

February 1998

Intentional blockage by 101 Ranch - 1998-02-05

Audubon Lake Okeechobee Watershed Campaign Office

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South Florida Water Management District

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VIA TELEFAX

February 5, 1998

Mr. John T. Mitchell
Environmental Counselor
National Audubon Society
102 East 4th Avenue
Tallahassee, FL 32303

Dear Mr. Mitchell:

**SUBJECT: Blockage of Surface Water Flows at
Ordway-Whitell Kissimmee Prairie Sanctuary**

Thank you for your February 4, 1998 letter expressing the concerns of Florida Audubon.

Let me respond by pointing out that the South Florida Water Management District (District) is equally concerned over the adverse water resource conditions which exist in that portion of northwest Okeechobee County that includes the Ordway-Whitell Kissimmee Prairie Sanctuary (Sanctuary) and other lands.

For about eight months now the District has devoted extensive efforts and staff time to develop a consensus approach among the Sanctuary and surrounding landowners to specifically deal with water quantity/flood management concerns.

To date the following has been accomplished:

1. Sanctuary and landowner representatives have met on several occasions at District offices to discuss problems, solutions and associated funding needs.
2. An experienced water management/engineering consulting firm has been retained and partially funded by the District, Sanctuary and landowners to develop a regional, watershed-based solution.
3. After numerous site visits and consultations with affected landowners a draft water management plan has been developed by the consultant. This plan identifies key activities that will need to occur on both public and private lands, including increased on-site storage of surface waters.

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4. Permit applications to authorize work which would reinstitute historic surface water flows from the Sanctuary and surrounding lands (north of Military Grade) to the west to Seven Mile Slough have been filed and are under expedited review by District staff.

As you can see, much has been accomplished, yet more work remains to be completed.

Due to unseasonably wet conditions in this region the District has recently embarked on an effort to identify and implement short term solutions to relieve high water conditions in the Sanctuary. Last week John Morgan met with the Sanctuary and landowner representatives to discuss these short term initiatives.

From the "get-go", the District has attempted to foster a consensus-based approach among the affected landowners. However, if this approach fails the District is prepared to initiate legal action to obtain necessary injunctive relief which may include culverting and/or degrading portions of Military Grade.

I firmly believe that all the landowners, not just the Sanctuary, can benefit from a permissible, regional water management solution. The days of each landowner dealing with surface water drainage on their own property on a piece-meal basis are over—such efforts usually fail in the long run.

Another meeting with Sanctuary and landowner representatives is scheduled for February 8, 1998. Landowner commitments will need to be made at this meeting.

I will keep you posted on developments as they arise.

Sincerely,



John J. Fumero
Deputy General Counsel

JJF/ep

cc: Len Lindahl
Mike Slayton
John Morgan
Gary Ritter