



Audubon FLORIDA

Central Florida Special Places



Merritt Island NWR by Reinier Munguia

Protecting Central Florida Special Places

Advocacy for Central Florida's Special Places

Rapid growth is changing Central Florida. Population and developed areas may double by 2050. Effective policies to guide the growth and protect water resources are necessary so that the region does not lose the places that make it special.

Support for protection of places like the Wekiva River, Econlockhatchee River, St. Johns River, Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge, Canaveral National Seashore, Green Swamp, Withlacoochee River and the Everglades Headwaters requires the constant attention of conservation advocates. Without advocacy, protection of Central Florida's special places can no longer be assured.

Audubon Florida at Work in Central Florida

Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge and Space Florida

In 2013 Space Florida proposed locating a rocket launch facility on the 140,000 acre Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge - one of the most important sites for birds on the Eastern Flyway. The refuge provides habitat for the endangered Florida Scrub Jay, and the proposed site is on some of the most environmentally sensitive land in the Refuge.

Audubon Florida campaigned with other groups to bring thousands of concerned people to public hearings on the proposal. A federal process to determine environmental impact will chart the future course, but Audubon's advocacy efforts will be critical to stopping or modifying the proposal.

The Green Swamp, Halpata Tastanaki Preserve & the Sabal Trail Pipeline

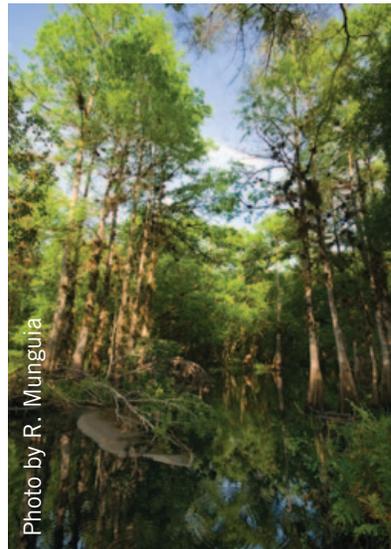


Photo by R. Munguia

A natural gas pipeline known as "Sabal Trail" was proposed to be routed through some of Central Florida's most important wildlife habitats, including the Green Swamp Area of Critical Concern, and the Halpata Tastanaki Preserve, which is one of the most important habitats for the endangered Florida Scrub Jay. Audubon took a major

stand to make sure the pipeline avoids important wildlife habitats and water resources. Audubon and local chapters' science-based positions expressed through letters to and meetings with public officials led pipeline officials to consider alternative routes. Audubon's voice is respected for sticking to the real issues in the pipeline debate.

Surplus Lands – Selling Off Florida's Special Places

In 2013 Florida's Department of Environmental Protection announced a program to sell off portions of our state parks and wildlife conservation areas. The agency rolled out a list of existing parks and preserves that arbitrarily lopped off parts of these special places for sale, possibly for development. Unique parts of Wekiva State Park, and the Green Swamp Area of Critical Concern were targeted for possible sale. Audubon led a statewide campaign to expose the folly of the proposal. Nearly every major newspaper in the state responded with front-page articles and editorials, criticizing the program.

Audubon's science-based reports on the value of the lands proposed to be sold resulted in tracts one-by-one being removed from the surplus list. Finally in early March 2014 DEP canceled the surplus program entirely.

Audubon's Charles Lee is assigned to take a stand on all state surplus land proposals.

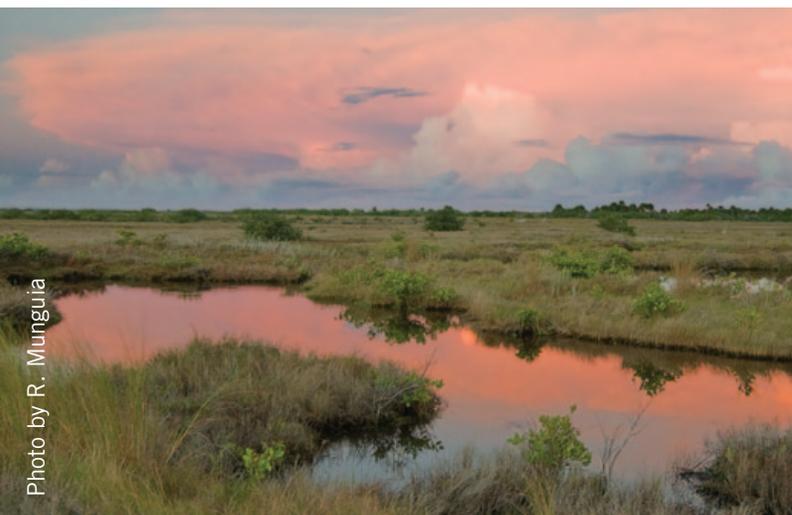


Photo by R. Munguia



Photo by Mac Stone

The Northern Everglades Headwaters

By working with ranchers and other landowners, Audubon has brought together support for increased funding to protect water resources and habitat in the Northern Everglades. Last year, \$11.5 million was appropriated to support easements over ranchlands. In 2014, \$15 million was appropriated for ranchland easements and for projects in which ranchers impound and detain water on their own land. Audubon has also taken the lead in opposing land use changes which would convert agricultural lands into housing developments and shopping centers, by opposing and challenging land use amendments that weaken environmental protection in the Osceola County Comprehensive Plan.

Ranchers appreciate and applaud Audubon's voice at the Capitol and water management districts where decisions are made.



Photo by Charles Lee

Central Florida Springs

In 2012 Silver Springs reached a record low-flow of only 260 cubic feet of water per second (CFS) contrasting with average flows nearly 800 CFS over the past 80 years. These visible declines in spring flows and pollution in Silver Springs inspired more than 1500 people to rally at Silver River State Park, advocating to protect this national treasure. Charles Lee's inspiring speech that day made national headlines including a front-page article in the New York Times.

At the same time a grass fed beef operation asked for permission to water and fertilize forage for a huge new herd in the Silver Springs watershed. Along with others pointing to pollution of springs, Audubon helped galvanize support for new springs legislation and stronger local rules.

Although formal legislation has yet to be passed, Audubon continues to push state agencies to restore spring flows and reduce pollution sources.

Audubon's and one of Charles Lee's legacies in Central Florida is the protection of the Wekiva River and its watershed. His most profound work was The 2004 Wekiva River Parkway and Protection Act where Charles prepared the Executive Order for then Gov. Jeb Bush to start the process of finding a compromise between transportation (Orlando's beltway) and the environment (bringing forth past promises and new initiatives to truly preserve the Wekiva River).

Scott Taylor
Audubon Florida Board Member



Photo by R. Munguia

Our Formula for Success is Science + Policy + Advocacy = Results

Audubon's Central Florida conservation efforts follow a model that works throughout the state.

Led by Charles Lee, who relies on other Audubon staff and collaborates with allies and leaders of Audubon's Central Florida chapters, our regional work is known for being fact and solution based. Presentations are credible and move decision-makers in our direction while causing the other side to seek compromise. Audubon is more known for "proposing" than "opposing." Audubon's materials are distributed to 30,000 electronic subscribers throughout Florida. With the push of a button, thousands of people can communicate directly to decision-makers on an important issue.

Through collaboration with allies from business, conservation and government interest, Audubon is always about the results and we seek to enlist others in our efforts. While hard litigation is sometimes needed, Audubon uses strategies to produce win-win outcomes. Reshaping a development proposal to save natural areas and wildlife corridors, or helping landowners use conservation easements and other practices that keep farming sustainable are two examples.

A Proven Record of Conservation Success in Central Florida

- Florida Audubon Society was founded in Central Florida in 1900. More than a century of conservation accomplishments can be credited to Audubon leaders, past and present. Audubon provided leadership for many of the state's most important environmental laws, and built public support for Florida's landmark environmental land acquisition programs.
- Charles Lee, who leads Audubon Florida's Central Florida Advocacy effort, has 42 years' experience with Florida environmental policy. He helped write many of our state's most important environmental laws and regulations.
- Reporters, editorial writers, broadcasters and bloggers all know that Audubon is the place to go for the right knowledgeable quote or interview.
- Audubon is not just an advocacy group. The Center for Birds of Prey is an important community institution in Central Florida. Ownership of sanctuary lands and operation of citizen science programs gives Audubon balanced credibility.
- Audubon has a track record of success. Whether it's assembling land to protect the Wekiva River, working to establish regulatory protections like the Green Swamp Area of Critical Concern, or seeking to protect wildlife habitat in the Northern Everglades, Audubon Florida has a long history of success.

Specific Funding Needs

Development pressure on Central Florida's Special Places requires that Audubon's Director of Advocacy Charles Lee spend a much greater part of his time focused on work in Central Florida. Funds are needed to provide salary support and underwrite costs for outreach and advocacy.

Forty-five thousand dollars in additional gifts and pledges must be identified to complete the annual budget for Central Florida advocacy. Multi-year pledges of support will make sure that we can keep working for Central Florida's special places.

For more details or to discuss different giving opportunities and ways to give, contact Margaret Spontak at (352) 229-2887 or mbspontak@audubon.org.



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