

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

COMMITTEES:
APPROPRIATIONS
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SELECT COMMITTEE ON INTELLIGENCE
SMALL BUSINESS AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP
SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING

August 21, 2019

Mr. Eric Sutton
Executive Director
Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
620 South Meridian Street
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1600

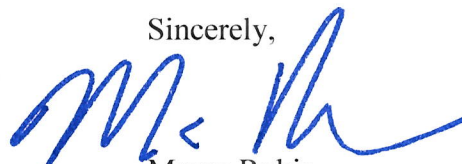
Dear Executive Director Sutton:

As you are aware, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (USFWS) national workplan for downlisting and delisting actions, first posted in June 2019, has outlined that the Key deer (*Odocoileus virginianus clavium*) may be proposed for delisting. I am concerned about the possible impact of a final delisting decision by USFWS on the species' survival, and will await the release of the Species Status Assessment to verify that it is grounded in the best available science and that it complies with federal law. However, regardless of the species' future federal status under the ESA, I request that your agency exercise its authority under Article IV, Section 9 of the Florida Constitution to ensure the longterm conservation and protection of Key deer populations.

Given the importance that the species holds to the identity of many residents in the Lower Keys, and the species' value to the region's tourism-driven and environmentally-conscious economy, the Key deer deserves special recognition and attention from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC). There is widespread public interest and affection for this unique mammal that is found nowhere else in the world. Should the USFWS conclude, through a thorough science-based and objective review, that the recovery criteria for the Key deer have been met and a delisting (or downlisting) decision is warranted, it would greatly benefit the public's confidence to know that the FWC was prepared to proactively seek appropriate state protections for these animals and their habitat throughout its historical range in cooperation with USFWS. Adoption of the Key deer into the State's current Imperiled Species Management Plan is one such action your agency should explore in that scenario.

While federal protections under the ESA have proven essential to the recovery of iconic species in Florida, such as the American alligator and Bald eagle, and have staved off the extinction of many others, including the Florida manatee, Florida panther, and American crocodile, the State of Florida has a significant responsibility and moral imperative to ensure that our endemic flora and fauna are conserved for future generations. We must not rely solely on federal protections when direct state-level action can secure state and local conservation goals. Once again, I request that your agency promptly and proactively exercise its constitutional authority to ensure that Key deer populations and their critical habitat remain protected from current and future threats to the species' survival.

Sincerely,



Marco Rubio
U.S. Senator