**Florida Wildlife Op-ed for CoreMessage Public Affairs Agency:**

For years The Florida Wildlife Federation has supported the growing need for property insurance reform. The changing climatic conditions pose a continual threat to the Florida coastline, adversely affecting its economic activity, along with the well being of its residents. Better management of existing coastal risks is essential in order to adapt to these climate-driven changes. While progress has been slow these past few years, it is with great hope that our newly elected governor and the Florida legislature will work this session to make a necessary change.

Citizens Property Insurance Corporation and The Florida Hurricane Catastrophe Fund (Cat Fund) are exempt from capital and solvency requirements and depend on issuing new debt to pay claims after hurricanes hit Florida. In order to service this debt, hurricane taxes are levied on the insurance premiums of Florida businesses, charities, schools, churches, renters and automobile policyholders across the state. Many of these parties subject to the tax are excluded from any potential “benefits” this program has to offer. Because of this inherent borrow-and-tax burden in the structure of the government-run Citizens and Cat Fund, our organizations are continuing to pay for storms dating back to 2004 and 2005. Furthermore, we will be forced to remain indebted to these storms each year for at least another five years.

There is critical concern about the amount of future hurricane taxes which our state’s businesses, charitable organizations and families may be forced to pay. After a large storm, or series of storms, we may be taxed at a rate of over 50 percent of our insurance premiums each year for up to 30 years. These hurricane taxes essentially subsidize homeowners living on the coast. Because of this, we believe building in high hazard areas that will grow more and more prone to flooding and storm damage is foolhardy and risky, not only to the inhabitants, but for all of us who share the costs associated with higher insurance surcharges.

Our efforts have aimed at restoring the Citizens Property Insurance Corporation from paying for post hurricane damages, back to its original role as the state insurer of last resort, and the Florida Hurricane Catastrophe Fund (Cat Fund) to its original mission of providing stability for huge hurricane events. Our goal is to strengthen this mission in order to provide services for the state’s most vulnerable by eliminating this inequitable tax. For this to happen, we must reign in on the coastal development that threatens our natural coastline and places the insurance burden on all Florida citizens, whether they live on the coast or not.