

## FLORIDA CONSERVATION COALITION – 2018 Candidate Briefing

### LAND CONSERVATION

From 1991 until 2008, Florida had the most successful land acquisition program in the Nation. Preservation 2000, followed by Florida Forever, which provided an average of \$300 million annually for land conservation and its wide-ranging benefits – protection of water supplies and water quality, outdoor recreation, fish and wildlife, and therefore Florida's economy.

Funding for Florida Forever was suspended in 2008, and in response voters passed the Water and Land Conservation Amendment, requiring 33% of the documentary stamp tax revenues to be deposited into the Land Acquisition Trust Fund for land acquisition and related management for 20 years, estimated to total \$10 billion. Despite a 2018 appropriation of \$101 million, the Legislature has consistently used millions of Amendment 1 funding for other inappropriate purposes, consistently falling short of the expectations set by voters. On June 15, a circuit court judge ruled that the Amendment funds are to be used for land acquisition and restoration and management of certain lands.

- *The Legislature should follow the will of the voters and, every year, fund conservation land acquisition programs such as the Acquisition and Restoration Council's scientifically ranked Florida Forever Priority List, the Rural and Family Lands Program, and the Florida Communities Trust projects.*

### PROTECTION OF WATER RESOURCES

Many Florida rivers, lakes, and coastal waters are polluted from stormwater, wastewater, septic tanks, and fertilizer. Florida's springs, including the largest number of first-magnitude springs in the world, suffer from long-term declines in flow and nitrate pollution. If land development and water consumption continue at the current rate, demand for water - primarily public supply and agricultural irrigation – will exceed sustainable supplies.

In 2011 Florida's water management districts suffered drastic reductions in their budgets and staff. Every year since, the districts have been required to reduce ad valorem taxes, their principal source of revenue. The districts are operating below their 2011 levels of capability.

- *The districts should be allowed to levy ad valorem taxes commensurate with their responsibilities and water resource challenges.*
- *The districts should be directed to do more to protect ground water and surface water resources and ecological systems that depend thereupon.*
- *District board appointments should be diverse and include appointees with civil engineering, hydrological, and environmental backgrounds.*
- *DEP should stringently enforce water quality laws and apply strong penalties to violators.*

## **GROWTH MANAGEMENT**

The Local Government Comprehensive Planning Act of 1975 and the Growth Management Act of 1985 set criteria and procedures to guide growth and ensure that the best characteristics of our communities and state remain. In 2011, the Department of Community Affairs was abolished and replaced by the Division of Community Development in the Department of Economic Opportunity.

- *An effective growth management process should be re-established by law, an appropriate state agency established to administer it, and funding provided to ensure that the program is fully integrated into land use, transportation, and capital improvement decision-making.*

## **SEA LEVEL RISE**

Sea level is rising, facilitated by climate change, fuelled by carbon emissions. To ignore or short-thrift this looming catastrophe is dangerously irresponsible.

- *The governor and legislature have an obligation to do everything they can to minimize the impacts. To forestall further impacts associated with sea level rise the legislature should advance investments in renewable energy - solar and wind.*

## **EVERGLADES RESTORATION**

While the restoration of the Everglades has progressed, it is far from complete.

- *Sources of pollution to Lake Okeechobee, and northern estuaries should be eliminated;*
- *Increase water storage, particularly in north, as well as south, east and west of Lake Okeechobee;*
- *Increase water retention and cleansing south of the Lake, with improved capability for flow into Everglades National Park and Florida Bay, should be accomplished while protecting the ecological integrity of the water conservation areas.*

## **APALACHICOLA RIVER AND BAY**

Crucial to the economy and culture of the region, the Bay once produced 90% of Florida's and 10% of the Nation's oysters, as well as being a major source of shrimp, finfish, and crab production. The seafood industry crashed in 2012. Reductions in flow from the Chattahoochee and Flint rivers have had devastating effects on the river, floodplain, and Bay. The river and its flow are controlled by the Army Corps of Engineers.

While the Corps accommodates water supply, hydroelectric power, and recreation upstream in Georgia, it doesn't consider the lower Apalachicola River and Bay its responsibility.

- *The Governor and Legislature should embrace restoration through legislation regarding adequate water flow, dredging, and snagging, and by reminding Congress and the Corps that the River and Bay need to be protected and restored.*