

# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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## CRITICAL HABITAT PROPOSED FOR TWO ENDANGERED FLORIDA BIRDS

Severe loss of living space for two endangered species of Florida birds--the Everglade kite and the dusky seaside sparrow--has resulted in proposed critical habitat determinations by the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Associate Director Keith M. Schreiner announced today.

The proposal, published in the December 3, 1976, Federal Register, includes about 1,000 square miles of marshland in southeastern Florida for the kite and about 50 square miles of savannah near the east-central coast for the dusky seaside sparrow. Under the Endangered Species Act of 1973, a Federal agency may not authorize, fund, or carry out any action that would result in the destruction or adverse modification of critical habitats. Interested persons have until January 31, 1977, to comment on the proposal.

"The Everglade kite, unfortunately, epitomizes the plight of most endangered species today," Schreiner said. "Its fate is so clearly linked with loss of habitat that it could be used as a textbook example. The only known food of this hawk is the apple snail which inhabits the fresh-water marshes of the area. The snails live and feed on certain plants and algae which are themselves dependent upon the water level of the marshes.

(over)

"In recent years, however, the widespread development of the Everglades region for agricultural uses, flood control, grazing, and residential and recreational projects has drastically altered and reduced the original habitat. The flow of water from Lake Okeechobee to the Everglades has been reduced by drought and diversion to agricultural areas. Add to this the threat of hurricanes, fire, shooting, increased pollution from pesticides used in the area, and the potential fate of the 100 or so remaining birds is all too apparent."

The entire population of the dusky seaside sparrow is found in Brevard County. Its preferred habitat is the broad open expanses of savannah found between 10 and 15 feet above sea level in the St. Johns River Valley. The moist cordgrass savannahs are characterized by widely scattered cabbage palms, small ponds, and salt pans--areas of high salinity. These birds are normally not found in areas dominated by trees, but will tolerate occasional low trees or scattered clumps. Considerable changes have taken place to meet flood control, space, and water needs of the county. Any further changes in the salinity or water levels could be devastating to this species since it might alter the vegetation of the area upon which the birds are dependent.

Interested persons wishing to participate in this rulemaking should submit written comments, preferably in triplicate, to the Director (FWS/LE), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, P.O. Box 19183, Washington, D. C. 20036.

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