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Immediate News Release

Florida Ranchers Aid National Bird

More than a half million acres of ranch lands in the Kissimmee Prairie region of south central Florida have been established as a Bald Eagle Sanctuary. Fifty-nine landholders, who control practically contiguous acreage extending from near the town of Kissimmee to the northwestern shore of Lake Okeechobee, have entered into an agreement with the Florida Audubon Society to maintain their properties in such a manner that Bald Eagles can be protected and safeguarded in this area for the future.

The importance of the Bald Eagle project may be judged from a statement by Frederick K. Truslow, writer and photographer for National Geographic Magazine, who estimated that there are less than five hundred pairs of resident Bald Eagles left alive in the United States, excluding Alaska. Surveys of the past four years show about two hundred and fifty active eagle nests in Florida, the only state, except Alaska, having a sizeable eagle population. Our National Bird, known for the last decade to have declined in numbers at an alarming rate, is now the subject of a nation-wide campaign, initiated in Florida in 1958, for its preservation and restoration. The campaign has had the commendation of President Kennedy and the encouragement in Florida of proclamations by Governors Collins and Bryant. The Florida Audubon Society cooperates closely with all Federal and State agencies in this work and also with the National Audubon Society, whose research director, Alexander ("Sandy") Sprunt, of Tavernier, heads the national program and serves on the Wildlife Committee of the State Society.

The formation of the KISSIMMEE COOPERATIVE BALD EAGLE SANCTUARY is the work of the chairman of the Florida Audubon Society's Bald Eagle Project, George Heinzman of Winter Haven. His wife, Dorothea, serves as Vice-Chairman, and is involved particularly in the educational phases of the project. Mr. Heinzman became interested in the serious plight of the Bald Eagle four years ago and spent much time in studying and photographing eagles at their nests. He has had several articles on the Bald Eagle published in national magazines. A comprehensive view of the present status of eagles in

this State has been obtained through the help of many cooperators who have reported on the location and the success of nests in Florida.

During the course of the Florida Audubon Society's eagle survey, Mr. Heinzman began two years ago finding nests on ranches. Realizing that the environment provided was ideal, and reasoning that many coastal eagles may have been driven inland by housing developments, he began a search of ranchlands. Speaking before the Florida Cattlemen's Association, he found tremendous interest among those he met. On the vast ranchlands of the Kissimmee River drainage, he found a concentration of eagles comparable to those in Everglades National Park. This led to the development of the cooperative sanctuary plan. "Many of these nests," says Heinzman, "because of their inaccessibility had been overlooked in our earlier surveys. This cooperative venture of our patriotic and conservation-minded ranchers, involving approximately twenty percent of Florida's active eagle nests, is a practical guarantee that the Bald Eagle will continue to be a spectacular part of the Florida scene."

The landholders, who joined the cooperative project, have agreed in signed statements to protect and safeguard to the best of their abilities, all Bald Eagles and eagles' nests on their properties, from shooting, nest-robbing, and other forms of persecution. They also agree to protect any eagle nests on their lands from destruction by removal or fire, and to leave standing, when clearing land, enough tall trees to provide future nesting sites for the eagles.

C. Russell Mason, Executive Director of the Florida Audubon Society, speaking from Maitland headquarters, had this comment to make: "Florida is one of the two most important remaining nesting areas for the American Bald Eagle. Although given the protection of both Federal and State laws at all seasons, the eagles may still be harmed by disturbance at their nesting sites. This far-reaching agreement between our ranchers and the Society is evidence that Floridians are aware of their responsibilities and will strive to keep our National Bird not only alive but vigorous."

An Open Letter . . .

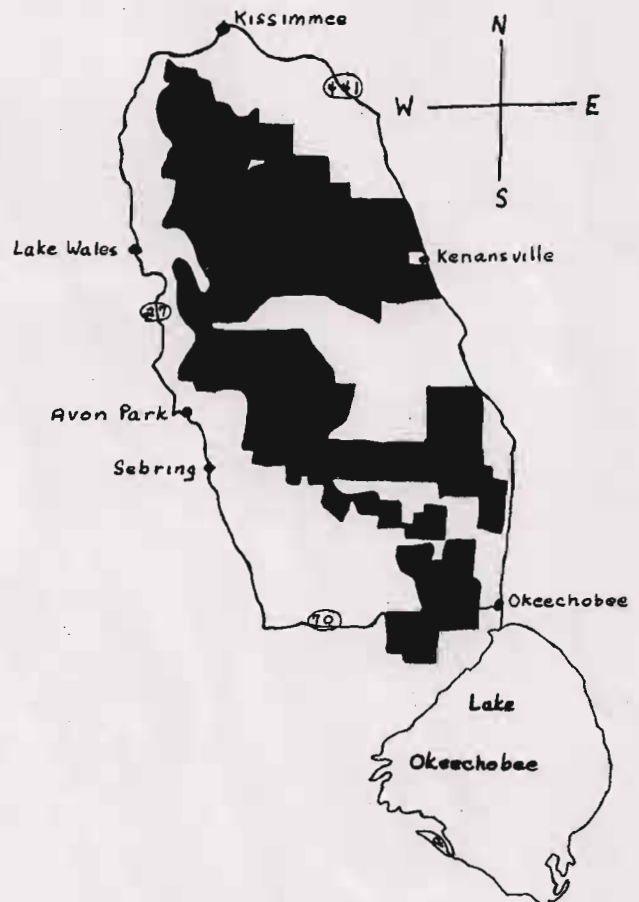
TO ALL MEMBERS OF THE KISSIMMEE COOPERATIVE BALD EAGLE SANCTUARY

To the following members: Alico Land Development Co., Frostproof; B. H. and S. A. Belcher, Basinger Shooting Preserve, Okeechobee; Oscar Bass, Okeechobee; George J. and Mary P. Baya, Miami; Everett Boney, Lorida; Irlo Bronson, Kissimmee; G. H. Cross, Sebring; William Candler, Jr., Kissimmee; E. N. Davis, Frostproof; George C. Dempsey, Okeechobee; Dixie Ranch (James E. Hodges), Okeechobee; John Drenik, Fort Lauderdale; Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission, Tallahassee; Mrs. A. B. Godwin, Fort Meade; Leon E. Godwin, St. Cloud; E. C. Goolsby, Okeechobee; O. W. Goolsby, Deerfield Beach; GPS Ranch (Norman E. Stebner), Okeechobee; Gulf Ridge Council, Boy Scouts of America, Tampa; Robert M. Harriss, Ft. Pierce; C. T. Hart, Fort Meade; W. P. Hayman, Bartow; Indian Lakes Estates, Inc., Indian Lake Estates; Pat Johnson, Kissimmee; Barney S. Keen, Lake Wales; Paul M. Keen, Tampa; Roy J. Keen, Lake Wales; Sam M. Keen, Lake Wales; Laird and Pederson, Lake Wales; Doyle E. Lightsey, Brandon; Morris Lofton, Okeechobee; J. N. McArthur, Miami; J. F. McKillips, Jr., Miami; Mrs. Olena Ferne McMann, Haines City; G. W. Mann, Jr., Bartow; Clifton Meekins, Okeechobee; Eddie Montsdeoca, Lorida; John Norman, Okeechobee; Mrs. Cebelle Norton, Haines City; R. S. Norton, Haines City; Joe Overstreet, Kissimmee; Parker Brothers, Inc., Arcadia; C. C. Peters, Lake Wales; Ray B. Raulerson, Pahokee; Arthur A. Simpson, Tampa; Mary L. Singletary, Kissimmee; Ernest M. Smith, Bartow; H. B. Snively, Winter Haven; John A. Snively, Jr., Winter Haven; George R. Stearn, Miami Beach; Three Lakes Ranch, Inc., Wilmington, Delaware; Timed Investments, Inc., Lake Wales; Tower Bay Development Corporation, Lake Wales; Mrs. Lemmie C. Whitehurst, Wauchula; M. A. Williams, Basinger; Z. K. Williams, Okeechobee; and W. C. Zipprer, Jr., Lake Wales.

Yes, you recognize not only your own name above, but also those of many of your neighbors and friends in the cattle industry.

On behalf of the Florida Audubon Society, and unofficially for all patriotic Americans, I want to thank you for providing a more than half-million acre sanctuary for the American Bald Eagle, where these birds can live and raise their families as Nature intended.

Most of you are cattlemen, men of the land, the type of rugged individualists who built this great nation of ours. We are happy that you are far-seeing and realize the im-



The black pattern indicates the location of the 600,000 acre Bald Eagle Sanctuary, which stretches from just below the town of Kissimmee almost to the shore of Lake Okeechobee. Drawing by Jody Frutchey from a sketch map by George Heinzman.

portance of saving the Bald Eagle, our National Emblem, from possible extinction. Some of you are businessmen and land developers, who are willing to make concessions in order to keep a remnant of our wildlife heritage for our children and those to follow.

You have, collectively, done far more than a number of persons could have done if they had made cash donations to the Eagle Project. For it would be practically impossible to raise enough money to buy, let alone maintain, a half million acre eagle preserve. By nature, eagles usually nest far apart. So in order to have an *effective* sanctuary, it must be a large one, indeed. And this is what you have provided. Included on your lands are sixty-five known eagle nests, fifty of which were active this past year.

Cash donations are, however, an important part of the eagle work. And I would like to take this opportunity, in



this letter open to the Audubon membership and to the public, to ask those readers who have not provided land in this sanctuary project, to consider whether they can help provide another essential, funds. Certain expenses are involved in administration, signs, publicity, and travel, which we must have underwritten. In offering such assistance, please address: Bald Eagle Project, Florida Audubon Society, P. O. Drawer 7, Maitland, Florida.

I am happy to count most of you ranch owners and managers as personal friends. I shall hope to see you sometime during the eagle nesting season this coming winter. Until then, thanks again!

George Heinzman, Chairman
Bald Eagle Conservation Project
Florida Audubon Society.

Florida Audubon members are reminded that the prime purpose of creating the Kissimmee Bald Eagle Sanctuary is to provide an extensive area where the eagles may continue to exist in a state of isolation so necessary to their survival. The lands involved are privately owned, are used for cattle raising, and are definitely not open to visitors. We have promised these cooperators that Audubon members will not request permission to enter their ranches. Such intrusion could lead to the withdrawal of members from this project. Bald Eagles are still plentiful enough in Florida and in the area covered by this sanctuary so that the birds may here and there be adequately viewed from the public roads.—George Heinzman.