



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

J. N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge Complex
1 Wildlife Drive
Sanibel, FL 33957



June 25, 2013

Herschel T. Vinyard Jr.
Secretary
Florida Department of Environmental Protection
3900 Commonwealth Boulevard
M.S. 49
Tallahassee, Florida 32399

Dear Secretary Vinyard:

Sanibel Island's reputation for stewardship of its coastal barrier island ecosystem has been earned by a daily commitment to its conservation ethic. Through the dedicated and thoughtful actions of its residents and land managers, Sanibel Island has protected its natural beauty and restored its native habitat to attract a wide variety of wildlife to its shores, marshes, mangroves, and hammocks.

This lush and diverse ecosystem not only supports an abundance of wildlife, but it also enhances the quality of life for its residents and provides the engine that drives the local economy. The centerpiece of this nature-based economy is a vibrant and robust ecotourism industry that attracts many visitors from around the world drawn to the highly rated beaches and conservation areas. ***About 700,000 people visit J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge each year, contributing over \$26 million to the local economy and supporting over 260 jobs!***

The J. N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) consists of over 6,400 acres of mangrove forests and islands, submerged seagrass meadows, cordgrass marshes, and subtropical hardwood hammocks. Over 2,600 acres of the Refuge are designated by Congress as a Wilderness Area. The [J. N. "Ding" Darling NWR](#) is part of a larger complex that encompasses the [Caloosahatchee NWR](#), [Matlacha Pass NWR](#), [Pine Island NWR](#), and [Island Bay NWR](#). These refuges consist mostly of mangrove islands used as colonial waterbird rookeries. The entire refuge complex contains approximately 8,000 acres and forms a part of the largest undeveloped mangrove ecosystem in the United States.

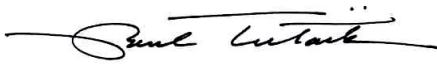
J.N. "Ding" Darling NWR (Refuge) began a legacy of land conservation on Sanibel Island since 1945 through acquisition of environmentally sensitive land. In recent years, the Refuge has worked with the City of Sanibel (City) and the Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation (SCCF) to protect over 1,200 acres since 1980. Over 67% of Sanibel Island is now protected in conservation lands, for a total of over 6,700 acres.

On April 20, 2010, the BP oil spill began to upset the fragile balance of Sanibel Island. The oil didn't reach Sanibel's shores, but the perception of harm to Sanibel's beaches and mangroves significantly affected tourism. Reservations were canceled, visitation dropped and businesses that relied upon a healthy coastal ecosystem struggled.

We have had a close and dependable partnership with the City and SCCF for over 40 years. The investment of new funds to restore habitat and improve water quality will enhance the natural capital of Sanibel Island, so that it can continue to yield high returns, both economically and ecologically. These efforts will not only help heal a vulnerable landscape, but help heal a valuable tourism industry by reassuring visitors that the natural communities of Sanibel Island are still worthy of the reputation they have earned.

Thank you for giving full consideration to this request.

Sincerely Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Paul Tritaik", with a stylized flourish above the name.

Paul Tritaik
Wildlife Refuge Manager