

# Vero Beach

## *Ecological Services Field Office*



photo: USFWS

### Photos (top to bottom)

*Threatened and endangered plant community at Lake Wales Ridge.*

*South Florida Ecosystem Restoration.*

*Endangered key deer:*

*Endangered Schaus swallowtail butterfly releases.*



photo: USFWS

### Station Facts

- Established: 1955.
- Staff: 58.

### Station Goals

Provide expert leadership in the conservation of fish and wildlife affected by federally-funded or licensed land development actions in south Florida.

### Services Provided to

- Private citizens.
- State resource agencies.
- Local governments.
- Federal agencies.

### Activity Highlights

- Reviews approximately 7,000 Federal permits each year that affect over 70,000 acres of wetlands. One-third of these actions involve endangered species and require consultation under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act.
- Helps plan, construct and operate approximately 30 wetland mitigation banks in south Florida.
- Through the Coastal Ecosystem Program, begun in 1995, the station provides funding support and technical assistance to 51 on-going habitat restoration and public outreach projects. The Service has "partnered" \$1,702,109 with over \$6,951,394 in total project costs.



photo: USFWS



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- Works with Federal, state, tribal, and local partners to restore the Everglades. Restoration of the Everglades involves an unprecedented combined effort to ensure the long term survival of the ecosystems of south Florida.
- Completed the South Florida Multi-Species Recovery Plan. The plan and its implementation is the framework for recovery of 68 federally-listed species and the ecosystems upon which they depend.
- Works cooperatively with the state of Florida and other Federal agencies to quantify and reduce fish and wildlife losses from releases of hazardous substances.
- Provides technical assistance regarding the importance of addressing contaminants in recovery and restoration efforts.
- Evaluates acquisition parcels for lands needed to restore the Everglades ecosystem as authorized by the 1996 Farm Bill, which has allocated up to \$300,000,000 for land acquisition in south Florida. Each acquisition proposal is reviewed for compliance with the ESA, National Environmental Protection Act, Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act, and other Federal laws.

### Questions and Answers

*How will the presence of a bald eagle nest on or adjacent to my property affect my ability to develop the property?*

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service provides conservation recommendations to landowners in the vicinity of bald eagle nests as outlined in the Service's 1987 publication, *Habitat Management Guidelines for the Bald Eagle in the Southeast Region*.

Conservation recommendations provided by the Service are specific to each bald eagle nest site and may vary depending on existing circumstances at each nest site. However, recommendations generally include such measures as timing of the construction activities outside of the nesting season, siting structures on the property to reduce impacts, increasing visual and auditory buffers for the eagles from human activities, and avoiding construction related disturbances in the vicinity of the nest.

*I've been told that Florida scrub jays are present on my property and that I will need to complete a Habitat Conservation Plan before I can develop the property. What is a Habitat Conservation Plan and what do I need to do next?*

The preparation of a Habitat Conservation Plan or HCP is the first step in obtaining an Incidental Take Permit (ITP) from the Service. ITPs are required for anyone who will "take" federally listed species while conducting otherwise lawful activities such as residential or commercial development. The creation of an HCP provides a means for you to identify what measures you will take to conserve scrub jays that may be affected as a result of your construction activities. The completion of an adequate HCP will ensure issuance of an ITP which will allow you to legally "take" scrub jays while developing your land.

The Service provides technical assistance to landowners in need of an ITP and will help you in the development of your HCP. An expedited permitting process is available for residential, small-landowner size developments. You should contact an office and ask for a copy of the *Habitat Conservation Planning Handbook* to assist you in this process.

*What is the Fish and Wildlife Service doing to help restore the Everglades?*

The Service is actively involved in a multi-faceted program to help restore the Everglades. For the Everglades to be successfully restored, the vast array of canals, dikes and levees that were constructed by the Corps of Engineers (COE) beginning in the early 1940's, must be modified to restore the natural flow of water to south Florida. The Service has 40 full-time biologists working with the COE to determine how best to accomplish this task. The Service is also responsible for administering a \$300,000,000 grant program to purchase the lands necessary for a successful restoration. In addition, the Service is actively partnering with Federal, state, local, private and Native American tribes to develop the most effective ways to contribute to the restoration effort.

To protect, conserve and recover the threatened and endangered species that are found in South Florida, the Service is implementing a Multi-Species Recovery Plan for 68 federally threatened and endangered species. This plan will ensure that the efforts being directed to the Everglades restoration will also maximize the benefits to these listed species and contribute to their recovery.

*Occasionally, I see my neighbors feeding lettuce to the manatees in the boat basin behind our house. They also leave a hose running to provide the manatees a source of fresh water.*

*Is there anything wrong with this?*  
Yes. Feeding manatees or giving them water can harm them for several reasons. Manatees may become habituated to "free" handouts from humans which may cause them to hang around or even approach humans for food. The manatee's natural feeding patterns, including the tendency to migrate and search for natural food sources may be disrupted.

In addition, when they become habituated to humans, they lose the natural tendency to avoid us.

Unfortunately, not every one loves the manatee, and these gentle creatures may approach humans who are cruel to them. There is documentation of people shooting manatees, carving initials in their backs and purposely hooking them with fishing gear. With watercraft collision being the main cause of human-related manatee mortality, approaching humans in boats makes them prone to encounters with propellers. The best policy is to "look but don't touch."

*I recently learned that Florida beaches host the most nesting sea turtles in the United States. In fact, sea turtles nest on the beach in front of our house. Is there anything I can do to help protect these creatures?*

Yes, there are many things that you can do to promote the survival of sea turtles. First, never approach sea turtles emerging from the sea, or make noise or shine lights on them while they are nesting. Since hatchling turtles instinctively crawl in the brightest direction, any reduction in the amount of artificial light reaching the nesting beach from your property will help sea turtles.

It is also important to pay attention while boating to avoid collisions with sea turtles. In addition, never throw trash into the water or on the beach since many turtles die each year from ingesting trash mistaken for food. Consider participating in a state or federally sponsored "turtle walk" conducted by an experienced guide. This is the safest and most informative way to learn about sea turtles and their nesting activities. If you call our office, we will be happy to provide you with information about participating in a turtle walk.