

Jan. 23, 2013

The Honorable Rick Scott
Governor of Florida and
Trustee of the Internal Improvement Trust Fund
Plaza Level 5, The Capitol
Tallahassee 32399-0001

Dear Governor Scott:

This is a request that you and the Trustees of the Internal Improvement Trust Fund defer proposed actions on today's agenda regarding agricultural leases of state-owned lands within the Everglades Agricultural Area. We learned only recently that you are being asked to extend these leases for 30 years without seeking competitive bids. The leases for which these lengthy extensions are being sought do not expire until 2015, 2016 and 2018. There is no urgency to approve them today. Typically state agricultural leases are for six years, existing leases for these parcels have 20-year terms as a result of specific authorization in the Everglades Forever Act.

We believe state-owned lands in the Everglades Agricultural Area and elsewhere should be utilized to maximize opportunities for Everglades and environmental restoration and to reduce the costs. We support and recognize that value-for-value land swaps to expand the South Florida Water Management District's Stormwater Treatment Area 1-West are essential to reducing the level of nutrients in agricultural runoff discharged to the Arthur R. Marshall National Wildlife Refuge. We are also supportive of the Lake Hicpochee project, which will benefit the Caloosahatchee River and its estuaries by providing additional and greatly needed water storage in the region.

Nonetheless, we question the wisdom and prudence of locking up state-owned land with new 30-year leases that make these lands unavailable for future environmental restoration projects. We would hope to use the delay in approving the lease extensions to negotiate shorter-term leases with reasonable termination clauses and to require the most effective best management practices be used on state-owned land. These properties ought to be utilized in a manner that improves the quality of farm runoff and sets an example of what EAA agriculture can do.

Of the seven leases you are asked to extend today, it is our understanding that three, covering approximately 2,200 acres will include "claw-back" provisions, allowing for early termination, that are intended to permit potential use of these state lands in restoration projects. Upon reviewing the language presented to us yesterday, it appears it will take multiple years to invoke these provisions, some of which are so complex and onerous that it is questionable that they could ever be invoked. Consequently, we request

that approval be deferred and more attention be devoted to the drafting and public review of the provisions of the lease extensions.

We believe the short delay would evidence your serious commitment to the stewardship of public lands.

Sincerely,

Manley Fuller
President
Florida Wildlife Federation

Charles Pattison
President
1000 Friends of Florida

Lisa Interlandi
Executive Director
Everglades Law Center