

January , 2018

Dear :

As a proud supporter of the Crystal River National Wildlife Refuge Complex and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, I urge you to support the 2010 management agreement between the City of Crystal River, the Southwest Florida Water Management District and the Crystal River National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge) so that the Three Sisters Springs property continues to be managed by the Refuge and stays in the National Wildlife Refuge System.

Dedicated Refuge staff and volunteers; members of the Friends of Crystal River National Wildlife Refuge Complex, the Felburn Foundation, the National Wildlife Refuge Association and a myriad of other organizations and private citizens worked to acquire the Three Sisters Springs property to protect and manage this vital manatee habitat as part of the Refuge. The refuge was established in 1983 specifically for the protection of the federally threatened Florida Manatee and for preservation of the undeveloped springs in Kings Bay. Over 400,000 people visit the refuge each year, adding more than \$4.5 million in sales tax revenue and over 275 U.S. jobs.

The City cites the Service's inability to develop sufficient public access and capital improvements on the property and lack of federal funding and staff as failure to uphold their end of the management agreement. While the Service acknowledges that implementation of the approved management plan has not progressed as desired, progress has been stalled by a lack of a unified vision among the City, the Service, and the broader public. It is important to note that the Refuge has assisted the City in meeting the intent of Florida Communities Trust (FCT) in granting funds to the City for the purchase of the property and that 19 of the 21 FCT restrictive covenants have been completed or are ongoing. The Refuge has spent \$1,465,130 on site development and construction (e.g. temporary fee booth and gate, entrance road, boardwalk, etc.) since Fiscal Year 2012 and is prepared to invest significant funding into permanent restroom facilities, trails and buildings, and habitat management but must ensure a long-term agreement between the Service and the City to do so. The dynamics between the City of Crystal River and the Refuge must improve.

If this management agreement is revoked, it would end the wildlife-first priority for management of the property. That would be disastrous for all Floridians and the manatees that depend on the springs that are essential to manatee health and survival in winter. Even if the City continues managing for wildlife while providing public access, 100% of the costs would fall on the City - and therefore the citizens of Crystal River.

I believe that the Refuge is equipped to not only oversee the management of Three Sisters Springs, but to protect our natural resources and provide for the conservation of wildlife, including the manatee. I urge you to uphold the management agreement with the Refuge and that Three Sisters Springs remain part of the Crystal River National Wildlife Refuge.

Thank you for your consideration,

Signature

Print Your Name

City _____ State _____