



**STEERING  
COMMITTEE:**

Chairman

**Bob Graham**

Vice Chairman

**Lee Constantine**

Organizations

**DEFENDERS OF  
WILDLIFE**

**FLORIDA WILDLIFE  
FEDERATION**

**LEAGUE OF  
WOMEN VOTERS**

**NORTH FLORIDA  
LAND TRUST**

**1000 FRIENDS OF  
FLORIDA**

**ST. JOHNS  
RIVERKEEPER**

**TRUST FOR PUBLIC  
LAND**

Individuals

**Craig Diamond**

**Ryan Smart**

**Victoria Tschinkel**

**Estus Whitfield**

October 3, 2019

Governor Ron DeSantis  
The Capitol  
400 South Monroe Street  
Tallahassee, FL 32399

Dear Governor DeSantis,

We write you today to encourage you and your Administration to develop environmental policy that addresses the needs of all Floridians.

You have demonstrated a commendable commitment to implementing the state's Everglades restoration plan and funding projects to reduce the effects of water pollution along our southern coasts. However, there are many other pressing environmental needs throughout our great state that are in dire need of additional state funding. These needs include ample funding for springs protection; protection of the St. Johns, Suwannee, and Apalachicola Rivers; and other statewide water quality protection projects. For instance, your recent proposal for restoration projects in the St. Johns, Suwannee, and Apalachicola Rivers is only 5% of your proposal for Everglades restoration.

The most pressing environmental funding need in Florida today is for increased funding for land conservation throughout the state. Florida's population growth and the recent decision to build three new road corridors through rural lands make land conservation funding more vital than ever as a means to balance the economic benefits of today with the needs of future generations for clean water and protected natural areas.

Florida voters have been waiting five years for the State to fulfill the true intent of the 2014 Water and Land Conservation amendment to restore funding to the Florida Forever program for conservation and recreation land acquisition. Since Florida voters approved Amendment 1, we've lost 10 acres of natural and working lands an hour to development in Florida. Yet in the 2019 budget, Florida Forever received only slightly more than 10% of its historic funding amount, with both the Rural and Family Lands Protection Program and the Florida Communities Trust receiving no funding. The \$33 million allocation for the Florida Forever program in last year's budget is a far cry from the historic average annual allocation of \$300 million the program received for decades.

Florida's environment is more than just the Everglades. Teddy Roosevelt understood this in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. He proclaimed the Ocala National Forest, home to some of Florida's most beautiful springs, as America's first National Forest east of the Mississippi. This principle remains true today and we urge you to reflect it in your proposed 2020 budget.

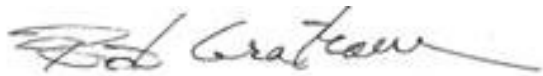
The Florida Conservation Coalition believes that in order to meet all of Florida's environmental needs we must expand the environmental funding pie to include adequate funding throughout the state. To that end, we provided numerous recommendations for ways to increase environmental spending in our recent publication *A Water Policy for Florida*, including charging a modest fee on large water users, bonding for lands conservation, management, and restoration, and increased water management district ad valorem rates. You and the Legislature have the opportunity to build on Florida's rich conservation commitment by adopting legislation that provides for annual funding from the Land Acquisition Trust Fund to acquire natural areas, working farms and ranches, and close-to-home recreational lands through the Acquisition and Restoration Council's scientifically-developed Florida Forever Priority List, the Rural and Family Lands Protection Program, and the Florida Communities Trust. The Florida Conservation Coalition is asking the Legislature to annually dedicate the largest share of funds in the Land Acquisition Trust Fund to these premier conservation programs.

If you and the Legislature cannot agree to increase environmental spending to address statewide land conservation and water protection needs, the State of Florida is going to lose crystal clear springs, beautiful lakes, parks, trails, and white sand beaches that drive our tourism economy. The people of Florida don't support the policy of sacrificing one environmental treasure (or many) to save another.

We sincerely urge you to build upon your initial announcement to continue to fund Everglades restoration when you make your official budget request to the Legislature later this fall. At a minimum, that proposal should significantly increase funding for non-Everglades related water projects and fully fund the Florida Forever land conservation program.

Thank you for your consideration of this urgent request.

Sincerely,



Bob Graham  
Chairman  
Florida Conservation Coalition



Lee Constantine  
Vice Chairman  
Florida Conservation Coalition