



Proposed Everglades Headwaters National Wildlife Refuge and Conservation Area
1.26.2011 Public Scoping Meeting – Verbal Public Comments Submitted
~200 attendees

- 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: How can we make FWS get out of our lives?
- 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.
- Question: How many people would/would not like the federal government to take over this area?
- 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).
- Question: Isn't the 1,000s of acres already in the Everglades National Forest enough?
- 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. You already have enough land.
- 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.
- Duck Stamp money goes into conservation for ducks. Questions: Where do registrations for airboats and ATVs go? Why can't we use that money for allowing access?
- 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.
- 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.
- 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: How much hunting on Nature Conservancy lands?
 - Answer by TNC: TNC allows hog hunts on all acres and other hunts on about 40,000 acres across the State.
- This is government sprawl.
- 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.
- For my property, TNC won't allow ATVs or hunting, only walking trails.
- 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 need to stop the guy doing the wrong thing out there. Don't punish all of us.
- We need information on what the FWS plans to do with the lands they want to buy.
- 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.
- I support this. Development threatens farms and birding area.
- I don't support this. Farmland in Miami was taken by the government and given to developers.
- 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.
- 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.
- State, local, and federal governments don't need more land.
- 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.
- You can't buy land and make money right now.
- Cows are part of the system and help maintain the ecosystem here. This part of Florida is a fire based ecosystem.
- I am opposed to fee title acquisition.
- Question: How is Avon Park adding restrictions going to affect this proposal or these lands?
 - Answer: These restrictions are fairly new and their impacts are still to be seen.
- 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.
- This federal expenditure of tax dollars has no benefit for non-landowners.

- 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.
- Regardless of the alternatives, the FWS will do what it wants.
- 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.
- This whole thing is about development versus protection. Urban sprawl is bad for 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.
- 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.
- Concerned about being locked out with no access.
- Question: How would invasive species management be handled?
 - Answer: For an area under conservation easement, the landowner would be responsible.
- The value of traditional recreational uses hasn't been mentioned.
- Eagles have expanded in this area with airboat use. (Airboat use did not stop the eagle population in the area from expanding.)
- Cougars (Panthers) are here and have been here.
- Airboats are the only vessel that won't damage the substrate.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- Wildlife First wipes out the hunters.
- 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: 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.
- 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).
- 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.
- Generally this is a good idea. I like to see wildlife.
- This area is where all the clean water comes from for the southern 1/3 of the state.
- We've seen what development does and I don't like what it did.
- 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.
- Question: What is the budget?
 - Answer: The PPP outlines \$700 million, but it could be a billion. A land acquisition budget will be determined for each of the alternatives that will be developed during the NEPA process.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- Question: How do we know that these concerns and comments go further than this room (1.26.2011 meeting at the Kissimmee Civic Center)?
 - Answer: We will use the comments and concerns to help us develop and evaluate the alternatives and the proposal. We will make the comments available on the web and to requesters.
- It is apparent that this group (at the 1.26.2011 meeting at the Kissimmee Civic Center) doesn't want this proposal. Are you going to do this regardless of the majority of this group?
- How can we work together without the government?
- Is the water that dirty? How are you going to clean it up more?
- 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.
- 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.
- Is all of this going to push boaters off the water because of the Clean Water Act?
- Why do the feds need to tell the State how to do its job?