



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
South Florida Ecological Services Office
P.O. Box 2676
Vero Beach, Florida 32961-2676



August 16, 2000

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ENVIRONMENTAL PROGRAMS

Marc C. Bruner Ph.D.
Director of Planning and Environmental Programs
Solid Waste Authority of Palm Beach County
7501 North Jog Road
West Palm Beach, FL 33412

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By DEP Siting Coordination Office via Email at 5:05 pm, Sep 22, 2010

Dear Dr. Bruner:

This letter is in response to your request for the Fish and Wildlife Service's (Service) position on the removal of exotic vegetation in the vicinity of an active wading bird rookery at the Solid Waste Authority North County Resource Recovery Facility (NCRRF) in Palm Beach County, Florida. Service biologists Spencer Simon and Brian Luprek of this office met with you and Mary Beth Mihalik to discuss exotic vegetation removal and to tour the bird rookery at your facility.

The wading bird colony at the NCRRF is regionally and nationally significant. Greater than 14,000 federally protected migratory birds were documented during the 1989 breeding season. The colony also is diverse, with records of the following species using the site: white ibis (*Eudocimus albus*), cattle egret (*Bubulcus ibis*), anhinga (*Anhinga anhinga*), little blue heron (*Egretta caerulea*), tricolored heron (*E. tricolor*), great egret (*Casmerodius albus*), snowy egret (*E. thula*), black-crowned night heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*), green heron (*Butorides striatus*), and great blue heron (*Ardea herodias*). Available information indicates that the colony also supports the federally endangered wood stork (*Mycteria americana*). In addition, this area represents the largest drought refuge for the endangered Everglade snail kite (*Rostrhamus sociabilis plumbeus*) in the United States.

For over 10 years, the birds at this colony have successfully nested in exotic Australian pine (*Casuarina equisetifolia*) and Brazilian pepper (*Shinus terebinthifolius*) that became established on spoil islands from an historic shell mining operation. We understand that the exotic vegetation in and adjacent to the rookery is an issue of concern at the NCRRF because of a recent county ordinance requiring its removal. The Service generally supports the removal of exotic and nuisance vegetation for habitat restoration and maintenance.

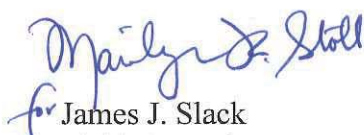
Since breeding colonial waterbirds are highly susceptible to human disturbance and landscape modification, we believe the environmental benefits to be gained by exotic removal in this situation are outweighed by the potential for disturbance to this important nesting colony. Furthermore, we are doubtful that even the systematic removal and replacement of the exotic

vegetation with native species within the colony would be practical. This is due to the temporal lag before the trees became mature and were able to provide functional nesting habitat and perch sites.

Care must also be exercised when removing vegetation in the vicinity (within 350 feet) of the colony due to the potential alteration of visual and auditory buffers protecting the site. Please coordinate with our office if it becomes necessary to remove exotic and nuisance vegetation at the colony so we may assist you in minimizing the potential for disturbance to the colony.

Thank you for allowing us to provide these comments. Please contact Mr. Simon at (561) 562-3909, extension 226 if you have any additional questions.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Marilyn J. Slack".

for James J. Slack
Field Supervisor
South Florida Ecological Services Office

cc: FFWCC, Lara M. Coburn, West Palm Beach, FL

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ENVIRONMENTAL PROGRAMS

OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
EVERGLADES REGION
MARK ROBSON, Regional Director
(561)625-5122, fax (561) 625-5129

April 26, 2000

Marc C. Bruner, Ph.D.
Director, Planning and Environmental Programs
Solid Waste Authority of Palm Beach County
7501 North Jog Road
West Palm Beach, FL 33412

Dear Dr. Bruner,

Thank you for inviting me to visit the wading bird rookery located at the Solid Waste Authority North County Resource Recovery Facility in West Palm Beach off Jog Road and 45th Street on April 13, 2000. It is an impressive colony, hosting over 1,800 nests. During the week following my visit, I had occasion to conduct an aerial survey of the site, and was equally impressed from the air by its size and diversity. The colony has been active at this protected site for over 13 years, with nests counts varying between 2,000 and 5,000 each year. The colony is also very diverse, hosting several federally and state listed species, including Wood Storks (*Mycteria Americana*), White Ibis (*Eudocimus albus*), Little Blue Heron (*Egretta caerulea*), Tricolored Heron (*Egretta tricolor*), and Snowy Egret (*Egretta thula*). Although we did not see Snail Kites (*Rostrhamus sociabilis*) during my visit, your documentation indicates they have historically used the site for nesting and presently use the area as a feeding and roosting site. In light of the size of the colony, its historical use, and its diversity and species composition, this colony is one of the more important sites for breeding wading birds in South Florida.

The majority of the vegetation utilized at this site by nesting and roosting wading birds is exotics, including Australian Pine (*Casuarina equisetifolia*) and Brazilian Pepper (*Schinus terebinthifolius*). While the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission opposes the introduction or maintenance of exotics, both plant and animal, this site and situation is somewhat unique. If all exotics were removed from the site, little vegetative structure would remain, therefore assuring the abandonment of the area by the birds. Native vegetation could be replanted at the site, however, because it would likely be many years before the vegetation structure is suitable for wading birds and snail kites, it is doubtful they would return to the area after such a long interim.

In my opinion, the overall value of the site for snail kites and state and federally listed wading birds outweighs the value of exotic removal, and I do not encourage exotic removal within the colony boundaries at this time. I would however, encourage the Solid Waste Authority to continue to monitor the site closely, control exotics outside of the colony boundaries and continue an aggressive program to control the exotic seed source. Thank you again for allowing me to visit your property. If you require any further assistance or have any other questions, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lara M. Coburn", followed by a long horizontal flourish.

Lara M. Coburn, Ph.D.
Regional Biologist

Bureau of Wildlife Diversity Conservation
Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
8535 Northlake Boulevard
West Palm Beach, FL 33412
561-625-5122

cc: Mark Robson, FFWCC
Mary Beth Mihalik, SWA