



LAND CONSERVATION TALKING POINTS

FLORIDA CONSERVATION COALITION POSITION STATEMENT

Through Florida's Preservation 2000 and Florida Forever land conservation programs the state has spent approximately 6.3 billion dollars to protect almost 2.5 million acres of environmentally sensitive land. However, during the recent economic recession beginning in 2007, Florida's legacy of funding land acquisition programs to protect critical natural resources, encourage outdoor recreation, and honor the state's cultural heritage via fee-simple purchases and conservation easements was upended. When rapid growth returned to Florida, but funding for land conservation programs did not, Florida voters passed the 2014 Water and Land Conservation Amendment for the primary purpose of restoring funding for conservation and recreation land acquisition.

The Legislature should follow the will of the voters and build on Florida's rich conservation commitment by passing legislation during the 2018 session that:

Annually dedicates the largest share of funds in the Land Acquisition Trust Fund (LATF) to the acquisition of natural areas, working farms and ranches, and close-to-home recreation opportunities through the Acquisition and Restoration Council's scientifically-ranked Florida Forever Priority List, the Rural and Family Lands Protection Program, and the Florida Communities Trust.

To implement that legislation, the Legislature should appropriate funds from the LATF for these land conservation programs. Funding these scientifically-driven programs, rather than funding individual land acquisition projects, will ensure tax-payer dollars are expended effectively, protecting lands with the greatest conservation value.

The conservation of Florida's natural areas and recreational lands is one of the most important things we can do to protect Florida's environment and economy for present and future generations. Due to the pressures of population growth and development it is necessary to conserve critical lands now lest we further imperil our water supply, jeopardize our agricultural and tourism industries, lose habitat necessary to sustain and recover native wildlife populations, suffer increasing losses from flooding, and diminish the quality of life of Floridians. If we continue to fail to fund land conservation programs, over the next 50 years, an additional 5 million acres of natural and working landscapes will be lost to development.

WHY DO WE CONSERVE LAND?

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. Florida has the most first magnitude springs of any state in the country.
- **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 event¹. 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 \$38.3 billion in consumer spending and \$2.5 billion in state and local tax revenue.²
 - Wildlife viewing contributes \$4.9 billion annually to Florida's economy.³
 - Florida's state parks had a direct economic impact of \$2.1 billion in 2013.⁴
 - Fishing in Florida has an economic impact of over \$9 billion annually.⁵
- **Quality of Life:** Several scientific studies have concluded that spending time in nature is beneficial for people's health and well-being^{6,7,8,9}.
- **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.
- **Desirable Communities:** Protected lands increase nearby property values because protected lands help to create communities people want to live in.

¹ http://www.biologicaldiversity.org/programs/biodiversity/elements_of_biodiversity/extinction_crisis/

² https://outdoorindustry.org/images/ore_reports/FL-florida-outdoorrecreationeconomy-oia.pdf

³ <http://myfwc.com/about/overview/>

⁴ https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=0ahUKEwjO6KvzZzTAhVRfiYKHds6BvUQFggcMAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fapalachee.floridatrail.org%2Fwp-content%2Fuploads%2F2013%2F04%2FFlorida-State-Parks-Economic-Impact-Assessment-FY-2013-2014-10-23-14.pdf&usq=AFQjCNEJsOhGZ6jUwK0Kf04MfZLPI5cAMA&sig2=685_SiakTbFiL-EI0NMUxA

⁵ <http://myfwc.com/about/overview/>

⁶ <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0272494495900012>

⁷ <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1467-9280.2008.02225.x>

⁸ <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0269215511412800>

⁹ <https://www.takingcharge.csh.umn.edu/enhance-your-wellbeing/environment/nature-and-us/how-does-nature-impact-our-wellbeing>

BUT EVERYONE SAYS FLORIDA OWNS ENOUGH LAND...

Some elected leaders argue that Florida already owns too much land. The ailing state of our waters, however, and the vulnerability of our wildlife populations indicates that we do not yet own enough.

The time to buy land is now. If we fail to fund land conservation programs, over the next 50 years, another 5 million acres of natural and working landscapes will be lost to development. Lands that need to be protected will become more expensive the longer we wait.

WHAT IS FLORIDA FOREVER?

Florida Forever is our state's premiere land conservation program – dedicated to protecting conservation and recreation lands via public acquisition from willing sellers or by purchasing development rights on privately owned lands, including working agricultural lands.

Priority properties for purchase under this program are determined by the Acquisition and Restoration Council (ARC or Council). ARC consists of 10 members, including representatives from the Department of Environmental Protection, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, and the Florida Forest Service, as well as members of the public. The Council uses a rigorous, scientific process to determine which properties should be acquired, and in what order.

Funding for Florida Forever comes from documentary stamp taxes on real estate transactions, thus allowing growth to help pay for conservation.

Florida Forever, and its predecessor programs, have protected special places like America's Everglades, Silver Springs, Guana River State Park, Hillsborough River State Park, Wekiwa Springs State Park and Preserve, Lovers Key State Park, and Savannas State Preserve.

You can find ARC's approved 2017 priority list [here](#).

You can find descriptions for Florida Forever projects that need funding in the Florida Forever Five Year Plan [here](#).

To see a map with information on Florida's conservation lands, click [here](#). In the top right corner, next to "Map Help," there is a button you can use to select different "layers" and show different data. You can use these layers to see Florida's conserved lands (using the "Conservation Lands by Manager" layer) and Florida Forever project boundaries (using the "Florida Forever BOT Projects" layer). Click on parcels of land on the map for more information.

WHAT IS FLORIDA COMMUNITIES TRUST?

The Florida Communities Trust program (FCT) is a land acquisition grant program that assists local governments and non-profit organizations in protecting important natural areas and providing recreational opportunities to the public. This program seeks to ensure Floridians have reasonable access to parks, trails, greenways, and community gardens. FCT projects have provided protection for historical sites, wildlife habitat, and watersheds.

There is likely an FCT project near you! Find one [here](#).

WHAT IS THE RURAL AND FAMILY LANDS PROTECTION PROGRAM?

The [Rural and Family Lands Protection Program](#) provides funds for conservation easements on agricultural lands. These easements protect the land from development in perpetuity, while keeping the land in private ownership and allowing agricultural use to continue on the land.

These easements help to keep agricultural operations viable, preserving a historical way of life and providing locally sourced food for the state.

Protecting private land also protects ecosystem services such as aquifer recharge and provides important wildlife habitat.

The 2016 Rural and Family Lands Protection Program acquisition list can be found [here](#).

OVERWHELMING SUPPORT FOR LAND CONSERVATION

- From 1990 – 2003, under Governors Bob Martinez (R), Lawton Chiles (D), and Jeb Bush (R), Florida Forever and Florida Forever’s predecessor, Preservation 2000, received \$300 million annually. In 2003, funding dropped, but remained over \$200 million. And from 2004-2009, Florida Forever received at least \$300 million annually, and over \$600 million in 2006.
- A constitutional amendment (Amendment 5) in 1998 to authorize the state to borrow money through the sale of bonds for Florida Forever passed with 72 percent of voters approving the measure. The amendment also made it harder for the state to sell conservation lands.
- In 2014, over 75% of Florida voters approved The Water and Land Conservation Amendment, also known as Amendment 1. The primary purpose of the Water and Land Conservation Amendment is to restore funding for conservation and recreation land acquisition.

RECENT LAND CONSERVATION ALLOCATIONS

Although the primary purpose of the Water and Land Conservation Amendment that created the Land Acquisition Trust Fund (LATF) was acquiring conservation and recreation lands, **less than 4% of LATF dollars have been allocated to land conservation statewide from 2015-2018**. In comparison, almost 25% of LATF dollars have been allocated to pay for expenses previously paid for through General Revenue and almost 19% of LATF dollars have been allocated for the Everglades.

From 2015 – 2018:

- Less than 2% of LATF dollars have been allocated to land conservation on ARC’s priority list.
- Less than 1% of LATF dollars have been allocated to the Florida Communities Trust program.
- Less than 3% of LATF dollars have been allocated to the Rural and Family Lands program.

In the 2017-2018 fiscal year, the Florida House and Senate provided the following allocations for land conservation:

Florida Forever (ARC Priority List)	Rural & Family Lands	Florida Communities Trust
\$0	\$10 million	\$0

CONSERVATION QUOTES

- “The people of Florida voted overwhelmingly in favor of conserving Florida’s natural lands. The Florida Conservation Coalition is working to honor their voices by advocating for guaranteed funding for conservation and recreation land acquisition programs. We will not rest until the lands that replenish our aquifer, clean our waters, provide critical wildlife habitat and recreational opportunities are protected for future generations.” – **Governor Bob Graham, Founder and Chair of the Florida Conservation Coalition**
- “[T]he single most effective way to accomplish large scale gains in our environmental well-being is to substantially increase the level of funding for the state’s land acquisition programs.” – **Report of the Commission on the Future of Florida’s Environment, 1989.**
- “As the nation’s fastest growing large-population state, Florida is forever facing choices between trees or towers, creeks or canals, marshes or marinas, water or waste, beaches or barriers, sunshine or smog, men or machines, and green lands or ghettos. How we make those decisions in the years ahead could very easily determine for us the most important decision of all – that of life or death for our state as we know her.” – **Governor Askew, 1973.**
- “Our continued commitment to conservation through the Florida Forever program will enable us to complete the work begun a decade ago and leave a lasting plan for stewardship of our precious natural areas. I pledge to support the implementation of this program – we can offer no greater gift for future generations.” – **Governor Jeb Bush**
- “We’re being overrun by development. But by using Amendment 1 we can buy in. We can create big green zones, little green zones, green zones around cities to protect unique habitat. There are plenty of them that need to be created.” – [Nathaniel Reed, 2016](#)
- “More than 700,000 acres have been acquired through Florida Forever, but the program has identified another 2 million for purchase or protection. Buying more of that land, or the development rights for it, could protect springs, other waterways, and the state’s underground supply. It could preserve forests, wildlife corridors and other wildlife habitat. It could expand the acreage for recreation. It could hasten Everglades restoration. It could spare taxpayers the much higher expense of other restoration projects in the future.” – [Orlando Sentinel Editorial Board, 2017](#)
- “The whole purpose of Amendment 1 was to reverse the drastic cuts in the Florida Forever program.” – **Governor Bob Graham, Founder and Chair of the Florida Conservation Coalition**
- “Ranchlands are...the protectors of our natural heritage and native wildlife... The heart of our state is at stake; the Rural and Family Lands Protection Program and conservation easements under Florida Forever are crucial for the health of our state.” – [Jim Strickland, 2017](#). Jim Strickland is a cattle rancher, past president of the Florida Cattleman’s Association, past chairman of the Florida Cattleman’s Foundation, and chairman of the National Cattleman’s Political Action Committee.