**Talking Points for Florida Forever Days of Action**

Land Conservation is in the Constitution

* It’s been FIVE years since over 75% of Florida voters approved the Water and Land Conservation Amendment with the primary purpose of restoring land conservation funding. Each year their calls for protecting rural and natural lands have been woefully shortchanged.

Conservation Expenditures Have Not Kept Up with Population Growth/Development

* At current expenditure rates, the Office of Economic and Demographic Research (EDR) estimates that acquiring the conservation lands identified in State priority lists (including the Florida Forever, Rural and Family Lands Protection Program, and Water Management District priority lists) would require nearly $12.3 billion and take about 172 years. *Florida does not have 172 years to acquire priority lands.* Natural and working lands are being developed at a rate equivalent to 10 acres an hour.

Voters Consistently Support Land Conservation Funding

* 1998 – 2019: 93 of the 113 (82%) state or local land conservation ballot measures that have been placed on the ballot have been approved by the voters.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Benefits of Land Conservation

Protected lands provide important services:

* **Water Supply:** Natural lands allow rainwater to percolate into our underground aquifers. 90% of Floridians obtain their drinking water from Florida’s aquifers and these aquifers also feed Florida’s world-class springs.
* **Air & Water Quality**: Conserved lands naturally filter out pollutants in our air and water. Plants can remove excess nutrients in stormwater before it reaches our surface waters or aquifers. Excess nutrients are responsible for toxic algae blooms like those in Lake Okeechobee, the Indian River Lagoon, the St. Johns River and numerous springs.
* **Climate Change:** Conserved lands mitigate the effects of climate change by absorbing carbon and acting as a buffer during extreme weather events. One acre of wetland can store 1 – 1.5 million gallons of floodwater! Mangroves reduce wind speed and wave damage during storms and can allow soil to build up over time, which will be critical as sea levels rise.
* **Wildlife:** We are currently in the midst of the world’s 6th mass extinction event.[[2]](#footnote-2) Protected lands provide vital habitat for wildlife, including Florida’s many imperiled species. Native wildlife, including black bears and Florida panthers, are threatened by increasing habitat fragmentation. It is necessary to connect protected lands statewide in order to provide migration pathways for wildlife and ensure the genetic viability of Florida’s wildlife populations. Dr. E. O. Wilson, professor emeritus at Harvard University, recommends that humans conserve 50% of the earth’s land and waters to protect biodiversity.
* **Agriculture:** Conserving working agricultural lands helps ranchers and farmers sustain their way of life and provide locally produced food for our citizens. It also protects ecosystem services on these lands from being lost to development.
* **Tourism and Recreation:** Natural lands offer residents and visitors of Florida countless recreational opportunities including fishing, hunting, wildlife viewing, hiking, horseback riding, kayaking, and swimming.
  + In Florida, outdoor recreation generates $58.6 billion in consumer spending and $3.5 billion in state and local tax revenue.[[3]](#footnote-3)
  + Wildlife viewing contributes $4.9 billion annually to Florida’s economy.[[4]](#footnote-4)
  + Florida’s state parks had a direct economic impact of $2.4 billion in 2018.[[5]](#footnote-5)
  + Fishing in Florida has an economic impact of over $8 billion annually.[[6]](#footnote-6)
* **Quality of Life:** Protected lands provide opportunities for exercise, recreation, and meditative experiences. Several scientific studies have concluded that spending time in nature is beneficial for people’s health and well-being.[[7]](#footnote-7),[[8]](#footnote-8),[[9]](#footnote-9),[[10]](#footnote-10)
* **Cost Savings:** Conserving land is less expensive and more effective than providing the ecosystem services that natural lands provide through artificial means, by imposing regulations, or attempting complex restoration and infrastructure projects.
* **Defense:** The military needs natural lands to buffer their bases in order to run simulations and test equipment without interfering with civilian life.

Florida Forever Projects

Florida Forever funds helped permanently protect natural lands across the state. To view conservation lands near you, check out the Florida Natural Inventory web map tool [here](https://www.fnai.org/webmaps/ConLandsMap/).

There is much work to be done. The Florida Forever Priority List details the projects that need funding. To view, visit the Florida Department of Environmental Protection’s Florida Forever Five-Year Plan on page 58 ([link here](http://publicfiles.dep.state.fl.us/DSL/FFWeb/Current%20Florida%20Forever%20Five-Year%20Plan.pdf), large file-loads slowly).

1. The Trust for Public Land. LandVote: Measures> History – Florida. Accessed at https://tpl.quickbase.com/db/bbqna2qct?a=dbpage&pageID=8 on April 2, 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. http://www.biologicaldiversity.org/programs/biodiversity/elements\_of\_biodiversity/extinction\_crisis/ [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <https://outdoorindustry.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/OIA_RecEcoState_FL.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. http://myfwc.com/about/overview/ [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. <https://floridastateparksfoundation.org/Impact> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. http://myfwc.com/about/overview/ [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/0272494495900012 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1467-9280.2008.02225.x [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0269215511412800 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. https://www.takingcharge.csh.umn.edu/enhance-your-wellbeing/environment/nature-and-us/how-does-nature-impact-our-wellbeing [↑](#footnote-ref-10)