

**TESTIMONY  
BEFORE THE HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT AND  
RELATED AGENCIES**

Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Moran and Members of the Subcommittee

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies. My name is Todd Hallman and I submit this testimony on behalf of myself, the Florida Sportsmen's Conservation Association (FSCA) and The Future of Hunting in Florida (FHF) on whose Boards of Directors I sit, and the Florida Sportsmen Trust Group, a new organization formed to support the newly established Everglades Headwaters National Wildlife Refuge and Conservation Area. We respectfully request that you fully fund the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) and allocate \$50 million for the Everglades Headwaters National Wildlife Refuge & Conservation Area for Fiscal Year 2014.

The FSCA is an organization formed to unify and build upon the individual strengths of a diverse group of people who share a common interest in protecting and restoring the unique natural resources of Florida in order that we, and generations to follow, can enjoy it's economic, social, recreational, ecological, and aesthetic benefits into perpetuity. It is our intent to work towards the restoration of our natural areas while promoting legitimate public use of these areas. We work with city, state, and federal agencies to accomplish these goals. Key areas include environmental protection and enhancement, habitat restoration, wildlife preservation and water quality protection.

The FHF is a non-profit organization committed to recruiting and retaining hunters in Florida, to promote and strengthen ethics and conservation, and to increase access and opportunities for citizens and visitors to hunt on public and private lands in Florida. Both the FSCA and FHF are strong and active supporters in the Youth Hunting Program of Florida and developing sporting opportunities for our Wounded Warriors in the state.

The Sportsmen Trust Group is currently comprised of approximately 30 sporting organizations who are working with the National Wildlife Refuge Association, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to address concerns of sportsmen in Florida with the Everglades Headwaters National Wildlife Refuge and Conservation Area (EH NWR/CA).

We respectfully request that you appropriate \$50 million for Fiscal Year 2014 to start funding the EH NWR and to fully fund the Land and Water Conservation Fund at the authorized \$900 million. The monies from this fund are needed to purchase 100,000 acres of conservation easements over working ranch lands and to purchase 50,000 acres of fee simple lands. We understand that \$50 million is a large number and that the project overall will require much more from a variety of sources, it is a start and if we do not start now, these lands will be gone forever.

I understand that at this time, when spending must be cut to balance the budget and sequestration is happening, it could be considered a bad time to ask this subcommittee to appropriate monies for a acquiring land. However, I would like to respectfully call to your attention that this project has nothing to do with balancing the budget, it has to do with the Land and Water Conservation Fund and Congress making good on a promise to the American people back in 1964.

The LWCF is a fund; a federal program established by Act of Congress in 1964 to provide funds and matching grants to federal, state and local governments for the fee acquisition of land and water, and easements on land and water, for the benefit of all Americans. The main emphasis of the fund is recreation and the protection of national natural treasures in the forms of parks, refuges, forests and wild lands. The primary source of income to the fund is fees paid to the federal government, specifically the Bureau of Energy Management, Regulation and Enforcement, by private companies for the right to drill offshore for oil and gas. Congress regularly diverts most of the funds from this source to other purposes. Additional minor sources of income include the sale of surplus federal real estate and taxes on motorboat fuel.

Funds from the Land and Water Conservation Fund have been utilized over the years on projects both large and small. LWCF has helped state agencies and local communities acquire nearly seven million acres of land and easements and developed project sites including such popular recreational areas as Harper's Ferry in West Virginia, California's Big Sur Coast, and the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem in Montana, helped maintain Yellowstone National Park, and helped to build and maintain thousands of local playgrounds, soccer fields, and baseball diamonds. Though LWCF is authorized with a budget cap of \$900 million annually, this cap has been met only twice during the program's nearly four decades of existence. This fund has been paid into over the past 40 years for just this purpose , but most of these monies – over \$17 billion – have ended up in the United States General fund. We feel like it is time that we get back on track, collect the LWCF and use the fund for the purpose for which it was designed.

The Everglades Headwaters National Wildlife Refuge and Conservation Area is very important to all Floridians and wildlife in the state. It will also conserve one of the last remaining grassland and longleaf pine savanna landscapes in eastern North America. It will provide cattle ranchers a way to preserve their lands and their way of life for future generations. And importantly, it will provide access to hunters, fishermen, hikers, and bird watchers and a beautiful outdoors for anyone wanting to use and enjoy this refuge for whatever appropriate type of recreation they choose. It will also provide a landscape to hold and clean water before it travels south down to lake Okeechobee.

Today the South Florida Water Management Board spends millions and millions of dollars building storm water treatment areas to clean water before it is dispersed to the Everglades. Why not use this Everglades Headwaters project to do the same in a natural way and still help the ranchers, hunters, and recreationalists and provide opportunity for generations to enjoy what we have to share now?

The sportsmen of Florida have not always been supportive of this project because of the way the federal government (USFWS, NPS) has treated sportsmen in the past. USFWS has had very limited hunting on refuges in Florida. When this project was shown at 4 scoping meetings throughout the state, sportsmen showed up to voice their opinions. With the room filled at all 4 meetings by about 95% of sportsmen, at the time not one wanted to give one more acre of land to the federal government. That was 2 years ago.

The Sportsmen Trust Group has worked hard with USFWS to have our issues addressed and we feel like our voice is being heard.. We understand that no individual USFWS employee can fulfill these promises, but they are working hard to do consider hunting and fishing opportunities when management plans are up for review. The Sportsmen's Trust Group and the Northern Everglades Alliance (ranchers) are now partners in the campaign and fight to make this Everglades Headwaters project a success.

The Sportsmen's Trust Group and others are still working to resolve issues with the National Park Service, specifically in the Big Cypress Preserve. An additional 147,000 acres were added to the Preserve in 1988 known as the "Addition Lands". The Addition Lands legislation called for these lands to be opened to the public for 'traditional cultural activities' within three years of the 1988 acquisition. Unfortunately, 23 years later, the National Park Service produced a "Final Alternative" which would turn 80% of the Addition Lands into Wilderness and/or Back Country Primitive, both of which would not allow future off-road vehicle trails, something sportsmen felt they were promised.

During the creation of the Preserve in 1974, it was clearly stated by Senator Lawton Chiles and others that no part of the Preserve was intended then or now to be Wilderness or Back Country Primitive areas. The Park Service allowed the Addition Lands to sit idle for 20 + years allowing the area to somewhat grow over. When the facts are exposed regarding the activities over the past 60 + years in the Addition Lands it will become clear that none of the Addition Lands qualify for Wilderness consideration. We have people prepared to verify ongoing activities in the Addition Lands over the past 60 + years including farming, ranching, timber removal, oil exploration, air strips, tram roads, private homes, private hunting cabins, existing off-road vehicle trails etc. etc. etc. to say nothing of the area being divided by I-75, a four lane interstate divided highway.

So in closing I would like to say, you can see why, at the start of the Everglades Headwaters Project the sportsmen of Florida had a lot of trouble buying into this. We did not trust the federal government and met the initiative to create a new national wildlife refuge with skepticism, scorn and anger. However, with hard work and good communication between The Sportsmen Trust Group, USFWS, FWC, NEA and the National Wildlife Refuge Association, our hesitance and anger turned to commitment and trust. We are all committed to this project; now all we need is your commitment to fund the LWCF and this project can come true and help Florida be saved for generations to come.

Thank you for your time in reading this testimony when you have a lot of problems to solve all over the world. I am at your disposal to answer additional questions

and I welcome any and all of you to visit this special part of the United States and see for yourself exactly why it should be protected, not just for Floridians, but for all Americans.

Todd Hallman