



Florida Conservation Coalition

TAKING ACTION FOR FLORIDA

STEERING COMMITTEE:

Chairman

Bob Graham

Vice Chairman

Lee Constantine

Organizations

CONSERVANCY OF
SOUTHWEST
FLORIDA

DEFENDERS OF
WILDLIFE

FLORIDA WILDLIFE
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LEAGUE OF
WOMEN VOTERS

NORTH FLORIDA
LAND TRUST

1000 FRIENDS OF
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SIERRA CLUB
FLORIDA

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TRUST FOR PUBLIC
LAND

Individuals

Craig Diamond

Ryan Smart

Victoria Tschinkel

Estus Whitfield

Governor Ron DeSantis
Attorney General Ashley Moody
Chief Financial Officer Jimmy Patronis
Commissioner of Agriculture Nikki Fried
The Capitol
400 South Monroe Street
Tallahassee, FL 32399

October 16, 2019

Dear Governor DeSantis, Attorney General Moody, Chief Financial Officer Patronis and Commissioner Fried,

The Florida Conservation Coalition (FCC) applauds your recent decisions to protect environmentally sensitive land, including acres within the Seven Runs Creek Final Phase project, Etoniah/Cross Florida Greenway, Wakulla Springs Protection Zone and Fish Island Florida Forever projects. We are pleased with your actions as members of the Board of Trustees of the Internal Improvement Trust Fund to approve the acquisition of more than 15,000 acres of critical conservation lands through our state's premier land acquisition program. These acquisitions are integral to achieving Florida's water protection goals.

The Etoniah/Cross Florida Greenway, Seven Runs Creek Final Phase and Devil's Garden projects bring the State a step closer to completing vital natural land corridors. In Putnam County, the Etoniah/Cross Florida Greenway includes a unique white cedar swamp along Deep Creek and affords critical water recharge within the lower St. Johns River basin. This greenway is home to vulnerable species like the black bear and gopher tortoise, and endemic species like the scrub jay and Etoniah rosemary. It also provides recreational value to those who hike the Florida National Scenic Trail. In Walton County, the Seven Runs Creek easements help conserve the ecological greenway and enables Nokuse Plantation to restore Black Creek's wetlands and floodplain. In Hendry County, the Devil's Garden parcel helps ensure landscape connectivity for the endangered Florida panther and cleanses water flowing to the Caloosahatchee River, Fakahatchee Strand and Big Cypress National Preserve.

The Fish Island property boasts a maritime hammock forest on the Intracoastal Waterway in St. Augustine. Preserving this land ensures that water flowing through the property to the Matanzas River will be cleansed, rather than polluted by intensified land uses.

The Wakulla Springs Protection Zone acquisition includes 717 acres within the Wakulla Springs Basin, land that directly affects the water quality of one of the world's largest artesian springs. Within the property are at least 13 karst features connected to the underground aquifer that contribute to Floridians' drinking water and feed Wakulla Springs.

To continue acquiring the conservation lands identified in state agency priority lists, we must make conserving natural and working lands a fiscal priority. The Office of Economic and Demographic Research's 2019 Annual Assessment of Florida's Water Resources and Conservation Lands states "[a]t the current rate of annual state conservation land acquisition expenditures, it would take about 172 years to generate the state's share [of the cost to acquire priority lands]..." We do not have 172 years to wait to acquire these lands. Florida loses an equivalent of 10 acres of natural and working lands every hour to development, and thereby loses the invaluable natural goods and services like pollutant filtration they provide. We urge you to continue your support for state conservation land acquisition and encourage the expedition of the acquisition process in order to protect Florida's special places.

As a coalition of over 80 conservation-minded groups and over 2,000 individuals, the Florida Conservation Coalition is comprised of Florida's preeminent environmental organizations, including experts on our state's waters, lands and wildlife. The Coalition has long been an advocate for protecting Florida's most environmentally sensitive lands, and we look forward to working with you toward this end.

Sincerely,



Bob Graham
Chairman
Florida Conservation Coalition



Lee Constantine
Vice Chairman
Florida Conservation Coalition

CC: Secretary Noah Valenstein