



April 26, 2007

Senator Burt Saunders
Room 418
Senate Office Building
404 South Monroe Street
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1100

Senator Dave Aronberg
Room 405
Senate Office Building
404 South Monroe Street
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1100

Re: House Bill 981
Senate Bill 2054

Dear Senators Saunders and Aronberg:

The Sanibel Captiva Conservation Foundation has been monitoring the proposed amendments to House Bill 981 regarding Babcock Ranch Preserve management. We understand that at this stage of the legislative session, amendments can move quickly so we want to provide you with our thoughts on stewardship of the Babcock Ranch Preserve. We are concerned that the proposed amendment is premature and urge you to allow the procedures that the Legislature put in place last year to be implemented before any changes to the statute are contemplated.

I am the Lee County appointee to Babcock Ranch Inc., (BRI), the management oversight committee, established to provide management and administrative services for the Preserve. Last year, the Legislature tasked BRI to establish and implement management policies to ensure that the preserve operates for the public good. BRI was additionally tasked with developing the administrative and accounting procedures for the operation of the Preserve.

Since the ranch was purchased 9 months ago, the management oversight committee has had only one meeting, held in February, 2007. This initial meeting was strictly organizational, no substantive decisions were made. The committee has not been provided nor reviewed any management plan for the operations of the preserve which are under the control of the private

development group, Babcock Ranch, LLC. To date, the management oversight committee has had no opportunity to establish or review any management policies or accounting procedures for operating income, costs or expenses. At this point, the management oversight committee has not been given sufficient information by which to evaluate operational alternatives or the validity of any losses for the Babcock Ranch Preserve reported in newspapers this past week. Most importantly, the management oversight committee has not yet forwarded any reports, recommendations or conclusions to the Legislature or Board of Trustees regarding the Preserve operations.

It is premature to make any decisions about the need or appropriateness of harvesting cypress on the Preserve in light of the fact that the advisory committee has not met, has not reviewed any management plan and is unaware of the financial specifics, notwithstanding the requirements of Sections 215.981(1), 1001.453(4), 1004.28(5), or 1004.70(6), Florida Statutes, that require an annual financial audit of accounts and records by an independent certified public accountant.

As the Executive Director of a well established, 40 year old, non-profit conservation foundation that owns and manages approximately 2000 acres of habitat in Lee County I am familiar with the challenges of native landscape land management. I urge you to hold off on developing legislation that is not responsive to specific needs that have had the requisite oversight.

Sincerely,

Erick Lindblad
Executive Director

Cc; Bob Janes – Chairman Lee County Commission