



Bringing back the birds

November 16, 2016

The Honorable Rick Scott
Governor
State of Florida
400 S. Monroe Street
Tallahassee, FL 32399-0001

Dear Governor Scott,

On behalf of American Bird Conservancy, we are writing in regard to management of the Arthur R. Marshall Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge which provides important habitat for waterfowl, migratory birds, and the endangered Snail Kite and threatened Wood Stork. We agree that addressing the threat of invasive species needs to be a high management priority. Please direct the South Florida Water Management District to work with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) in a cooperative effort to address this threat.

American Bird Conservancy (ABC) works in partnership with a wide variety of landowners, industries, and state and federal managers to advance the conservation of birds, and we have two staff members in Florida. Kacy Ray is our Gulf Conservation Project Manager in DeBary, and Kirsten Luke McCord, is GIS Specialist with the Atlantic Coast Joint Venture and located in Panama City.

ABC believes that the best course for birds, other wildlife and Florida residents in this instance is maintaining the lease agreement with the Service and continuing the partnership between the State and the Refuge which provides habitat to over 250 species of birds, including the largest wading bird colony in the Everglades. In 2016, thanks to Florida and the Service working together, the \$5 million estimated needed investment was achieved. Without this teamwork, the State of Florida would be on its own to provide for the management needs of this area and to control Melaleuca and Old World Climbing Fern.

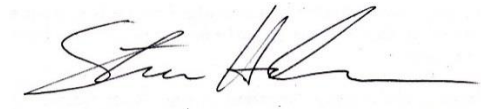
This challenge is another indication of a much broader problem. The threat of invasive species in the Everglades is growing, and ABC supports a substantial increase in resources to halt the spread of invasive plants and snakes that threaten to decimate populations of native wildlife and migratory birds. The Service and partners have spent \$29 million on exotic plant control thus far, but the problem keeps growing.

Based on the available performance measures, the Service is achieving nearly all of its Refuge management objectives. And with additional resources available through continued partnership with Florida, it can better address the threat of invasive species.

Floridians receive many benefits from current Refuge management including public access, wildlife watching tourism, and educational outreach with local schools. Since 2002, the Refuge has hosted 4,438,336 visitors from all 50 States and 21 foreign countries and organized field trips for 59,157 Palm Beach County students. Visitation generated an estimated 107 jobs in local communities and \$1.9 million in tax revenue.

We hope the State of Florida and the Service will resolve this issue by working together to maintain the lease agreement and address the threat of invasive species. ABC will assist in this effort through our efforts to boost funding for invasive species management and management of National Wildlife Refuges. Thank you for considering these comments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Steve Holmer", written over a light grey rectangular background.

Steve Holmer
Vice President of Policy
American Bird Conservancy