



Proposed Everglades Headwaters National Wildlife Refuge and Conservation Area
2.10.2011 Public Scoping Meeting – Verbal Public Comments Submitted
~580 attendees

- Opposes all of this project. Born here and for 55 years have spent hunting and fishing. Own property at RR along with 6,000 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.
- 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 RSA 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.
- 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.
- National Wildlife Refuge Association. Represent nearly 1000 Floridians and supports proposal. 1. FI ranchers are good for wildlife 2. Net increase in hunting and fishing in State. 3. If area is not put into refuge lands it would be developed into houses, and thirdly, FWS will work with partners. Three suggestions, remove landowners, such as RR out of proposal, 2. Be very clear that FWS will purchase only from willing sellers. 3. Work closely to help manage easement lands.
- 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. 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 RR property and you do not realize the economic impact on FL. If you shut us down, we spend lots of money on ATVs and that money would no longer be in the economy.
- 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 govt. Been sorely disappointed by management on FWS lands. Not in Florida, not today and not ever.
- 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. Is there any stipulation through the taking by eminent domain? Is there anything outside the parameters of the proposal that will allow the use of eminent domain? No, there is no percentage.
- 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 do 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 better. How many of lands is related under a treaty with other countries. The MBTA passed in early 1929, only involves lands to be acquired in the US.
- 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. Audubon is not pushing to acquire RR properties and we need to focus on the problems of the watershed instead of worrying about the FWS trying to buy up River Ranch.

- 9th 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- Elected official in Martin County. Same interest in preserving as much land as possible. When the population of FL 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. 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.
- Fisherman and fishes because of mental and physical health it gives him. For a healthy Florida with cleaner waters, and is in favor of the proposal to hold public meetings and establish an Everglades Headwaters NWR. 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.
- Explored Florida all life. Boon docks was swamps with alligators and mosquitoes. Developers came in and built and now Briar County is not the way to live. Many moved because the developers ruined 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.
- 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. Strongly urge that meetings be reheld, especially the Okeechobee meeting that was split up. 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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. There is a report on population growth FI 26 report and 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 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 FL 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.

- Big Threat, money factor, threatening to take away from us. 40% comes from duck stamp and we need to hunt illegally and not buy duck stamps. Do not fund 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.
- River Ranch Property Owner. 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.
- 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.
- 10 year old dream to keep River Ranch the same. Learned how to survive and fun with family. Likes to see all wild animals and they don't need to be told where to poop. Please leave RR alone.
- Under attack by these folks. Preliminary and detailed planning. During preliminary planning they said it was in the works since 2007. In phase 1 you say you are going to leave RR alone, are you going to say the same in phase 4? He wants us to leave RR alone.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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. This proposal will conserve biodiversity and habitat for panthers, snail kite, etc.; creates wildlife corridors. This is the best chance these species has for survival. It 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. The new refuge will also protect the headwaters of everglades. If we have uncontrolled pop growth rather than conservation, there will be a drain on the natural resources.
- 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?
 - A: How do you get to it now? (Four-wheeler) Do you have an access agreement? (No)
 - A: 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.
- Speaker: My problem is if the four property owners around me sell, I can't get to my property.
- 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. 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.

- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- First concern: 50,000 acres designated for a wildlife refuge. Where is that 50,000 acres? It's not defined anywhere. 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? 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.
 - A: 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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 NWR. 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 Dec. 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.

- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 6th 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. 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. Thank you for considering some way to conserve the land.
- 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.

- 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. 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.
- 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. All the environmentalists should be embarrassed. None of the information printed on recycled paper. I oppose this project. I am for wildlife and refuges, but get areas around Orlando and Kissimmee. It would filter the land going through. 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. 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.
- 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 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.
- 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?
- 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. They tell us what to do with our own property.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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?
- 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.
- River Ranch property owner- opposes the Everglades Headwater Refuge Project.
- River Ranch- opposes the Everglades Headwater Refuge project.
- St. Lucie County- River Ranch HOA: Opposed to the entire headwater 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.
- River Ranch is our heaven on earth.