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Mr. Skibo,

This letter is addressing the neglect of the historic structure on Pilot Island in Door County Town of Washington in Wisconsin. The structure we are talking about resides on the National Register of Historic Places (#83004279 Pilot Island Lighthouse, added to NRHP November 21, 1983).

The United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) became responsible for Pilot Island in 2007 and incorporated it into the Green Bay National Wildlife Refuge. Since then they have done little to maintain or restore the Island. We believe the time has come for the



State Historic Preservation Office to look into the condition of the building and the Islands environment to see what can be done to save it, before it is lost forever.

Pilot Island

It is the only historic site we are aware of in Wisconsin, being used for breeding colonial nesting birds. It has one historical structure, the lighthouse/keepers building built in 1858 to aid mariners in safe passage through Deaths Door. The lighthouse/keepers building is still an active maritime navigational aid used by the U.S. Coast Guard today. The colonial nesting bird fecal matter has decimated the flora and fauna on the Island. The larger worry is the damage the birds have done to this irreplaceable historic treasure. Over the last 15 years of USFWS

ownership little has been done to maintain the building. In fact it is in worse condition today than when they took responsibility for the Island in 2007.

On their website [Historic Preservation | U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service \(fws.gov\)](https://www.fws.gov/historic-preservation)

They make the following claim.

- Through its stewardship of historic properties, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Historic Preservation Program not only complies with federal law, but also engages refuge visitors, deepens their understanding of the nation's past and builds relationships with local communities.
- Recognize the intrinsic value of the U.S Fish and Wildlife Service's cultural resources by properly protecting and maintaining them in compliance with historic preservation legislation and Interior Department policy.
- Prevent or avoid damage and deterioration to cultural resources that result from erosion, abandonment, lack of maintenance and neglect.

None of this is happening with regards to Pilot Island. The best FWS has been able muster in the last 15 years is:

- Reroofed the building 2012 (Reroof portions currently failing due to the bird feces and weather) Feces can weaken and reduce the life of a roof by 50% or more. The roof was repaired 2019 and again 2022 due to missing or failing shingles.
- Add non-historically accurate gutters to the building in 2021 as a temporary measure to try and reduce damage to the crème city brick.
- Replaced the leaky roof with a new metal roof over the summer kitchens on the east side of the building and install temporary water shield on the lantern base to stop water intrusion into the structure.

The Historical Structures Report (HSR) that was developed in 2017 outlined the serious conditions of the lighthouse/keepers building. Some of the more critical issues are:

- Water damage has had a devastating effect on the crème city brick all over the building



- The lantern tower leaks have caused structural damage in the main framing possibly down to the first floor.



The windows are cracked and leak and the tower platform is sagging.



- Previous summer kitchen roof leaks have critically attacked the summer kitchen floors making them unsafe to walk on. Appliances are literally falling through the floor. Major decay in substructure beams in the basement is evident.



- Intrusion of moisture in walls, floor and wood framing made the basement very damp. Indicates black mold and decay is occurring from the inside out.



The HSR also pointed out the overall poor condition of the walls (falling plaster) due to moisture and a lack of paint inside and out on the structure to protect the wood from

deterioration.

To date, we are not aware that FWS has consistently requested any funds in their annual budgets for maintenance or restoration of the lighthouse on Pilot Island. A FOIA request has been made to FWS. It requests they submit their Pilot Island budgets and expenditures by year and specific



categories, one being restoration, from 2007 to 2022. This is to determine the integrity of their actions to properly protect and maintain Pilot Island and be in compliance with historic preservation legislation and Interior Department policy.

The Towns of Washington, and Liberty Grove have written letters to FWS requesting that they change the use of Pilot Island. FWS has also received letters from the Washington Island Sportsman's and Women's Clubs requesting a change in the use of the Island. A website established in 2019 called savepilotisland.com, has established an online petition for people to electronically sign that has requested the following from FWS.

- 1) Remove the cormorants
- 2) Preserve and restore the Lighthouse Keepers Building to its original state
- 3) Reconstruct the Fog Signal Building to its original state
- 4) Remove the cormorant guano, and replace with fertile soil, flora, and trees and return it to its original state
- 5) Build a dock and boat channel so visitors can safely access the island

The Washington Island Sportsman's Club had a face to face meeting with FWS on October 13, 2022, on Washington Island, and presented a strong case for changing the use of Pilot Island from a colonial bird nesting site, to historically based and environmentally sound Island, open to the public Island, for recreation and historic purposes. To reestablish the Island and restore it back to its period of significance (1960's) as determined in the Historic Structures Report developed in 2017. One of the significant features of Pilot Island is the lighthouse built in 1858. It remains an active navigational aid today for nautical traffic through Deaths Door. We believe the current condition of the tower borders on becoming a safety issue not only for light repairs, but for its continued use as a navigational aid. Wouldn't it be a shame, from a historical point of view, if the U.S. Coast Guard decided to replace the lighthouse with a metal tower and install a new light for navigation? This would be a historic loss much like the loss incurred when Front Range light on Plum Island was replaced by a skeletal structure. Also, very similar to the lighthouse situation on Rock Island. There would be a loss of historic value/importance if this happens.

This letter is about making Pilot Island healthy again and a benefit to the public, educationally, historically, environmentally and economically. This Island can contribute so much more to Door County than to die a slow death as a colonial bird rookery.

Thank you for your time and attention on this matter. We look forward to hearing from you in the near future,



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