Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ 2013

**To:** Randy Brown, Park Manager for San Felasco and the State of Florida Park Service

**Re:** Controlling feral hog growth in San Felasco Hammock Preserve State Park

**Dear Sir,**

I am writing in support of the Friends of San Felasco, Inc., the Citizen Support Organization for San Felasco Hammock Preserve State Park. San Felasco is a preserve containing about 7,300 acres of the southernmost tract of eastern deciduous forest in North America. Feral hogs have caused significant damage to the preserve over the past years. Recently, population growth has caused escalating damage:

* Hogs compete for food (acorns and seeds) with native wildlife, such as deer and turkey. Hogs also feed on ground nesting reptiles and birds, such as bobwhite quail, and consume young animals.
* Hog rooting damages tree roots, kills sensitive plants, prevents native tree growth, allows invasive species to take hold, contributes to erosion, and can cause a decline in water quality.
* Recreational trails in the park are being destroyed by hog rooting. This may result in decreased visitation, which reduces funds for the state park system.
* Hogs carry 45 different parasitic and infectious diseases, which can affect livestock, wildlife, and people. There are health concerns for wildlife within the park, for the people and horses that visit the park, and for the people and animals that inhabit the surrounding farms.
* Hogs can be dangerous. One of our group bicycle ride leaders was knocked down last year by a pack of hogs. Fortunately, no injury occurred, but safety is a major concern.

The current state management plan for San Felasco Hammock Preserve State Park states: "Feral hog removal and adequate fencing to slow the movement of hogs into the preserve will continue to receive the highest priority." In contrast to this management plan priority, in 2012, only periodic trapping through the USDA at an expense of about $12,000 was performed. Although over 190 hogs were removed, this is not sufficient to prevent the current hog population explosion. With sows reproducing twice a year with litters of 8-10, it is unrealistic to expect to control an established population with intermittent tactics. Current permitting, liability, and disposal requirements are not realistic, and the costs of individual permitting and insurance exceed a thousand dollars per applicant.

**Please consider these options:**

* Increase funding for additional, state-employed trappers to aggressively remove hogs on a full-time, year-round basis
* Provide funding for state-employed hunters to reduce the population on an aggressive ongoing basis.
* Waive excessive permitting and liability fees in order to better allow volunteers, approved by the park manager, to trap hogs. Current fees put a limit/strain on this viable avenue for control.
* Allow volunteers to hunt hogs with a firearm and/or dogs. This would occur at night when the park is closed and would not impact daily operations. The volunteer options would eliminate costs associated with state-employed trappers or hunters.
* Change the hunting laws and close the park for a brief time every year to allow hunting.

A combination of both trapping AND hunting is the only known method to be remotely effective in keeping feral hog population in check. We understand other state parks are pursuing more aggressive management plans.

Volunteers with the Friends of San Felasco Citizen Support Organization raise over $25,000 a year and contribute thousands of hours to maintain the preserve. Please consider their request to provide the means to keep the feral hog population in check, to ensure that our park remains one of the finest natural resources in the state.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

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