

February 1998

National Audubon Society - Okeechobee clarifications - 1998-02-11

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National Audubon Society



Ordway-Whittell Kissimmee Prairie Sanctuary
100 Riverwoods Circle 17350 N.W. 203rd Ave.
Lorida, FL 33857 Okeechobee, FL 34972
(941) 467-8497

Okeechobee Board of County Commissioners
Okeechobee County Courthouse
Okeechobee, FL 32972

February 11, 1998

Dear Commissioners:

I received a FAX letter on January 22, 1998 (attached), that was copied to several County officials, including Commissioners. The letter was not signed and included several erroneous statements. I offer clarifications on some inaccuracies.

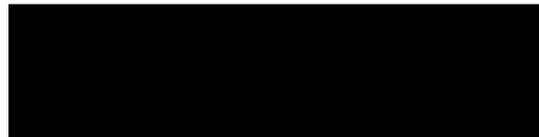
The referenced dike between the Audubon Sanctuary and 101 Ranch is not impounding 50,000 acres--our engineering studies indicate it is about 7,400 acres. The impounded area is not larger than the Florida Power and Light impoundment. Returning the natural water flow to Fish Slough would not be life threatening to anyone. And of course, tidal waves do not occur in sloughs.

The dike that the 101 Ranch and others use to impound water on upstream landowners in Fish Slough has recently been altered to increase impounding capacity, ~~and violates Florida water law~~ Ranches in Sevenmile Slough are being flooded with the redirected Fish Slough water and suffering damages they should not be suffering. The seven damaged landowners have been patiently working with each other, and the Water Management District, for more than two years to solve this inequitable situation. An impartial engineer was hired and has offered a plan for solution. However, we need more time before full implementation.

Audubon's Sanctuary holds one of the most endangered species in the world, the Florida Grasshopper Sparrow. Three years of unnatural flooding have prevented all breeding and our population has declined from about 30 pairs, to 10 pairs last year. Sparrows do not live long and we must allow the sparrows to breed this year or they may perish. This flooding has prevented Audubon from using their own property for the mission and purpose it was purchased. This unnatural flooding has damaged other properties too; one rancher removed approximately 1,300 cattle from his land, while another has removed about 400 cattle. We all have drowned oak trees.

We have tried to solve this problem cooperatively. It is time to act. We simply request that Fish Slough water be allowed to flow down Fish Slough.

Sincerely,



Paul N. Gray, Ph.D.
Manager