

### SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

## **GET THE FACTS**

August 15, 2016

Audubon Florida wants to raise your taxes to pay for the federal government's failure to control invasive plants that are destroying the Arthur R. Marshall Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge.

The South Florida Water Management District Governing Board has been clear on two points:

- 1) The Board is committed to no new taxes on South Florida families.
- 2) The Board, as the landowner, will hold the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service accountable for its obligations as the lessee and operator of the Refuge to protect this special place.

#### **Here are the Facts:**

- Audubon Florida is asking the SFWMD Governing Board to raise taxes to make up for the federal government's failure to control an infestation of invasive Old World climbing fern in the Refuge. The Governing Board voted in July to lock in the "rolled-back" millage rates for the 2016-2017 Fiscal Year. These millage rates will not increase the tax burden on South Florida property owners for a sixth consecutive year while generating the same level of *ad valorem* tax revenues as the prior year.
- Audubon Florida claimed during last week's Governing Board meeting
  that the District has more resources than the federal government for
  invasive plant control. The District's budget for the current fiscal year is
  \$749.6 million. In comparison, the federal government is projected to
  spend \$3.9 trillion this fiscal year, according to the Congressional Budget
  Office.
- As Audubon Florida notes, the District and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission have repeatedly stepped in to invest millions toward invasive plant treatment in the Refuge. The USFWS has not even asked Congress for funding to fix an urgent problem that is the federal agency's responsibility under a 50-year agreement to use state lands.
- Audubon Florida acknowledges that the Refuge faces "a crisis." Yet the organization wants the USFWS to continue operating the Refuge while asking South Florida property owners to pay more to fix the problem.

This is like arguing a tenant should continue living in an apartment while the landlord pays to repair a hole the tenant punched in the wall - not real smart.

#### Multimedia:

- Read a <u>letter from Audubon Florida Executive Director Eric Draper</u> to SFWMD Governing Board Chair Daniel O'Keefe.
- Watch <u>public comments from Audubon Florida Executive Director Eric Draper</u> during the Aug. 11, 2016, Governing Board meeting.
- See pictures and video of the devastating effects of Old World climbing fern in the Loxahatchee Refuge in this Flickr album.
- For more information on the USFWS's contract violation, visit <a href="https://www.sfwmd.gov/loxrefuge">www.sfwmd.gov/loxrefuge</a>.

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The South Florida Water Management District is a regional governmental agency that manages the water resources in the southern part of the state. It is the oldest and largest of the state's five water management districts. Our mission is to protect South Florida's water resources by balancing and improving flood control, water supply, water quality and natural systems.

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