



United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0905

BILL NELSON
FLORIDA

September 28, 2007

The Honorable Condoleezza Rice
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington DC 20520

The Honorable Dirk Kempthorne
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington DC 20240

Dear Secretaries Rice and Kempthorne:

Last week, I presided over a hearing on the actions of a U.S. representative to the United Nations' World Heritage Committee that resulted in the removal of the Everglades from a list of sites in danger.

During that Senate Foreign Relations International Operations Subcommittee meeting, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Gerald Anderson informed the committee that, in light of concerns raised by myself and others over the delisting of the Everglades, the Department of State's Bureau of International Organizations Affairs had adopted new procedures for reviewing proposals that would add or remove U.S. sites from the list in the future.

While I am pleased to learn that the Departments of State and Interior have modified the decision-making process for endangered U.S. sites, the new procedures do nothing to ensure the protection of the Everglades.

There's consensus within the scientific community, including the National Park Service, the World Conservation Union (IUCN), and the Audubon Society, that the Everglades is still very much endangered and much more restoration work needs to be done. The Everglades is facing a number of problems, including toxic levels of mercury; a continued decline of endangered species, such as the Florida panther and wood stork; and a dramatic die-off of sea grass in Florida Bay – "all indicators that something is seriously wrong in the ecosystem of South Florida," according to the Park Service.

Despite these dire conditions, not a single one of the critical projects that make up the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan, which Congress passed in 2000, has been completed. Furthermore, the administration has worked actively to thwart Congress' efforts to pass the Water Resources Development Act, which would authorize many of these projects – even threatening to veto this important legislation.

Given the decision to remove the Everglades was made using flawed procedures, ignored the recommendations of many in the scientific community, and did not reflect funding challenges facing its restoration, I urge you to seek the reinstatement of the Everglades on the list of endangered sites at the World Heritage Committee's next meeting.

In addition, I would appreciate more information on the new procedures for U.S. delegations to the World Heritage Committee announced by Deputy Assistant Secretary Anderson at the hearing, including an explanation of how your respective agencies plan to cooperate in their implementation.

I look forward to working with you to ensure that the opinions of scientific experts – not political concerns – are the basis for decisions about our country's valuable natural treasures.

I appreciate your attention to this important matter and look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bill Nelson". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.