



Proposed Everglades Headwaters National Wildlife Refuge and Conservation Area
2.9.2011 Public Scoping Meeting – Verbal Public Comments Submitted
~665 attendees

- River Ranch Area – 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.
- 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. Generally NWR 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.
- 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.
- 4th generation Floridian and an endangered species. Do not sell your land, the devil is in the detail. Are you going to allow us and use ATVs, trucks, airboats? Speaker believes you will use eminent domain.
- 6 year resident coming to Okeechobee. Hunting lease on large cattle farm, state and feds came in and said we can hunt, however, can't use ATVs, cant' 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.
- Water Resources Advisory Commission. 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 FL 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 surplus to the Federal Government. Submit comments to the State regarding this fear.
- 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.
- River Ranch owner, if no one in river ranch sells, what will happen if 50% of land sells are you going to change the boundary. We are not interested in fee title acquisition in River Ranch, only interested in conservation easements. We are only interested in development rights. So if easement, then you would only buy land as it is now? Correct.
- 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?
- Lifelong sportsman. You are either doing something really wrong or right. Against this proposal. 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.
- Sanibel Island with Ding Darling NWR. Avid hunters saw piles of birds and if there weren't lands protected. Ding darling brings in over 1 million dollars per year, work with them very nicely, wonderful economic driver and is the number 2nd. 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.
- If they really want to buy property go buy Disney World.
- Director of land acquisition for The Nature Conservancy. Strongly supports these efforts. Upper Kissimmee Basin is high in wildlife diversity and stewardship is great. The partners will strongly support all property rights. Ask that you help create a vision for this part of Florida.
- 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. Not opposed to hunting and fishing, should take into consideration these rights in the state of Florida.

- 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.
- Everglades Institute. Project to restore Florida panther, history demonstrates that the panther can't be restored by the feds or state lands. Not an ES. 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 of the Everglades by Management of water. Constitution does not allow for refuges or parks or other lands.
- 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? 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. Wildlife Corridors are already there, news channels cover story for free. Why aren't they here? Panther has been extinct for a long time and have crossbred. You are not partnering or participating with us, you are taking land away and I am not selling my land.
- River Ranch – 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, smoker on back of truck, have good 'ol time. Please tell us you don't want River Ranch so we can go home.
- National Wildlife Refuge Association supports this proposal for 3 reasons. 1) Ranchers are good for wildlife. 2) There will be a net increase for hunting and fishing opportunities. 3) Partnership effort and DOI and DOA should work together. Do not include landowners that are not willing sellers, i.e., River Ranch. Make it very clear they will not condemn land and third, they will work with state and private partners in order to co-manage land.
- 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. Unfair that the slide show was not shown at the first meeting. You should show the same show everywhere.
- 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.
- River Ranch Property Owner. Put some figures together. Should this happen, if you go out on the weekends. Spend \$800/month = 2190 times 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.
- Their water management caused the last droughts, shoot all panthers and bears. We all believe in conservation, kill them all so there is nothing to protect
- Property in Hollow Pond and if people that are stupid enough to sell, will I be able to hunt on lands around me? Areas with access in River Ranch, a lot of these areas will be reduced. This will also affect business that deal with ATVs. What is going to be done to replace the income? Fee title and conservation easements lands with landowner will maintain all rights except development rights. River Ranch will only be conservation easement from willing sellers.
- Rancher north of town. Farmers were first conservationist. When Florida fish and game and water management came in there were no longer any deer no hogs. Death in family cause ranches to sell, figure out a way to get rid of state tax. 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.
- Landowner in affected proposed area. This is 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 were not invited to these meetings. You have a responsibility to tax payers to take their representatives comments into consideration.
- 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.
- 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? 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.
- 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. It will inhibit road maintenance and traditional cultural activities. The proposal promises wilderness review. Panthers will move into this area. Comment period needs to be extended. Adversely affects south Florida so there should be meetings down south.
- Owens Law Group. 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- Tea Party Solutions, Ocala, Fla. 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.
- 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. Opposed because this process was chosen to avoid the Congress. Loss of sovereignty of the state of Florida when the federal government takes control. 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. Wilderness consideration is a concern. Move panthers out of town overrunning Naples and Collier County. They are heading this way.
- From Florida for about 12 years. What I see here tonight is tremendous because you're all interested in it. 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.
- Director of the Florida Wildlife Federation. 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. We respectfully request that you remove River Ranch from this map. It has caused enormous disruption and the people are fearful.

- I am a 5th 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 eminent domain to take back federal lands.
- 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.
- Kissimmee River Valley Sportsman Association. Did Mr. Ashe get confirmed? 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 through Feb. 3 have been posted. Others will be posted ASAP.
- You're 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.
- Last thing: when they take it, it's done. I hope that doesn't happen. That's all there is to it.
- 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. 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.
- President of FSCA. We're not for this. Everyone needs to contact your Congressmen and Senators.
- President of Florida Airboat Association. 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. Conservation Area No. 1 is sovereign waters. We can't get in there. That's the most filthy area, 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.
- From the Everglades Coordinating Council. 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 US 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. 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.

- 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, wildlife protection.
- 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.
- 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 US Congress like they were instructed to do and US Constitution says they should do. I encourage you to go on line and read this. 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.
- River Ranch property owner. 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.
- You say you have willing sellers but there are more unwilling sellers.
- What restrictions if any will be placed on conservation easements?
- 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.
- 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.
- We should have used the civic center with 3,000 seats.
- 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.
- I oppose anything and everything to do with the everglades headwaters proposed project
- I oppose this project
- I oppose the project completely, I don't think that any money should be spent toward the taking of property and River Ranch should be excluded from this project
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- 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.

- 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.
- I am concerned about Highlands County's 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.
- 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.