



January 23, 2009

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Robin Heard, Director
Easements Programs Division
Natural Resources Conservation Service
Wetlands Reserve Program Comments
P.O. Box 2890; Room 6819-S
Washington, D.C. 20013

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**SUBJECT: Wetlands Reserve Program Comments;
Docket No. NRCS-IFR-08013; Executive Order 12866**

Dear Ms. Heard:

This letter is written to provide comments on the 2008 Interim Final Rule for the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP). Specifically, Palm Beach County objects to Section 1467.4(e) which prohibits local governments from participating in the WRP. Following is Palm Beach County's experience with the WRP with a recommendation for your consideration.

Palm Beach County has purchased and restored over 35,000 acres of environmentally sensitive land. One parcel, nearly 600 acres in size, was restored with assistance from the WRP. Those federal dollars were put to immediate use in the form of contracts with local vendors who carried out the restoration.

A second project, known as Mecca Farms, was a candidate in the WRP when we learned of the Executive Order excluding local government participation. Mecca Farms is a proposed 600 acre flow way identified by the South Florida Water Management District and the U.S. Army, Corps of Engineers as a necessary component of Everglades restoration.

Palm Beach County had already purchased the land, had obtained all necessary permits and was prepared to go to bid on what we estimate to be an \$8,000,000 restoration plan and thought the project was highly ranked when we learned of the exclusion of local governments.

We do not know what project ultimately was funded. However, we can say that, had the Mecca Farms project been funded, a contract would have been awarded to local construction vendors and the money would be injected into Florida's economy right now. In addition, of course, 600 acres of former row crop and citrus land would be in process of becoming a vital wetland slough.

Our request then, is to allow local government participation in the WRP for purposes of restoring land already purchased by the local government when such restoration will be in the form of contracts quickly awarded to vendors. Of course, all such projects must first meet the objectives of the Wetland Reserve Program.

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**Department of Environmental
Resources Management**
2300 North Jog Road, 4th Floor
West Palm Beach, FL 33411-2743
(561) 233-2400
FAX: (561) 233-2414
www.co.palm-beach.fl.us/erm



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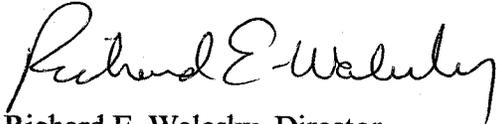


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Thank you for your consideration of our request. Should you have any questions, or wish to discuss further, please feel free to contact me at (561) 233-2400.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Richard E. Walesky". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name and title.

Richard E. Walesky, Director
Environmental Resources Management