August 22, 2016

Daniel O’Keefe, Governing Board Chair
South Florida Water Management District
3301 Gun Club Road
West Palm Beach, FL 33406

Dear Chairman O’Keefe:

On behalf of the 61 member organizations of the Everglades Coalition committed to the protection and restoration of America’s Everglades, we ask the South Florida Water Management District (District) to continue to partner and work collaboratively with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) in managing invasive species in the Arthur R. Marshall Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge).

We appreciate that the State of Florida has increased funding for exotic removal in recent years to offset insufficient federal funding. Whenever the District and FWC act proactively and work together with USFWS, the funding goals needed to perform important work are met. FY 2016 is a prime example of the fruit of this partnership among agencies. The District’s investment of an additional $2,550,000 from FWC, combined with USFWS’s $2,754,628, surpassed the $5M needed yearly to successfully contain invasive exotic species in the Refuge. We believe continuing a collaborative partnership between the state and the federal agencies is in the best interest of the Refuge, Floridians, and all Americans who appreciate and enjoy this special place.

We agree that the loss through exotic plant infestation of the hundreds of tree islands critical to the Everglades would terminally degrade wading bird habitat, the habitat that makes the Refuge a haven for wildlife and a treasure. We believe collaboratively sharing resources (while advocating for federal funding) is the path toward a satisfactory resolution of the situation in the Refuge.

As the only National Wildlife Refuge in Palm Beach County, LNWR currently averages more than 300,000 resident and tourist visits each year. Many Floridians and tourists use the canals and interior marshes for fishing, hunting, and paddling. Public-use areas at the Refuge provide viewing and photography opportunities for a large variety of wetland flora and fauna including over 250 bird species.
Therefore, we encourage the District to re-establish its collaborative partnership with USFWS. Doing so will better facilitate our shared goal for invasive species management in the Refuge, benefit wildlife, compliment Everglades restoration efforts, and serve the interest of Florida public.

Sincerely,

Cara Capp  
National Co-Chair

Michael J. Baldwin  
State Co-Chair