



Merritt Island Wildlife Association

P.O. Box 2683, Titusville, FL 32781 Phone: 321-861-2377

Fed ID# 59-3289841

www.merrittislandwildlife.org

Friends of the Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge Complex since 1994

Brevard County Tourist Development Council
430 Brevard Ave
Cocoa, FL 32922

June 21, 2021

Dear Peter,

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and the Merritt Island Wildlife Association (MIWA) are working together to build a state-of-the-art Community Conservation Education Center (CCEC) at Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge (MINWR). MIWA received a \$500,000 grant from the TDC to be used for construction of indoor and outdoor exhibits at the CCEC.

Unfortunately, construction of the building and related exhibits continues to be a challenge. Although MINWR has finally resolved the FWS funding, the start date has now been held up due to issues with wetlands permitting. A copy of the permitting timeline with the St. Johns River Water Management District is included with this letter.

FWS contracts for both the interior and exterior exhibits have been completed. The design phase by Cre8play for the outdoor exhibits is nearly complete and construction of the educational play-structures should begin soon. The finished play-structures will be shipped to MINWR and stored at the maintenance facility until time for installation.

Construction of the indoor exhibits has not been so simple as Wilderness Graphics cannot build the indoor exhibits until the building has been constructed. Originally planned for ground breaking in 2018, FWS funding delays resulted in the building construction being pushed to 2020. A planned ground breaking in September 2020 did not occur due to delays related to COVID-19. Currently, groundbreaking is planned for this fall but there is no guarantee that it will happen then either. Once construction begins, it should take 14 to 16 months to complete the project.

Due to these ongoing delays, MIWA is respectfully requesting a two-year extension to December 31, 2023 as the final date to turn in documentation for the reimbursement of expenses to construct and install the indoor and outdoor exhibits for the MINWR CCEC. We anticipate that will allow enough time to finish construction of the building and installation of the exhibits.

We deeply appreciate your help in this matter. Please let me know if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Laurilee Thompson, President Merritt Island Wildlife Association