
FLORIDA



FOUR WHEEL DRIVE ASSOCIATION

www.FL4WDA.com

Education • Conservation • Recreation

Florida Four Wheel Drive Association, Inc.
1568 Arbor Lane
Fernandina Beach, Florida 32034

Governor Jeb Bush
The Capitol
400 South Monroe Street
Tallahassee, Florida 32399

February 22, 2006

Re: Babcock Ranch

Dear Governor Bush:

I am writing this letter on behalf of the over 2000 members of the Florida Four Wheel Drive Association. In November of 2005, a member of the Board of Directors of FL4WDA, Monica Monroe, was present at your cabinet meeting where the purchase of the Babcock Ranch was discussed. She was last on the agenda and we believe that possibly some of comments regarding the purchase were missed. I would like to take this opportunity to address some of the concerns of the off road community and to solicit your active involvement in pursuing off road recreation in a portion of the Babcock Ranch.

Contrary to the opinions of state agencies and environmental groups, the membership of the Florida Four Wheel Drive Association consists of physicians, lawyers, bankers, and untold numbers of small business owners that actively trail ride at least once a month in any number of areas, including the National Forests in Florida (Ocala, Osceola, and Apalachicola). Because of the rather expensive nature of our sport, recreational four wheel drive enthusiasts tend to spend a considerable sum of money in the form of vehicle upgrades, recreational vehicles and incidental purchases related to a day of trail riding or weekend of camping.

There are several clubs that are members of CERT (Citizens Emergency Response Team) and SAR (Search and Rescue). These CERT groups have been implemented before, during and after natural disasters, specifically the hurricanes of 2004 and 2005. Because of the modifications made to these vehicles, they are able to traverse deep water and downed trees that local and state emergency management vehicles are unable to navigate, with the exception of National Guard H-1's. There are Off Road Vehicle CERT/SAR teams in Fernandina Beach, Jacksonville, Ocala, Tampa, Ft. Myers and soon to be Ft. Lauderdale/Miami. As recently as January, the Ocala Jeep Club CERT Team was mobilized to search the Ocala National Forest for an elderly man missing for several days. These Off Road CERT Teams are at your disposal in the event of a natural disaster in Florida and can be mobilized and on the road in a short period of time.

In addition, these clubs also spend a great deal of time serving their local community, especially around the holidays, providing gifts and assistance to underprivileged children. We also spend time doing trail cleanups and maintenance in needed areas. Recently, nine tons of garbage was removed from the Church Lake area of the Ocala National Forest. So as you can see, four wheel drive clubs are active participants in the proper stewardship of our public lands.

After reviewing newspaper items and email exchanges between the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, the Fish and Wildlife Commission, and the Department of Agriculture, the Florida Four Wheel Drive Association, Inc., is having doubts about the existing Management Agreement with Kitson and Partners regarding the ability of full size four wheel drive vehicles to have access to the property. As it stands right now, only ATV's, Swamp buggies, motorcycles and other unlicensed vehicles are *expressly prohibited* from the property. However, the conversations taking place between DEP, FWC, and DOA lead us to believe that the intent of Kitson and Partners is absolutely no motorized recreation, which is what the members of Florida Four Wheel Drive Association, Inc., are concerned about.

Because of the rampant development of South Florida that went unchecked for so long, there are absolutely no available areas for motorized recreation in southeast Florida. The nearest area for those clubs in south Florida is the Ocala National Forest, which is four to five hours away. Having an off road recreation area in South Florida would provide the largest population segment of the state a location to ride. You could also consider it a significant thank you to the clubs in the state that participate in CERT and SAR.

The Florida Four Wheel Drive Association, Inc., is committed to providing volunteers, labor, materials, and money to make an off road park in Babcock Ranch a reality. A "pay to play" area is a way of offsetting the cost associated with a park. But because the above state agencies have classified us with ATV's, motorcycles and other groups, the FL4WDA must say that this park would be strictly for licensed off road vehicles-no ATV's, motorcycles, etc., as defined by Florida Statute 317. These unlicensed vehicles continue to abuse the public lands they are provided under the T. Mark Schmidt Act and unfortunately, Jeeps and other four wheel drive vehicles, while being excluded from the T. Mark Schmidt Act, are being lumped together with them. In short, because of their actions public lands are constantly closed.

It is the hope of the Florida Four Wheel Drive Association, Inc., that you would prevail upon Mr. Charles Bronson and Ms. Colleen Castille to dedicate a parcel of the property of Babcock Ranch to the creation of an Off Road Vehicle park to be used strictly by licensed four wheel drive vehicles. Entrance fees and a campground can be used to offset the implementation and policing of the area. In addition to entry fees, there is money available for motorized recreation through the Recreational Trails Program, administered by the Department of Environmental Protection. As stated earlier, motorized recreation is increasing exponentially and the lack of areas in South Florida to ride on continues to be a source of concern.

In closing, I would like to thank you in advance for taking the time to address the concerns of my letter. I hope that you will take the opportunity to visit our website, www.fl4wda.com to learn more about our organization as well to visit the sites of some of our member clubs. We would like to extend an invitation to you and your staff to allow us to take you on an organized trail ride (hand picked members of the FL4WDA), perhaps as close as the Apalachicola National Forest just west of Tallahassee or Osceola National Forest just east of Lake City so that you can see what this sport all about. Should you wish to contact me, I can be reached at (904) 753-0244, or by email at vicepresident@fl4wda.com.

Thank you and we look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Hawkins-Vice President
FLORIDA FOUR WHEEL DRIVE ASSOCIATION, INC.

cc: Board of Directors, Florida Four Wheel Drive Association, Inc.
Carla Boucher, Legislative Advocate, United Four Wheel Drive Association, Inc.