



Proposed Everglades Headwaters National Wildlife Refuge and Conservation Area
2.4.2011 Public Scoping Meeting – Verbal Public Comments Submitted
~325 attendees

- 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 kinds 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 for future generations we can keep it like it is and that's the outcome we are seeking.
- Q: Who makes the final decision?
 - A: The Service Director will make the final decision on this proposal.
- Q: Who is the Director?
 - A: Dan Ashe. He's going through confirmation hearings this week.
- 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.
- Q: Which landowners are your partners? What if we do not want to be your partner?
 - A: 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 Ranch. 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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, get rid of Alligator Alley then the Everglades will be restored.
- 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.
- 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.

- 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.
- One of the things we heard here tonight is this is not our policy. Who sets the policy?
 - A: USFWS policy is set by the Director.
- Q: And it can be changed when?
 - A: Service Director has the right to change policy yes.
 - Listen to that, it's important.
- Ding Darling Wildlife Society member. Neighbor of Ding Darling 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.
- 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.
- President of the Everglades Coordinating Council. We don't want a refuge. Charlie Pelizza can sit in the turkey blind 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?
- Director of Conservation Projects, Florida Chapter of The Nature Conservancy. 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.
- My concern here is I'm one of the landowners that has property you want. 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?
 - A: Policy is to work with willing landowners.
 - Q: So you will guarantee me that you won't force me to sell at a later date?
 - A: Policy is to work with willing landowners.
- Everglades Law Center, appearing on behalf of Conservancy of SW 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.
- Collier County Audubon Society. 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.

- 7th generation Florida, 4th 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.
- President of Audubon Society. Great grandparents lived in Florida. 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.
- Tea Party Solutions in Marion County. 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. Marian 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.
- From St. Cloud and drove two hours to get here. At Kissimmee last week.
 - 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.
- (Second-time speaker) 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 an 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. The guy who's been appointed your Director is going to get fired in two years. We're done with him. You might be able to achieve your goal through another method. If you really want to achieve your goal, look at an alternative method. In the meantime, when you do your PowerPoint and you do a beautiful think 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.
- (Second-time speaker – 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.
- 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.
- 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.

- 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. Rose said: 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.
- River Ranch property owner. What is financial impact on small businesses? Is there something being done on how it affects your local businesses? Want to know if ATVs or off-road vehicles will be allowed on properties. Charlie Response: Several studies on public lands and the financial benefit it brings to local community. If landowner enters into conservation easement, you would be able to run ATV/buggies.
- The 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 has 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.
- 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.
- 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.
 - A: 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.
- 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.
- 7th generation FL 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 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.
- Lawyer with Owens Law Group. Scary when the federal government comes into to say that they want to buy your land. 5th 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 imminent domain policy. The project has been justified by saying it will relieve the Ranching community of estate taxes and he disagrees with that.

- 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.
- 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.
- 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 US 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 PA 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 MS 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 SE Florida. I hope a good decision is made.
- 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.
- RRP 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.
- Everglades Coordinated 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.
- Woman decided to take a verbal vote
- If planning conservation proposal, why do you keep the bombing range?
- Concerned about ATV use on private lands. Meeting answered a lot of questions.
- Friends of Istopoga
 - Would appreciate then remembering that the Istopoga 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.
- Economic concerns regarding our federal deficit- the money could be spent better on other national priorities.
- 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.
- If worried about the environment we had more endangered sp than anywhere in the state. We have the same amount of endangered species 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 grand kids.
- 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.
- Worried about landowners becoming land locked by surrounding owners selling (hole in the donut).
- Found the meeting to be informative and the Service did a good job.
- It's only a land steal.
- 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 SWFMD took the properties in the Lake Istopoga area- there were people's homes there; afraid that the government will take the property. Better things to do with the money.
- 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. Good luck and appreciate all our work.
- Should include in the presentation the date the last time that the FWS or Federal government took property via eminent domain.
- Think It's a waste of tax payer money; every area the feds get involved access was eliminated ; 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;
- 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.
- 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.
- Property is not for sale or lease; leave us alone.
- Meeting not noticed properly
- River Ranch Lawyers want to meet with Charlie or at a minimum he should meet with them.
- Need more handouts; add a sheet with only the website address
- We don't want you here; get out of our State.
- Even if buy land you don't have the money to manage it properly.
- Need a public meeting in Polk County.