

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR**Fish and Wildlife Service****Arthur R. Marshall Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge**

ACTION: Notice of intent to prepare a Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Assessment for Arthur R. Marshall Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge in Palm Beach, County, Florida, and Hobe Sound National Wildlife Refuge in Martin County, Florida, and notice of meeting to seek public participation.

SUMMARY: This notice advises the public that the Fish and Wildlife Service, Southeast Region, intends to gather information necessary to prepare a Comprehensive Conservation Plan and an Environmental Assessment for Arthur R. Marshall Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge, Florida, and Hobe Sound National Wildlife Refuge, Florida. The Service is furnishing this notice in compliance with Service comprehensive conservation planning policy, the National Environmental Policy Act, and implementing regulations to achieve the following:

- (1) Advise other agencies and the public of our intentions, and
- (2) obtain suggestions and information on the scope of issues, opportunities,

and concerns for inclusion in the environmental assessment.

DATES: A public meeting concerning Arthur R. Marshall Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge will be held at 7 p.m. on August 17, 1998, at the Boynton Beach Civic Center, located at 128 East Ocean Avenue, Boynton Beach, Florida. A public meeting concerning Hobe Sound National Wildlife Refuge will be held at 7 p.m. on August 18, 1998, at the Hobe Sound Civic Center, located at 8980 Southeast Olympus Avenue, Hobe Sound, Florida.

ADDRESSES: Address comments and requests for more information to: Refuge Manager, Arthur R. Marshall Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 10216 Lee Road, Boynton Beach, Florida 33437-4796.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Arthur R. Marshall Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge, located 15 miles southwest of West Palm Beach, Florida, consists of 221 square miles of the remaining northern Everglades. The refuge is one of three large freshwater storage areas surrounded by levees and canals. These storage areas, built by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, were later placed under the jurisdiction of the South Florida Water Management District. The primary objective of the refuge,

established through an agreement between the Service and the South Florida Water Management District, is to maintain suitable habitat for a variety of wildlife native to the northern Everglades. Sawgrass marshes, wet prairies, sloughs, and free islands compose more than 90 percent of the area's unique wetlands. The refuge also provides critical habitat for the snail kite, American alligator, and neotropical birds as well as numerous other threatened and endangered species.

Hobe Sound National Wildlife Refuge, located 25 miles north of West Palm Beach, Florida, consists of a 735-acre island tract and a 232-acre mainland tract. The island tract consists of mangrove swamps and coastal sand dunes, and the mainland tract consists of sand pine-scrub oak forests. The sand dunes provide critical nesting habitat for loggerhead turtles. The refuge is also important to numerous endangered and threatened species such as the eastern indigo snake, the Florida scrub jay, and the gopher tortoise.

Dated: July 8, 1998.

Judy L. Jones,

Acting Regional Director.

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