable and understand wildlife better than any of us.
- A gap exists between the professionals and hope that there is an appreciation of the culture of the people in this room. There are not tennis players in this room, but these people still need to be respected. Not a great appreciation about the Federal government and concerned with contracts with the government.
- Conservative Republican. We don't like big government, we know what is good for us. We don't need someone from DC to tell FWC what to do. Get back on your horses, pick up Obama and get out of our state.
- Swan Lake NWR from Missouri, biologist in Okeechobee. Airboating on Okeechobee is either way too deep or too shallow and this is because we overgraze watershed. In order to fix that we need to catch rains in upper part of watershed. This project will allow us to start to fix this problem, help increase hunting and fishing.
- Farmers and ranchers were first conservationist. Death in family cause ranches to sell, figure out a way to get rid of State tax on ranchers.
- Telling us what we want to hear but not enough details. You don't know how the river changes or how to run things. He does not believe the FWS would be able to manage these lands. He is dead set against this.
- The National Wildlife Refuge Association represents nearly 1,000 Floridians and supports this proposal. 1. Florida ranchers are good for wildlife 2. There will be a net increase in hunting and fishing opportunities. 3. If area is not put into refuge lands it would be developed into houses. 4. FWS will work with partners.
- Strongly supports these efforts. The partners will strongly support all property rights. I ask that you help create a vision for this part of Florida.

- Fisherman and fishes because of mental and physical health it gives him. I am for a healthy Florida with cleaner waters, and is in favor of the proposal to hold public meetings and establish an Everglades Headwaters NWR.
- Lifelong sportsman. You are either doing something really wrong or right. I am against this proposal.
- Question: Are you telling us we don't have the common sense to take care of our land?
  - Answer: We're hoping to participate with you in taking care of it.
- I work on FWC boats. None of these guys knew about it. How can our own people not know about this? We have property owners all around us. I can't understand why we can't take care of our own neck of the woods.
- I'm against all this that's going on. I'm a lifelong Okeechobee resident and a WWII veteran. What these people have done in Florida is criminal. I don't think it's right. I'm going to fight it.
- I oppose anything and everything to do with the everglades headwaters proposed project
- I oppose this project, your team sound like time share salesmen, it sounds like what you want to hear but there's a lot left to read between the lines. I attended the previous meeting and one of the facilitators did not know what is on this land, Ya'll can't come in here and tell us what to do with our land if you don't know what is on it.
- We don't want you here; get out of our State.
- They don't do what they say initially. At this point you can't trust a word that they're saying. It's a beautiful river system right now. It's a natural sanctuary without help from the government. Everybody should be against this proposal.
- Question: Have you ever been on a real airboat? They don't need water.
- Why do we need the federal government to intervene in Florida's business? We don't need the federal government telling us what to do in our State.
- I have property out there. I'm not selling.
- Tea Party from Marion County - The first tenant of Communist Manifesto: Remove their property rights. This isn't about Bambi. If you own it, you're the best custodian. They're bureaucrats. They don't care about the land. This is going the way of Argentina: inflating their economy and trashing their country.
- 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?
- 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.
- 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.
- How can we work together without the government?
- The proposal has high merit and should be passed and work on it should start ASAP.
- 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.
- The Ocklawaha Valley Audubon Society endorses the proposed Everglades Headwaters NWR and adjoining conservation lands.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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. 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.
- Audubon is strongly supporting both the Everglades Headwaters National Wildlife Refuge and Conservation Area, and the expansion of the Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge within the larger study circles drawn on maps by USFWS.
- I'm a resident of Indian River County and a member of the National Audubon Society. Our mission is to conserve wildlife, and to do so we have to protect the traditional way of life. We support the process going on here tonight. We also support the idea. This project will conserve water, it will conserve agricultural resources and it will be a long term benefit for conserving and protecting areas that can be used for carbon sequestration. It's important as a society that we communicate about these projects. It may well be too small. We should think bigger in terms of protecting ranch land. I urge you also to think long term. We have similar values. We all want to conserve the way of life as it is.
- John Marshall, 6<sup>th</sup> generation Floridian. One of these refuges was named after my uncle, Arthur R. Marshall. My heart is in this. My uncle had a partner, named Johnny Jones, He was also a fisherman and a hunter. He became my mentor. He beat me around my head and shoulders to see that hunters and fisherman are the ultimate conservationists in Florida. You are going to have to get together and do more than is currently being done. If it's not a national wildlife refuge in this area, then there are a lot of talks about bullet trains and super highways. There would never be a bullet train or super highway crisscrossing a national wildlife refuge. DOT freely uses the power of eminent domain. Try to get together to conserve the land more aggressively. Thank you for considering some way to conserve the land.
- It will inhibit road maintenance and traditional cultural activities.
- This proposal is a bold initiative that serves as a model for achieving conservation results that benefit wildlife and people throughout this country.
- This wildlife refuge will protect our endangered wildlife and conserve the natural land and water, while continuing to allow less detrimental uses like farming and ranching.

- There is a proposal to ban windmills which, for ranchers, is their ability to supply water for their cattle or farming operations.
- Protection of the Northern Everglades will benefit the public with water supply protection, maintenance of a sustainable agricultural economy, opportunities for recreation and education, and the simple pleasure of seeing wide-open spaces secured in perpetuity.
- Preserve these lands for future generations. Aren't there enough examples of disasters allowing imbalance? You are sworn to protect, serve, and defend.
- I support this proposal since it will ensure that Florida's cattle ranches remain a vibrant part of our culture, and not just a piece of history.
- The best thing we can do for our children and our children's children is to go ahead with the plan to create the new wildlife refuge in the headwaters of the Everglades.
- I do not trust the USFWS. You guys have a proven track record of not telling the truth.
- I suspect this is a ruse to exclude the people from more land to carry out the Wildlands Project to return 50% of the land to the wild; 25% to buffering; and 25% for the people to live, work, and play. We are the stewards of the land and can better take care of the flora and fauna than the government can. The small landowner is the backbone of the USA. Let's keep it that way.
- Traditional recreational activities and rural cultures will continue under the status quo, it is a joke to think that the federal government thinks they need to protect the culture of an area.
- Select the No Action Alternative. Private property rights will be retained by the property owners, without a cloud of federal blight hanging over their heads. How would a small farmer make a living and keep his land if he had to deal with the federal bureaucracy and red tape regarding every aspect of his land? Florida agencies and local governments will retain their jurisdiction over these lands, elected officials can be held accountable by the voters, and recreational activities will still be regulated by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.
- Select the No Action Alternative. Putting a federal boundary on these lands would automatically trigger lawsuits against public and private property owners by environmental extremist groups. These groups would use every regulation in the Federal Register to punish private property owners for simply cutting the grass or going to the bathroom.
- This is a once in a lifetime opportunity to protect wildlife and habitat; provide wetlands; benefit flood control, groundwater recharge, crop pollination, and recreation. It will also allow for the connection of existing conservation areas.
- The Everglades Headwaters proposal and the proposal to expand Florida Panther NWR represent a great opportunity to accomplish many important regional, State, and national goals, including those listed.
  - Secure the breeding range and an identified dispersal zone of the Florida panther, plus a large and connected ecological landscape supporting this and a host of other Everglades species.
  - Collaboratively engage ranchers and major landowners in habitat and watershed protection and restoration, using full fee title and less than fee acquisition tools and agreements.
  - Permanently increase natural water storage capacity and nutrient reduction on a landscape scale in the headwaters of Lake Okeechobee and downstream estuaries and the Everglades. Everglades restoration, including meeting legal water quality targets and managing water supply, water deliveries to estuaries, and flood protection for over seven million residents of South Florida, depends on the success of aggressively addressing these issues. There also is a very able partner in these efforts in the SFWMD.
  - Protect the heritage and economic contribution of Florida's ranches.
  - Enhance the Kissimmee River Restoration success with additional habitats surrounding the present restoration footprint.
  - Provide additional resource-based compatible recreational opportunities, such as hunting, fishing, birdwatching, boating, and other traditional uses.