



COMMITTEE ON CONSERVATION & STATE LANDS

**WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 20, 2008
8:30 AM – 10:00 AM
216 THE CAPITOL**

ACTION PACKET

**Marco Rubio
Speaker**

**Rep. Will Kendrick
Chair**

Committee Meeting Notice

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Speaker Marco Rubio

Committee on Conservation & State Lands

Start Date and Time: Wednesday, February 20, 2008 08:30 am

End Date and Time: Wednesday, February 20, 2008 10:00 am

Location: 216 Capitol

Duration: 1.50 hrs

Consideration of the following bill(s):

HB 819 Hunter Safety Course Requirements by Kendrick

Presentation of interim project-"State Lands Acquisition and Management."

COMMITTEE MEETING REPORT
Committee on Conservation & State Lands

2/20/2008 8:30:00AM

Location: 216 Capitol

Attendance:

	<i>Present</i>	<i>Absent</i>	<i>Excused</i>
Will Kendrick (Chair)	X		
Mary Brandenburg	X		
Charles Chestnut	X		
Faye Culp	X		
Rene Garcia	X		
Doug Holder	X		
Richard Machek	X		
Robert Schenck	X		
Will Weatherford	X		
Totals:	9	0	0

Committee meeting was reported out: Wednesday, February 20, 2008 11:27:17AM

COMMITTEE MEETING REPORT
Committee on Conservation & State Lands

2/20/2008 8:30:00AM

Location: 216 Capitol

HB 819 : Hunter Safety Course Requirements

Favorable

	<i>Yea</i>	<i>Nay</i>	<i>No Vote</i>	<i>Absentee Yea</i>	<i>Absentee Nay</i>
Mary Brandenburg	X				
Charles Chestnut	X				
Faye Culp	X				
Rene Garcia	X				
Doug Holder	X				
Richard Macheck	X				
Robert Schenck	X				
Will Weatherford	X				
Will Kendrick (Chair)	X				
Total Yeas: 9		Total Nays: 0			

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COMMITTEE MEETING REPORT
Committee on Conservation & State Lands

2/20/2008 8:30:00AM

Location: 216 Capitol

Other Business Appearance:

2007 Interim Project- State Lands Aquisition & Management

Larry Novey (State Employee) - Information Only

OPPAGA

1038 Holland Drive

Tallahassee Florida 32301

Phone: 850-487-3768

2007 Interim Project- State Lands Aquisition & Management

Lane Stephens (General Public) - Proponent

Allied Sportsmen's Associations of Florida

501 East Tennessee Street, Suite D

Tallahassee Florida 32308

Phone: 850-513-0004

2007 Interim Project- State Lands Aquisition & Management

Janet Bowman (Lobbyist) - Information Only

The Nature Conservancy

625 N. Adams Street

Tallahassee Florida 32301

Phone: 850-251-9406

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COMMITTEE MEETING REPORT
Committee on Conservation & State Lands
2/20/2008 8:30:00AM

Location: 216 Capitol

Summary:

Committee on Conservation & State Lands

Wednesday February 20, 2008 08:30 am

HB 819 Favorable

Yeas: 9 Nays: 0

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Handed-out to
Members of
Committee
from Lane
Stephens.

Paradise Lost?

Florida bureaucracy might ruin one of the state's best-managed lands



When you picture a sporting paradise, what do you see? For many hunters, anglers and outdoorsmen in southwestern Florida, that vision was the 73,236-acre Babcock Ranch. Until 2006, the 100-year-old ranch was privately owned, and as part of its commercial operations it leased land that provided deer, turkey, quail and boar opportunities to paying sportsmen—120 such leases, in fact, averaging 5,000 acres each.

HOG WILD Without hunting, the number of hogs on the Babcock Ranch might explode, threatening the well-managed deer herds and overall wildlife habitat.

For decades the Babcock Ranch was hailed as a model of wildlife conservation. The money from the leases helped pay for wildlife professionals, who developed management practices to keep the ranch's deer and other game animals in balance.

When the state purchased the ranch in June 2006 for \$352 million—the largest conservation land acquisition in Florida history—sportsmen looked forward to having the property opened to public hunting.

But the hunting has been put on hold as the state embarks on a survey to assess the ranch's wildlife, a move that ironically puts the decades of sound management policy at risk by preventing sportsmen from helping to maintain appropriate herd numbers.

Sportsmen were surprised by the moratorium. As part of a complex sales pact, the state requires that the ranch remain financially self-sustaining until its commercial operations were phased out over 10 years and a management plan was devised. Presumably this included the revenue-generating hunting leases.

However, last May, Gov. Charlie Crist vetoed a bill that would have allowed lease hunting to continue while the management plan is being drafted by consultants hired by the Florida Wildlife Commission. The suspension will allow biologists to complete a two-year wildlife inventory and determine how public-access hunting should be regulated.



TIP OF THE MONTH

Add a **bat house** to your yard to create **roosting habitat** and help control flying pests. Bats will consume up to **600 mosquitoes an hour**. Find bat house instructions at batmanagement.com

Some, including members of Babcock Ranch Inc., a nine-member advisory board that will manage the preserve, say the suspension is unnecessary because the ranch employed its own biologists and was lauded for quality deer management. They fear that by the time hunting resumes, in 2009 at the earliest, the ranch's fragile ecosystem and wildlife will go to the hogs—literally.

"Why does the state need a year or two to assess the wildlife?" board member Al Cheatham asked. "The point being, if [the ranch] had been doing such a great job, they didn't have to stop hunting until they had a new plan in place. Essentially, they're saying, 'Until we have a management plan, we're going to stop managing it.'"

The suspension is standard procedure, said FWC biologist Chad Allison.

Lease hunting is "a private endeavor," he said. "If the state gets ownership, there can be no more of that."

FWC Conservation Acquisition & Planning Administrator Gary Cochran said officials are working on "an interim plan to provide public access that would include, potentially, public hunting of some sort." Cochran said that interim plan could be ready by July.

The sooner, the better, said Florida Wildlife Federation President Manley Fuller, who advocates special hunts as soon as possible to keep feral hog numbers down. "In hindsight, we should have had an interim plan that included hunting," he said. Fuller, also a Babcock Ranch Inc. board member, and Cheatham also fear that without hunting pressure, the ranch's carefully managed deer herd will suffer. The herd will continue to reproduce so competition for forage will make it hard to produce quality deer," Cheatham said.

Steve Tutko, the ranch biologist for 25 years until he retired two years ago, said little has changed since the last lease payments in 2005. "I really haven't seen that many changes, but it has only been two years," he said. "As far as I can tell, the wildlife is doing really well."

Cheatham doubts a management plan will be approved before the 2009 deer seasons—never mind by this July.

Fuller is also skeptical because of the divergent groups contributing to the management plan. "You talk about too many cooks. Well, everybody has a riddle in this stew pot," he said. 🌲🌲🌲

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