



SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

April 15, 2016

Secretary Sally Jewell
U.S. Department of Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Jewell:

I write with the utmost concern about the inadequate funding that the Government has given to the National Wildlife Refuge System under the US Fish and Wildlife Service. The Administration's failure to recognize the clear and present need to adequately support your own staff and management is apparent in the resulting infestation of exotic plants at the Arthur R. Marshall Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge). A severe, uncontrolled infestation of non-native Old World climbing fern (*Lygodium microphyllum*) and Melaleuca tree (*Melaleuca quinquenervia*) have caused significant ecosystem damage to the Refuge. As a result, the last remaining intact, northernmost portion of the original Florida Everglades is in crisis. Old World climbing fern has aggressively invaded tree islands at a rate of 600 percent in the past 20 years, where much of the biodiversity in the Everglades is concentrated. If not controlled, the infestation causes the eventual collapse of the tree canopy impacting the habitat of endangered species and the ecological services that are provided to thousands of visitors each year.

A 50-year contract, renewed in 2002, authorizes the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to operate the Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge on land owned by the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD). Under the contract, the USFWS is responsible for controlling invasive exotic plants in the Refuge and have specific performance measures that must be met by 2017. It is widely agreed that the Refuge staff, in spite of their efforts, will fail those critical performance metrics by that time.

With concern for protecting a valued Florida resource, the SFWMD and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission signed a memorandum of understanding with USFWS in April 2015 to help the USFWS meet its obligations. However, Congress and the Administration still are not adequately funding invasive plant management control in the Refuge.

As a result of the government's failure to adequately support the Refuge on this matter, Florida and its taxpayers have stepped up to bat by investing \$4.3 million since 2014 to

treat invasive exotics at the Refuge. The SFWMD has lead the coordination of this work and provided the expertise and manpower for over a decade. At a minimum, and as a consequence of inaction, Congress needs to invest an additional \$5 million per year for the next five years, or \$25 million total, to complete the initial treatment of invasive plant infestations in the Refuge with a sustainable \$3 million per year thereafter to maintain a level of control.

If Congressional funding is not secured for this critical treatment, these invasive plants will continue to expand, further degrading wildlife habitat and displacing native plant communities. Furthermore, if we continue on this current track, the SFWMD will have no other recourse but to pursue its contractual remedies.

Everglades Restoration has been a successful partnership between the state and federal government for many years; to that end we hope that you understand the urgency in preventing this epidemic from impacting the ecological progress we have made thus far. If you have any questions, please feel free to call me at (561) 682-6302.

Sincerely,

Peter Antonacci
Executive Director

PA/rb

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bc: Dan Ashe, Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Rolf Olson, Project Leader, Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge
David Viker, Regional Chief, National Wildlife Refuge System



United States Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
Washington, DC 20240

JUN 24 2016

June 24, 2016

Mr. Peter Antonacci
Executive Director
South Florida Water Management District
3301 Gun Club Road
West Palm Beach, FL 33406

Dear Mr. Antonacci:

Thank you for your letter to Secretary Jewell on April 15, 2016, expressing your concern about funding provided to treat exotic plants at Arthur R. Marshall Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge.

The Department agrees that the Refuge is a special and critical resource and as a result, the Department and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) have prioritized its management in our budgets. Since the Service renewed its partnership with the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) in 2002, it has invested more than \$80 million in operations and management at the refuge supporting a range of activities and conservation needs. More than 4.2 million visitors have come to the refuge from every state and 29 countries. Additional partnership with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) has allowed us to expand hunting opportunities for citizens. And this financial investment also provided educational opportunities for more than 8,000 teachers and nearly 50,000 students to learn about the outdoors and the Northern Everglades.

This substantial commitment includes more than \$30 million for the control and maintenance of exotic plants. The Southeast Region receives \$2.5 million annually for invasive control and eradication out of a total of roughly \$10 million available nationally. Loxahatchee received \$1.65 million of that amount in FY 2016. To give some perspective on the priority placed on invasive control at the Refuge, the Region's remaining 129 national wildlife refuges shared the remaining \$890,000 to address our highest priority invasive control projects such as feral hogs, Phragmites, Alligatorweed, and Chinese Tallow. This year's total budget for operations and maintenance budget for Loxahatchee is \$5.34 million, which includes the \$1.65 million for invasive control. We are grateful for the FWC contribution of more than \$4.5 million over a three-year period ending this coming fall toward invasive species control. That partnership is appreciated and critical to achieving success.

As part of the 2002 renewal of the license agreement, the Service agreed to pursue 13 performance measures, including those aimed at getting four invasive plants to maintenance control by 2017. While we have been clear the Service will not meet all 13 performance measures by then, significant effort with available budget resources has so far achieved substantial accomplishment in meeting 12.5 of the 13 performance measures in place. Indeed, two of the four invasive plants are in complete maintenance control well ahead of schedule. Sustaining that success depends on future funding. The Service will continue to prioritize opportunities for additional funding sources to address invasive species management.

We remain interested in re-negotiating the performance measure for control of Lygodium and Melaleuca to reflect what we have learned since the original lease negotiation about the level of effort necessary to control these particular species in this part of the Everglades. Our commitment to controlling invasive exotic species in the refuge is undiminished since we renewed the license agreement in 2002, however, since that time we have learned that achieving success on Lygodium and Melaleuca in the Refuge requires a larger, more concerted approach that cannot be implemented by the Service alone. Updating the Refuge Lygodium and Melaleuca performance measure would not relieve the FWS of its obligation to prioritize this management objective, rather, it would provide the state and federal governments the opportunity to re-evaluate the problem and to develop a more realistic approach to solving it.

If you have any questions as we continue to pursue the funding we need, please call me at 202-208-4416, or Cynthia K. Dohner, the Service's Southeast Regional Director, at 404-679-4000.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Karen Hyun".

Karen Hyun, Ph.D.
Deputy Assistant Secretary for
Fish and Wildlife and Parks
U.S. Department of the Interior



SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

June 30, 2016

The Honorable Sally Jewell
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Jewell:

I have received Deputy Assistant Secretary Hyun's letter of June 24, 2016, written on your behalf responsive to my letter to you of April 15, 2016. This exchange of letters deals with the impending destruction of what is left of Florida's Everglades.

As the contracted occupant of the large portion of the Everglades operated as the Arthur R. Marshall Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service solemnly promised 14 years ago that it would use its "best efforts" to acquire dedicated funds to control the invasive exotic plant infestation in the Refuge. Scientists and policy makers agreed at that time that control of invasive exotic plant species was critically important to restoration of the Everglades ecosystem. Today, our Governing Board urgently believes this to be true.

The Service has not only failed to control the invasive exotic plant infestation, but also ignores its contractual obligations. Our Governing Board is left to wonder how your agency can justify "best efforts" that stop short of actually asking Congress for the money to solve the invasive species problem. For the past several years, staff for both the Service and the District have agreed that it will cost \$5 million per year for the next five years to bring the Refuge into compliance with the contractual performance criteria. But, your agency has not even asked Congress for these modest sums.

To be clear, all parties have agreed for quite some time that the solution to the problem of invasive exotic plant infestation in the Everglades is to commit adequate funds for consistent treatment. This is not a problem of technical feasibility. Enclosed is a graphic illustrating the disparity between exotics control on District-managed and Service-managed lands in the Everglades. The Governing Board has achieved control of invasive exotic plants on District properties because of the taxpayer monies it commits to this effort annually.

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The Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge is unlike refuges owned by the United States where the Service may be entitled to seek funding as it sees fit. Here, the Governing Board expects that your agency will at a minimum do the honorable thing, meet its contractual obligations and request the \$5 million in annual congressional funding necessary to properly care for the Everglades currently occupied by the Service. After you have undertaken such efforts during this budget cycle, and if it is still necessary, the District will be pleased to discuss with you any reasonable renegotiation of our contract that you now so prematurely request.

Sincerely,



Peter Antonacci
Executive Director

PA/rb
Enclosure

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bc: Dan Ashe, Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Karen Hyun, Ph.D., U.S. Department of the Interior
Rolf Olson, Project Leader, Arthur R. Marshall Loxahatchee National Wildlife
Refuge
David Viker, Regional Chief, National Wildlife Refuge System