

July 21, 2006

Governor Jeb Bush
The Capitol
400 South Monroe Street
Tallahassee, FL 32399-0001
Via email to jeb.bush@myflorida.com

Re: Florida Park Service Prohibition of Dogs in Swimming Areas

Dear Governor Bush:

As Florida's population grows along with the popularity of our signature beaches, rules safeguarding beach-nesting birds are becoming ever more critical to the birds' very survival. One such rule that helps many of these listed species is the Florida Park Service's prohibition of dogs in swimming areas, which include our state park beaches.

While this rule aims in part to safeguard public health and safety, it also seeks to protect these sensitive species from careless disturbance. When parent birds are flushed from their nests by dogs, they cannot provide crucial shelter to their chicks and eggs. Exposed to predators and the summer sun, eggs and chicks can succumb quickly, with a single disturbance event wiping out an entire colony. Outside the breeding season, Florida's beaches are critical stopovers for shorebirds who must feed and rest before long-distance flights to wintering or breeding grounds. Birds who do not store enough energy frequently perish before reaching their destinations. Florida's beaches are crucial to the survival of not just Florida's shorebirds, but those of an entire flyway.

The FPS rule maintains Florida State Park beaches as safe, clean locations for Floridians to swim and wildlife to thrive. Many dog owners are responsible, and would be appalled to know their dog's recreation proved fatal to any of these birds. However, the implications of disturbance may not be apparent to an unknowing beachgoer, and sadly, some dog owners would prioritize their dog's brief enjoyment over the birds' survival. Disturbance events are increasingly common. It is critical that the Florida Park Service and all natural resource managers continue to enforce existing rules that protect our wildlife from disturbance.

Thank you for your continued commitment to natural resource conservation, and your support of rules like this one, which protect some of Florida's most vulnerable species.

Sincerely,

Eric Draper
Deputy Director for Policy
Audubon of Florida

CC: Colleen Castille, Secretary, Department of Environmental Protection
Mike Bullock, Director, Florida Park Service