



SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

Thank you for your email offering comment about the Loxahatchee Refuge License Agreement. The South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) would like to offer clarification about the management of this public land. As the SFWMD's Land Resources Bureau Chief, I share and appreciate your concern and passion regarding this issue. I have spent most of my career working to preserve and improve Florida's public lands. The Loxahatchee Refuge is a special place, a respite from our urban surroundings enjoyed by residents and visitors alike. Advocates such as yourself will help preserve this natural area well into the future.

Our Governing Board recently adopted a Statement of Principles to protect the Refuge. With the leadership of the Board, it is our agency's staunch commitment to accomplish what the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) has so far failed to do, which is control the spread of Old World climbing fern. This Statement of Principles details the Governing Board's commitment to managing this critical remnant of the Everglades if continued inaction forces the District to terminate the lease of that land.

Most importantly, our Board is determined to take all necessary steps to protect the Refuge's ecosystem for native plants and wildlife, and to provide public use and enjoyment as well as to support scientific research on these District-owned lands. The Statement of Principles and License Agreement only apply to the District-owned land. The USFWS would continue to own approximately 1,200 acres east of the L-40 Levee and control the property's visitor's center and boardwalk.

Regardless of its designation as a Wildlife Refuge, the entire 144,000 acres are and will remain subject to Florida's water quality standards. Furthermore, the state has spent more than \$1.8 billion to improve overall water quality entering Everglades, including the Refuge, and has committed \$880 million to Gov. Rick Scott's Restoration Strategies to that same end. Water quality touches us all and the Board will not allow that to be compromised.

On behalf of our organization, I am reaching out to you today because it's important for you to know that misinformation about motive and intent had been circulated without regard to the most simple fact checking. The Board wants to protect this precious ecosystem and ensure this public land will always be open to the public.

Thank you again for expressing your views about state lands. We have the greatest regard for South Florida taxpayers and will continue to protect their interests, most especially, as stewards for our public lands.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Rory Feeney", is written over a light blue horizontal line.

Rory Feeney
Bureau Chief, Land Resources