



Audubon FLORIDA

2018 Conservation Action Agenda

Approved at the 2017 Audubon Assembly in St. Augustine, Florida



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GUIDANCE ON THE 2018 CONSERVATION ACTION AGENDA

Each year, according to tradition and practice, Audubon Florida leaders gather at the Audubon Assembly to express our annual conservation action agenda through a group of state and regional resolutions that address our public policy priorities. The agenda provides members, chapter leaders, directors, staff, and the public summary statements of our policy and conservation positions. We believe we are the only statewide conservation organization that uses such an open process for setting a policy agenda.

Conservation priorities are broadly framed problem solution statements in the form of resolutions. They do not express every nuance of an issue and instead provide guidance through the year for state and regional work. The conservation action agenda is approved by vote at the annual Audubon Assembly and subsequently is ratified by the Audubon Florida Board of Directors.

Regional Conservation and Statewide Policy Priorities

Audubon's Florida chapters are organized into seven geographic and ecological regions and meet together as Regional Conservation Committees (RCCs). Chapter leaders, supported by policy staff, recommend conservation priorities that reflect a commitment to work together and prioritize regional efforts.

State policy priorities are recommended by Audubon Florida's Board Public Policy Committee and staff to frame our approach to important issues and campaigns and to leverage our resources to the greatest effect.



STATE CONSERVATION PRIORITY: COASTAL CONSERVATION AND STEWARDSHIP

Florida's coasts are home to a remarkable diversity of habitats, birds, and other wildlife. Coastal ecosystems also contribute to Florida's economic vitality and quality of life; yet, coastal habitats are jeopardized by a range of human activities including beach management and grooming, development, coastal armoring, dredging and filling, human disturbance, and rising sea levels.

Marshes, beaches and shoals, seagrass meadows, maritime hammocks, scrub, and mangroves constitute a complex and rich mosaic of living coastal systems that have evolved in response to climate and geophysical events. Many coastal bird species are now state or federally listed, designated species of greatest conservation need, or considered priority species by National Audubon Society.

Florida's significance as part of the Atlantic Flyway is most evident in our coastal areas. Shorebirds and seabirds stop over during hemispheric migrations, and raptors follow the dune lines as they work their way southward. Neotropical songbird migrants, facing the daunting odds of long overwater flights, use coastal habitats as last southbound jumping off points and first northbound landfall. In short, the geology of Florida's coasts is always in flux and Florida's birdlife is too.

Because of both the extraordinary value and tremendous vulnerability of these resources, Audubon Florida has long ranked coastal conservation among its highest priorities. Through management of waterbird colonies on coastal islands and encouragement of local Audubon efforts to steward rooftop nesting and beach-nesting birds, Audubon Florida has demonstrated increased shorebird productivity. National Audubon Society has also elevated coastal habitats as a national priority under the auspices of its Atlantic Flyway Initiative and Coasts program.

Additionally, Audubon Florida has developed a Climate Messengers campaign to advocate for natural resources in sea level rise adaptation and mitigation strategies, especially for coastal habitats like saltmarsh, the beach-dune system, and maritime hammock. And we have been leaders in Florida on the restoration of the Gulf of Mexico after the Deepwater Horizon oil spill disaster.

Florida's west coast forms the eastern boundary of the Gulf of Mexico, a vibrant ecosystem that supports much of the state's economic well-being. Our ecological connection to the other Gulf States was underscored by the shared adversity of the Deepwater Horizon disaster.

Audubon's Gulf of Mexico network helped pass the federal RESTORE Act to commit penalty funds from the spill to Gulf restoration. Audubon works with our partners throughout the Gulf to leverage these financial resources toward a cross-Gulf ecological strategy to benefit water, wildlife, and people.

Audubon is well positioned to lead science, education, public involvement, and policy efforts by engaging staff, chapters, partners, and volunteers in the restoration and conservation of Florida's coastal habitats and their waterbird populations.

Audubon brings to bear a coordinated effort of geographically distributed staff expertise, volunteer leadership, and local Audubon organizations to accomplish this mission. Site-based habitat and species management throughout Florida produce tangible results. In addition to on-the-ground improvements, the resulting data inform our policy work by identifying the immediate needs of Important Bird Areas and imperiled species.

Deep and diverse expertise in these issues makes it possible to provide leadership to the Florida Shorebird Alliance—a partnership of Audubon Florida, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Our broad grassroots base positions us well to advocate at local levels for sea level rise mitigation strategies to benefit vulnerable coastal habitats. These areas of expertise also provide us with the perspective to guide penalty money from the Deepwater Horizon disaster to meaningful restoration projects and, in fact, implement some of those projects as an agent of the Natural Resource Damage Assessment (NRDA) trustees, Restoration Council, or National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. Monitoring of habitat changes helps inform sea level rise strategies. Long-term coastal resource conservation and management work provide a foundation of data and perspective that gives a long view to our recommendations. Our experience also prepares us to address new challenges, such as the response and restoration efforts resulting from catastrophic storms like Hurricane Irma.

Therefore be it resolved:

Audubon Florida, deploying professional staff and expertise and using information derived from sound science, will call on the volunteer leadership of local Audubon societies (chapters), members and grassroots networks, and will work with conservation allies, business and community leaders, public officials, and agencies to:

Employ Sound Science to Guide Conservation

- Use coastal birdlife as a way to connect people to nature and get them excited about and involved with protection of Florida's special coastal places through partnerships such as Audubon's Atlantic Flyway Initiative's Coasts program and the Florida Shorebird Alliance;
- Improve the management of coastal Important Bird Areas and other special places either with direct responsibility or in advisory or volunteer capacities through bird stewarding programs and partnering with Audubon chapters;
- Monitor and use coastal bird population trends as a biological indicator of coastal health and resiliency and as a way to understand impacts related to sea level rise;
- Study and understand the effects of sea level rise and other threats to saltmarsh and propose strategies to reduce those threats; and

- Help assess the impacts of storm events like Hurricane Irma to identify priorities for recovery/restoration efforts.

Steward Habitat for Birds and Other Wildlife

- Advocate for wise land and recreation management and the acquisition of coastal conservation lands for habitat now, as well as in a future of higher sea levels;
- Focus growth and transportation plans to avoid conversion of coastal habitats or to facilitate habitat migration ahead of sea level rise;
- Promote proper shoreline retreat, rather than armoring, in the face of climate change;
- Encourage the planning authorities of coastal local governments to consider sea level rise in decisions about zoning and future infrastructure;
- Advocate for water quality standards and for freshwater management plans that maintain healthy estuarine habitats;
- Advocate for the establishment of new state Critical Wildlife Areas and reestablishment of those that need boundary modifications. Ensure adequate resources exist to implement these protections;
- Advocate for the value of coastal habitats for protection from the effects of climate change (e.g., carbon sequestration and wave attenuation value of marshes and shoals);
- Promote habitat protection strategies to provide routes for coastal habitats and wildlife to migrate upslope ahead of sea level rise;
- Oppose and organize opposition to oil and gas exploration, drilling, and production in Florida's nearshore waters and promote clean energy alternatives;
- Encourage use of RESTORE Act, other oil spill penalty monies, and hurricane recovery funding for ecosystem restoration and resilience rather than harmful development schemes; and
- Push for Gulf and hurricane restoration projects that benefit birds and their habitats.



STATE CONSERVATION PRIORITY: GREATER EVERGLADES ECOSYSTEM

Super-colonies of wading birds and an abundance of other wildlife once defined the Everglades. Efforts to divert water to accommodate development and agriculture contributed to a 90% decline in nesting wading birds. Audubon’s focus in the Everglades is to influence protection and restoration initiatives that improve water management and water quality to benefit habitat. The State of Florida and the federal government launched Everglades restoration to improve the quality, quantity, timing, and distribution of water and to regain some of the spatial extent of wetland habitats.

Audubon uses science to influence policy throughout the Greater Everglades Ecosystem- the Northern Everglades and the Kissimmee River floodplain; the Central Everglades’ Lake Okeechobee and Water Conservation Areas and coastal estuaries; Everglades National Park, and Florida and Biscayne Bays in the south; and the Western Everglades’ Big Cypress and Corkscrew Swamps.

Roseate Spoonbills, Wood Storks, Everglade Snail Kites, and Southern Bald Eagles are indicative of the harm that has occurred to the natural system and are therefore the indicator species that Audubon uses to gauge success in Everglades restoration. The Everglades is also an essential stopover habitat for migratory birds that rely on the Everglades for food and rest before continuing to wintering or summer nesting.

Therefore be it resolved:

Audubon Florida, deploying professional staff and expertise and using information derived from sound science, will call on the volunteer leadership of local Audubon societies (chapters), members and grassroots networks, and will work with conservation allies, business and community leaders, public officials, and agencies to:

Restore Freshwater Flows for the Everglades

- Prioritize projects based on potential benefits to wildlife, with a specific focus on birds that Audubon uses as indicator species for the success of Everglades restoration. Specific focus in 2018 will be around implementing the water storage provisions in Senate Bill 10 passed in 2017 and completing projects like the Central Everglades Planning Project that direct more water to Everglades National Park and Florida Bay;
- Work with agency project planning teams to design projects that obtain the greatest ecological results;
- Advocate for funds to complete restoration projects; and
- Support operations plans or water policies that ensure restoration projects obtain the promised ecological benefits.

Prevent Loss of Wetlands and Restore Wetlands

- Promote restoration projects that expand the spatial extent of wetlands, such as the Broward County Water Preserve Areas and the Picayune Strand project;
- Work with permitting agencies to improve wetland protections and wetland mitigation rules; and
- Recover nesting colonies of Wood Storks and other birds throughout the Everglades by protecting and restoring the wetlands essential for nesting season foraging.

Make and Keep Water Available for the Environment

- Promote meaningful and measurable water conservation within water supply plans and water use permits;
- Use regional Water Supply Plans to assure science-based allocations of water for natural resources and ecosystem needs; and
- Reserve water made available from restoration projects for the environment, including water from the Kissimmee River Restoration project.

Protect Habitat from Nutrient Pollution

- Reduce phosphorus and other nutrient sources in the Lake Okeechobee, St. Lucie, and Caloosahatchee watersheds and the Everglades Agricultural Area;
- Reduce urban sources of nutrient pollution and strengthen water quality laws; and
- Support implementation of Restoration Strategies on or ahead of schedule for water entering the Everglades and support and strengthen the Lake Okeechobee Basin Management Action Plan for water impacting the Lake and estuaries.

Improve Habitat and Watershed Connectivity

- Defend against the sale of valuable publically-owned conservation lands and attempts to remove current habitat protections, including attempts to revoke the Arthur R. Marshall Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge license agreement;
- Focus land conservation programs on projects that protect wildlife corridors and watershed health, including Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed (CREW) and the Everglades Headwaters National Wildlife Refuge; and
- Work with Northern Everglades landowners to advance conservation goals through payment for environmental services, wetland restoration, and conservation easements.

Track and Define Wildlife and Other Ecological Responses to Water Management and Other Activities

- Collect or research data on the historic and current population and habitat status of Roseate Spoonbills, Wood Storks, Southern Bald Eagles, and Everglade Snail Kites;
- Interpret data and trends to identify actions that will benefit these species and analyze restoration projects and operations to assure intended benefits; and
- Advocate for restoring funding to the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) and federal agency science programs so that decisions are based on science.

Educate People about the Ecological Benefits of Everglades Restoration

- Use the Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary experience to educate visitors and the public about the values of the watershed, the Western Everglades, and the Greater Everglades;
- Deploy the EagleWatch program to educate people in the Northern Everglades; and
- Develop educational materials that engage new audiences and focus on the ecological benefits of Everglades restoration.



STATE CONSERVATION PRIORITY: CLIMATE CHANGE

The Earth's climate is changing. Temperatures are rising, snow and rainfall patterns are shifting, and more extreme climate events – like more powerful hurricanes, heavy rainstorms and record high temperatures – are already happening. Many of these observed changes are linked to the rising levels of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases (GHG) in our atmosphere, caused by human activities.

Human-induced climate change is projected to continue, and it will accelerate significantly if global emissions of heat-trapping gases continue to increase. Heat-trapping gases already in the atmosphere have committed us to a hotter future with more climate-related impacts over the next few decades. The magnitude of climate change beyond the next few decades depends primarily on the amount of heat-trapping gases that human activities emit globally, now and in the future.

Ecosystems and the benefits they provide to society are being affected by climate change. The capacity of ecosystems to buffer the impacts of extreme events like fires, floods, and severe storms is being overwhelmed.

Climate change impacts on biodiversity are already being observed in alteration of the timing of critical biological events such as spring bud burst and substantial range shifts of many species. In the longer term, there is an increased risk of species extinction. These changes have social, cultural, and economic effects. Events such as droughts, floods, wildfires, and pest outbreaks associated with climate change are already disrupting ecosystems. These changes limit the capacity of ecosystems to continue to play important roles in reducing the impacts of these extreme events on infrastructure and human communities.

Bird wintering ranges have shifted and some birds have altered their migration habits to adapt to changes in temperature or other environmental conditions. Long-term studies have found that bird species in North America have shifted their wintering grounds northward by an average of more than 40 miles since 1966, with several species shifting by hundreds of miles. Florida is especially vulnerable to sea level rise, hurricanes, and other intense weather patterns and increased average temperatures. Prolonged droughts and intense storms will reduce nesting season productivity for many bird species. Wildlife and natural systems will not adapt easily to changes in temperatures, seasons, and rainfall patterns.

Florida businesses, residents, and visitors are significant consumers of energy and our activities contribute significantly to GHG in the atmosphere. Because the state is so vulnerable to the effects of climate change, Florida should be a leader in policies and actions to reduce GHG emissions and take actions to limit the effects of climate change.

Florida is just beginning to address issues of climate resiliency such as shoreline migration and saltwater impacts on drinking water sources.

The Trump Administration has proposed canceling the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Clean Power Plan (CPP) that set final emission guidelines for states (including Florida) to develop plans to reduce GHG emissions from existing fossil fuel-fired electric generating units (EGUs) to 32% below 2005 levels. The Clean Power Plan encouraged Florida to adopt a Clean Energy Incentive Program (CEIP) to reward early investments in no-carbon renewable energy generation and demand-side energy efficiency measures. The plan also proposed incentives to encourage efficiency investments in low-income communities.

The Trump Administration has also proposed changing passenger vehicle mileage standards. Existing standards reduced national average passenger car fuel consumption.

Therefore be it resolved:

Audubon Florida, deploying professional staff and expertise and using information derived from sound science, will call on the volunteer leadership of local Audubon societies (chapters), members and grassroots networks, and will work with conservation allies, business and community leaders, public officials, and agencies to:

Advocate for the Reduction of Green House Gases from Energy Production

- Encourage the State of Florida to develop a state Clean Power Plan that produces:
 - Target reductions that significantly reduce carbon dioxide pollution;
 - Investments in solar energy and energy efficiency; and
 - Incentives for investments in energy efficiency in low-income communities;
- Promote policies that encourage, and do not discourage, electricity production from renewable sources;
- Support building standards and efficient consumer energy use to reduce electric power demand;
- Oppose transportation projects that increase dependence on single passenger vehicle use and support alternatives including expanded public transportation and safe and bicycle and pedestrian use;
- Oppose drilling for oil and gas off Florida's coasts and on public lands; and
- Oppose fracking and acid matrix stimulation for oil and gas until adoption of rules avoid excessive use of water and prevent harm to water resources and air quality as well as methane loss.

Encourage Energy Conservation in Homes, Workplaces, and Communities

- Encourage people to improve energy efficiency of homes and workplaces including weatherization, equipment maintenance, and turning off unused appliances;
- Encourage use of energy-efficient appliances, lighting, and fuel sources in homes and workplaces;

- Encourage local governments to require ENERGY STAR qualified appliances for all new construction;
- Encourage waste recycling and reduced food waste to reduce methane emissions from landfills and emissions from waste-to-energy plants; and
- Encourage conservation and efficient use of water as water supply and treatment requires large amounts of electric power.

Promote Ecologically Sound Sea Level Rise Adaptation Strategies

- Conduct research and monitoring to document and report on coastal habitats, birds, and other wildlife to inform coastal resiliency programs;
- Educate the public and policymakers about impacts of the rising waters on birds and other wildlife, habitats, and water resources;
- Oppose ecologically harmful and expensive adaptation strategies, including beach armoring, seawalls, and other practices that marginalize or eliminate habitat;
- Support adaptation strategies such as Everglades restoration to make coastal habitats more resilient to saltwater intrusion; and
- Support coastal retreat policies that help relocate residents and businesses away from dynamic coastal areas.



STATE CONSERVATION PRIORITY: IMPORTANT BIRD AREAS AND WATERWAYS CONSERVATION

Florida is home to sixty-nine distinct ecosystems, each having evolved to host thousands of plant and animal species, including some that are rare and endemic. Native birds help maintain healthy ecosystems. As development, intensive agriculture, and human activity reduce the extent and functions of habitats, extra effort is required to protect Florida's native birds and water-based ecosystems.

Audubon and partner organizations have designated a network of Important Bird Areas throughout the western hemisphere. Audubon Florida is committed to developing and promoting important bird area conservation strategies within the state.

Although human activities have altered much of natural Florida, federal, state, county, and local governments have protected and restored considerable acreage as parks and other conservation lands. Of Florida's 35 million acres, 28% has been designated as conservation land.

Most of Florida's rivers, lakes, and estuaries are managed in the public trust for the benefit of all citizens and to protect natural systems. However,

- Reduced groundwater recharge and drainage of swamps and floodplains has depleted nature's storage systems;
- Diversion and discharge of wet season stormwater to coastal estuaries contributes contaminants and robs those same estuaries of freshwater during dry seasons and droughts;
- Pollution from fertilizers and human and animal waste impairs springs and rivers, leaving a legacy of human-caused nutrients in soil, lakes, and groundwater; and
- Overuse of water for farm and landscape irrigation depletes aquifers and surface waters and reduces flow of springs and rivers.

State and local budget cuts have slowed efforts to protect conservation lands and agencies are under pressure to surplus public lands.

The Florida Legislature cut funds for conservation lands in spite of 75 percent voter approval of the Water and Land Legacy Amendment passed in 2014.

Florida's waterways and Important Bird Areas benefit from active constituencies of habitat stewards whose observations and advocacy are essential to good management of public lands and to building public support for acquisition to complete Florida's system of protected areas.

Therefore be it resolved:

Audubon Florida, deploying professional staff and expertise and using information derived from sound science, will call on the volunteer leadership of local Audubon societies (chapters), members and grassroots networks, and will work with conservation allies, business and community leaders, public officials, and agencies to:

- Support state and local laws and programs that protect conservation lands and provide for managing those lands to restore and maintain water, wildlife, and habitats;
- Support the use of funds from the Water and Land Legacy Amendment to fulfill voter intent for land acquisition, management, and restoration;
- Support programs such as Florida Forever, the expansion of conservation easement purchase programs including the Rural and Family Lands Protection Program, Everglades restoration, springs, and other water sustainability programs;
- Seek consensus from chapters and allies on high priority areas and focus on sites and projects that yield the greatest benefits for native and at-risk birds, including:
 - **Florida Scrub-Jay Habitats** that harbor or can harbor successful populations of Florida’s only endemic bird. Their habitat is threatened by development and conversion to agriculture and some lands in public ownership are not adequately managed. Audubon will promote sound management and stewardship of Florida scrub habitats and push for scrubland acquisition that will promote overall growth of the state’s Scrub-Jay population.
 - **The Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed (CREW)** is a decades-old plan to protect and restore 130,000 acres of habitat around Corkscrew Swamp in southwestern Florida. Although ranked on the Florida Forever list, only half the CREW acreage has been protected and development is encroaching. Audubon will push for accelerated land acquisition spending and focus on CREW.
 - **Lake Okeechobee** is legendary for fishing and birdlife that are periodically devastated by extreme water levels. The Lake is harmed by pollution and over-drainage of its watershed as well as excessive water supply demands for agriculture use. Audubon will advocate for pollution control and water management decisions that prioritize the lake’s function and long-term health.
 - **The Northern Everglades** is characterized by ranchlands, which provide habitat and water storage. Conservation easements and wetland restoration projects can increase the benefits these lands provide while retaining historic uses. Audubon will urge that state conservation easement funds and federal wetland restoration funds be directed toward ranchlands in the Northern Everglades when conservation benefits are clear.
 - **The Indian River Lagoon** is the most biodiverse lagoon ecosystem in the Northern hemisphere and is home to more than 3,000 wildlife and plant species. Audubon will work to support efforts at the local, state and federal level that reduce excessive nutrients from entering the lagoon and seek other ecosystem improvement measures.
 - **The Lake Apopka Restoration Marsh** includes an amazing diversity of birdlife – 360 bird species use the Lake and marsh. Audubon will work with local agencies to plan an Audubon Center and work with local governments toward management of the public lands to the benefit of birdlife and improve the water quality of the Lake.

- **The Springs Coast and Big Bend Coast** are home to the world’s largest seagrass meadows. The health of those habitats depends on the flow of clean freshwater from the aquifer, springs, creeks, and rivers. Audubon will support projects that reduce nutrient pollution and restore freshwater flows to historic levels.
- **The Green Swamp**, covering 560,000 acres in Polk, Lake, and Sumter counties, serves as the headwaters of the Peace, Hillsborough, Withlacoochee and Ocklawaha Rivers. The Green Swamp is designated as an Important Bird Area due to its high diversity of avian populations. Only 110,000 acres of the Green Swamp are protected as conservation lands although significant areas have lingered on the Florida Forever list. Audubon will promote “finishing the job” of acquiring public lands and easements in the Green Swamp, speak out against harmful land uses and intrusions, and seek to continue the enforcement of the Area of Critical Concern requirements.
- **Apalachicola River and Bay** was once one of the most productive estuaries in the northern hemisphere and one of the most biologically diverse river systems in North America. In 2016, the Apalachicola was designated as the nation's most endangered river system. The ecosystem is suffering potentially irreversible damage primarily as a result of unsustainable water management practices in the Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint River system. Audubon will work as part of a broad coalition of conservation groups to restore freshwater flows to the river and bay.
- Seek guidance from chapters and partners to focus resources on the most appropriate places such as high-value waterways and IBAs, proposed conservation and restoration projects, and places that Audubon members and others consider special based on their own observations, experiences, and observed ecological attributes; and
- Engage Audubon chapters and other citizen groups to take action to protect specific natural places, such as working with private landowners to achieve good stewardship by supporting incentives to commit property to conservation, including purchase of conservation easements and “Payment for Environmental Services” programs to compensate for improved water management, water storage, and pollution cleanup.



STATE CONSERVATION PRIORITY: WATER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

Water defines Florida's natural ecosystems. Seasonally abundant rainfall seeps into aquifers and over floodplains, with billions of gallons of freshwater flowing through springs and rivers towards highly productive marshes and seagrass beds along the coast.

Alteration of Florida's landscape has drastically reduced its ability to store the plentiful water that the state receives. This has resulted in drained wetlands and depleted aquifers, while simultaneously delivering harmful amounts of nutrient-laden water to our coastal ecosystems. This wasteful practice leaves people, industry, and nature without sufficient water during dry periods and droughts.

High demands for water in a landscape with little storage capacity have created an intense, and unfortunate, struggle for water between people and the environment. Agricultural, industrial, and public uses all compete for the water needed to maintain healthy springs, rivers, and wetlands.

Surface waters throughout the state are listed as impaired because of poor water quality. Pollution from agricultural, industrial, and urban sources is harming Florida's waterways and ecological communities. Farm and urban fertilizers combined with human and animal waste have elevated nutrient loads in springs, lakes, rivers and coastlines. Years of overuse and inaction have left a daunting legacy of nutrient-rich sediments accumulated within our aquatic systems.

Florida's water laws and regulations are not effectively protecting the quantity and quality of water needed for healthy and sustainable ecosystems. Additionally, conservation, storage, water quality, and alternative water supply projects do not receive the funding and priority required to address the magnitude of the challenges.

The combined effects of drainage, pollution, and overuse of water threaten the sustainability of Florida's natural systems, the state's economy, and quality of life.

Therefore be it resolved:

Audubon Florida, deploying professional staff and expertise and using information derived from sound science, will call on the volunteer leadership of local Audubon societies (chapters), members and grassroots networks, and will work with conservation allies, business and community leaders, public officials, and agencies to:

Protect Water at the Source – Aquifers, Wetlands, Lakes, and Springs

- Urge water management districts to identify and reserve water needed for the health of natural systems;
- Ensure water management districts set protective limits for flows and levels in water bodies, and implement recovery strategies where these are not met;
- Support legislation and rules that are protective of spring flows and water quality;
- Use sound science and goals of ecosystem health and sustainability to inform water management decisions while adequately funding monitoring and assessment programs;
- Expand and improve floodplain, springshed, and water recharge area protection with public land acquisition or conservation easements combined with appropriate management; and
- Improve rules that allow wetland impacts and require that permits be more protective of the ecological roles of wetlands.

Advocate for Sustainable Water Supplies

- Require water conservation programs with water use reduction as a condition in water supply consumptive use permits;
- Enact stronger efficiency standards for water fixtures, appliances, and irrigation systems;
- Promote development and funding of water conservation efforts, including education and incentives;
- Urge government, including water management districts, to set tax rates at levels adequate to fund necessary water conservation, ecosystem restoration, alternative water supply, and water storage projects;
- Promote sustainable alternative water supply projects, including those using reclaimed and stormwater, that improve conditions in natural systems; and
- Discourage water supply projects that take water away from natural systems.

Advocate for Water Quality Improvements

- Strengthen state and local stormwater treatment requirements to be protective of ecological health;
- Require connection to central sewer where feasible and beneficial and in impaired basins;
- Limit fertilizer use to the standard of “no harm” to water resources;
- Ensure reclaimed water is used in ways that benefit or protect the water quality of natural systems;
- Eliminate land application of sewage biosolids;
- Ensure that nutrient-reduction efforts minimize effects of nitrogen and phosphorus on receiving water bodies; and
- Work to improve enforcement of state water laws, including those established or modified by Senate Bill 552 (2016), to achieve water quality improvements throughout the state.



REGIONAL CONSERVATION PRIORITY: SOUTHWEST FLORIDA

Audubon has a long history in the Western Everglades region beginning with hiring wardens to protect wading bird colonies from plume hunters, later creating the Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary (now a vital partner for these chapters), and helping to secure federal and state public lands. Audubon Florida and its five affiliated southwest Florida organizations are committed to working together to protect and restore the Western Everglades and downstream coastal ecosystems in the face of rapid human population growth and increasing anthropogenic climate change impacts including storms and sea level rise.

A primary means of Western Everglades protection is public land acquisition and management through programs such as Florida Forever, Rural and Family Lands Protection, and Lee's Conservation 20/20 and Conservation Collier. Bitter disappointment with the Legislature's refusal to fund Florida Forever leads the Southwest Florida Audubon organizations to pursue an active campaign to advocate local delegation support for buying highly-ranked local Florida Forever and Rural and Family Lands projects.

Additionally, southwest Florida local governments have suffered from widespread denial of increasing climate change risks to human and natural communities. The region hosts significant coastal habitats which will be impacted unless better planning for resource-oriented adaptation and mitigation occur.

Therefore be it resolved:

The five local Audubon organizations in the Southwest Florida Region, using sound science, professional policy guidance, and in complement to Audubon Florida's statewide conservation priorities, will mobilize volunteer and staff leadership, members, allies, community leaders, elected officials, and government agencies to cooperatively advance two regional priorities:

- Advocate our state legislative delegations to support 2018 session budgets that fund the purchase of high-priority local Florida Forever and Rural and Family Lands projects.
- Promote regional and local sea level rise/climate change adaptation and mitigation planning and implementation, including advancing a possible southwest Florida regional climate change compact of local governments and agencies.

Implementation of these priorities will require diverse strategies and creative collaboration among these five Audubon organizations. Some expected actions include engaging Legislative delegation members at home on local Florida Forever projects, including leading field trips to key areas, creating project fact sheets, advocating wetland and flowway restoration on a watershed-scale to counter saltwater intrusion, coastal bird habitat protection and acquisition,

promotion of local renewable energy generation and efficiency, engagement of local officials, support for NOAA/FGCU/UF research, and advancing effective coastal land use adaptation policies. The Southwest Florida Climate Change Compact may fold several of these latter strategies into a more coordinated plan.



REGIONAL CONSERVATION PRIORITY: EVERGLADES

The lower east coast of Florida is known for its beautiful beaches, productive estuaries, unique wildlife, and proximity to the Everglades. These natural wonders have attracted many people, and, of all the National Parks, Everglades and Biscayne National Parks have the highest population density adjacent to their borders. These unique conditions create a distinct set of conservation challenges when trying to accommodate human needs while protecting and restoring the Everglades and other wildlife habitat in Southeast Florida.

It is important to recognize the interrelated benefits of conservation for people and wildlife. Restoring the Everglades and other regional wetlands and landscapes provide critical life support and services for both, such as recharging and conserving water supplies, absorbing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, providing world-class tourism crucial to the South Florida economy, and preserving areas of wilderness for current and future generations to enjoy.

The lower east coast of Florida and the Everglades are home to more than 350 species of birds including the iconic Roseate Spoonbill, the endangered Wood Stork and Everglade Snail Kite. As a result of the draining of wetlands for flood control, agriculture, and residential development in addition to the misuse of water resources, many species are jeopardized. Preserving current populations and enabling the return of wading bird super-colonies and other indicator species that once symbolized the Everglades are the best measures of conservation success.

While individual chapters work on various issues and activities in their specific regions, the following goals reflect a shared commitment across the four chapters encompassed within the Everglades Regional Conservation Committee (RCC). Together the RCC will work toward these collective goals, while additional chapter activities are reflected in a supplemental list.

Therefore be it resolved:

The Audubon chapters in the Everglades region, in alignment with Audubon Florida and the Atlantic Flyway, using information derived from sound science, will mobilize volunteer leadership, members, conservation allies, community leaders, public officials and governmental agencies to:

Climate Change

- Educate chapter members, community members and decision-makers on the influences of climate change including impacts to water supply, ecosystems, shorelines, marine habitats, Everglades restoration, birds, and other wildlife and other impacts on human and natural systems.

Everglades Restoration

- Identify opportunities to advocate, expedite, and improve Everglades restoration efforts throughout the entire Greater Everglades Ecosystem from the Kissimmee Chain of Lakes to Florida Bay, and guard against threats to Everglades habitats such as fracking, urban sprawl and other intrusive activities.
 - **Water:** Enhance water conservation efforts at an individual, local, municipal, state and federal level to improve freshwater deliveries to the Everglades with the correct quantity, quality, timing and distribution and to reduce demand on and damage to the natural system during dry periods. Promote the prompt return of more historical freshwater flows in order to improve habitat quality, protect low-lying and coastal areas from rising sea level, and advocate for the preservation and restoration of natural shorelines to increase resiliency.
 - **Funding:** Advocate for intended use of Water and Land Legacy Amendment funds for restoration projects, including Everglades restoration, and for increased funding for the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) so they can fulfill their mission.
 - **Restoration Progress:** Advocate for the timely implementation of Senate Bill 10 (2017) to build a reservoir south of Lake Okeechobee and increase freshwater flows to Everglades National Park and Florida Bay. Advocate for timely implementation of Central Everglades Planning Project (CEPP) to augment even more southern freshwater flows. As projects come online, ensure operations deliver maximum ecological benefits as envisioned.

Bird and Wildlife Conservation

- Participate in bird monitoring programs, enhance the body of knowledge involving birds in the Everglades and Southeast Florida and use this knowledge to prevent degradation and fragmentation to reestablish a contiguous migratory bird habitat that aids in increasing survival of resident and migratory species.
- Inspire legislators to recognize the importance of local Florida Forever projects along the migratory flyway as beneficial to their communities. Create bird-friendly habitat through education and program implementation. Halt threats to critical bird habitat, such as the elimination of Arthur R. Marshall Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge.
- Preserve, expand and enhance wetlands and other habitats to increase populations of wading birds, Everglade Snail Kites, and other wildlife and simultaneously reduce populations of invasive species.



REGIONAL CONSERVATION PRIORITY: INDIAN RIVER LAGOON

The Indian River Lagoon RCC will continue work on our 2017 conservation priorities: to coordinate local and regional efforts to compel the Florida legislature to appropriate Water and Land Legacy Amendment funds for acquisition of conservation lands, to advocate for acquisition of sites listed in the Florida Forever Indian River Lagoon (IRL) Blueway project, and to educate local governments and communities about climate change impacts to at-risk bird species and to the entire IRL ecosystem.

Therefore be it resolved:

The Audubon chapters in the Indian River Lagoon Region, in alignment with Audubon Florida and the Atlantic Flyway, using information derived from sound science, will mobilize volunteer leadership, members, conservation allies, community leaders, public officials, and governmental agencies to:

Support Senator Rob Bradley’s initiative to mandate a \$100M minimum annual expenditure from Amendment 1 funds to acquire environmentally rare and sensitive lands

- IRL chapters will work together to get support for State Senator Bradley’s plan from their city councils, county commissions, and state legislators. Our tools will include individual and form letters, attendance at scheduled public meetings, and personal one-on-one meetings. Our chapters will identify, track and report metrics to evaluate the result of these actions (e.g., # members involved, # letters sent, # public meetings attended with numbers of members and volunteers, # personal meetings held, etc.).

Work together to advocate for greater funding to protect regionally significant lands

- We will primarily use the Florida Forever and Rural and Family Lands Protection Program approved project lists to identify such properties, and will lobby city councils, county commissions, and state legislators to support the purchase of specific properties within these projects.



REGIONAL CONSERVATION PRIORITY: CENTRAL FLORIDA

Central Florida RCC encompasses 10 chapters in seven counties with 47 miles of beaches on the Atlantic, uplands, wetlands and the central ridge of Florida. Our ecosystems are home to many important species some of which are already, or may become, endangered or threatened.

The proper management of these lands is critical to combating the declining quality and quantity of native Florida habitat and especially Florida's water, the focus of Audubon Florida's 2018 conservation efforts.

While continuing the work we have begun on the 2017 regional priorities; i.e.: to protect, enhance and acquire conservation lands by partnering with landowners and property managers and to protect water quality and water resources through adopting/enacting/enforcing meaningful water conservation requirements and nutrient run-off, the following goals reflect a shared commitment for our 10 chapters.

Therefore be it resolved:

The Audubon chapters in the Central Florida Region, in alignment with Audubon Florida and the Atlantic Flyway, using information derived from sound science, will mobilize volunteer leadership, members, conservation allies, community leaders, public officials and governmental agencies to:

Promote Lake Apopka Restoration, Visitor Access, & New Audubon Nature Center

- Chapters will focus joint resources and efforts to assure continued progress on the restoration of the Lake Apopka North Shore marshes and to increase appropriate public access to the marshes for birdwatching, nature study, and compatible recreation activities. Chapters will work with Audubon Florida and Orange & Oklawaha Audubon Societies to promote the long-term goal of building and operating a new Audubon Center to showcase Lake Apopka as Florida's most important inland bird habitat.

Monitor and Act on Local & State Government Land Use Decisions Impacting Wildlife Habitat

- Chapters will work together to advocate for greater funding for Florida Forever and the Rural and Family Lands Protection Program to secure money to purchase identified conservation property (such as those listed below) by meeting with legislators to build support for specific properties rather than lobbying solely for the umbrella programs.

1. Lenholt Farm: a vital property which links Ocala National Forest and the extensive state holdings along the Wekiva River

2. Conlin Lake X/Kirchman Tract: an 11,000-acre, pristine property at the headwaters of the Econlockhatchee and Kissimmee Rivers watershed
3. Purchase of conservation easements on Kissimmee Valley ranchlands where owners are interested and willing to participate



REGIONAL CONSERVATION PRIORITY: FLORIDA GULF COAST

Audubon Florida's Gulf Coast region stretches from northern Charlotte County to Citrus County and includes 11 Audubon Chapters: Venice Area Audubon, Sarasota Audubon, Manatee Audubon, Eagle Audubon, St. Petersburg Audubon, Clearwater Audubon, Tampa Audubon, West Pasco Audubon, Hernando Audubon, Citrus County Audubon, and the recently formed Cedar Keys Audubon. Florida's Gulf Coast includes a rich assemblage of habitats that support a great diversity of birds, fish, and plant species. Many essential wildlife habitats are being degraded, altered, and fragmented and rural landscapes are suffering increased development pressures. Populations of many species of colonial waterbirds, beach-nesting birds, migratory shorebirds and the Florida Scrub-jay have declined in their historic ranges and require significant intervention and management efforts to prevent local extirpation or extinction.

Seasonal freshwater flows from springs, streams, and rivers in adjacent uplands and wetlands are vital to the area's diverse and productive estuaries. Estuarine ecosystems throughout Florida's Gulf Coast region suffer from degradations or alterations of upstream habitats due to pollution, flood control, strip mining, development, and consumptive water use projects. Audubon staff and chapter volunteers have worked to protect shore bird and wading bird nesting habitats. The Suncoast Shorebird Partnership now ranges from the Tampa Bay area into Charlotte County and is part of the larger, multi-partner Florida Shorebird Alliance. Least Tern rooftop-nesting monitors and banding garner statewide and national recognition.

Additionally, the effects of climate change and sea level rise threaten the coastal ecosystems (beaches, saltmarshes, estuaries, and bays) and the birds that depend upon them throughout the region.

Therefore be it resolved:

The Audubon chapters in the Gulf Coast Region of Florida, in alignment with Audubon Florida and the Atlantic Flyway program, and using information derived from sound science, will work together to increase Audubon's influence on conservation decisions in this region using the following strategies:

Providing opportunities to take an active, hands-on role with actions that directly benefit birds and the habitats they use is very attractive to many volunteers. We should build upon our successful conservation and advocacy capacity featuring citizen science programs (such as EagleWatch, Bluebird Trails, Shorebird stewarding, Colony Watch, Jay Watch, Climate Messengers, Hooked Bird Project, Christmas Bird Counts, etc.) to expand partnerships and engage new audiences by:

- Taking an active role in local and regional habitat management initiatives, by engaging in the process on Audubon-owned lands, public lands (partnering with local municipalities

and county governments), and large corporate-owned lands (office parks, utility companies, phosphate industry, etc.);

- Developing and providing training guidelines for engagement and best practices for advocacy;
- Recruiting and training advocates of all ages to speak at local and regional public meetings regarding issues facing coastal and other environmentally sensitive environments; and
- Using action in the field for conservation, outreach, and education.



REGIONAL CONSERVATION PRIORITY: NORTHWEST FLORIDA

Florida's Panhandle and the Big Bend coastal areas are among the most beautiful, least developed, and ecologically productive regions of the state. This region includes spectacular beaches, four major bay/estuary systems, marshes, and floodplains that are home to some of the most diverse wildlife in North America, including resident and migratory birds. Beaches also provide habitat for endangered beach mice and nesting areas for up to five species of sea turtles. Northwest Florida's coastal economy is largely based on being a destination for beach and water-based recreation and tourism. State and local parks and Gulf Islands National Seashore are routinely listed among the world's finest beaches. The region also has a rich fishery that supports both recreational and commercial fishing. Oysters, shrimp, and other fisheries are historic and important parts of local economies.

The region's four major bay/estuary systems have been impacted by damming, landscape conversion of their watersheds, and freshwater withdrawals in-state as well as across state lines. As a result, the region's coastal bays and estuaries suffer from impairment to the quantity, quality, and timing of freshwater inputs. Restoration of this function in watersheds such as the Apalachicola is an important priority.

The Panhandle is also home to several important military bases, which are not only important economically, but also harbor thousands of acres of wildlife and forests. Several of the bases rely on extensive areas along the Gulf of Mexico that are used as ranges; these would be compromised by commercial activities such as energy extraction.

Oil and natural gas exploration and recovery have long been banned in Florida's state waters although drilling is permitted in some federal waters in the Gulf and in the nearshore waters of the other Gulf states. However, Florida's prohibition on nearshore drilling did not protect us from the effects of the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill disaster. Of all the regions in the state, Northwest Florida was the most impacted by this disaster— be it from oil physically reaching the shore, the effect of human relief preparations on habitat, or the eventual cleanup process.

In the wake of this event, our remaining coastal wildlife and habitat are more important than ever. Long-term effects of the spill are uncertain. While helping to monitor these effects, we also pledge to address the known pressures on these species in an attempt to offset what could be lasting impacts of the Deepwater Horizon event.

Therefore be it resolved:

The Audubon chapters in the Northwest Florida region, in alignment with Audubon Florida and the Atlantic Flyway, using information derived from sound science, will

mobilize volunteer leadership, members, conservation allies, community leaders, public officials, and governmental agencies to:

Advocate for the full funding of the Florida Forever program and the proper use of the RESTORE Act funding. This work will emphasize watershed-scale land conservation, resource monitoring, management and restoration to protect threatened bird species and improve freshwater flowing into Panhandle estuary systems.



REGIONAL CONSERVATION PRIORITY: NORTHEAST FLORIDA

From Nassau to Flagler along the coast, and Marion to Hamilton counties inland, the Northeast region covers 16 counties and is served by seven Audubon chapters and two Audubon staff – one based on the coast, one inland. The region harbors unique water resources, a variety of ecosystems, and climate strongholds that support resident wildlife and the birds of the Atlantic Flyway.

The beaches and dunes of the region’s coastal strand are the last significant nesting sites for shorebirds and seabirds on the East Coast of Florida. Extensive coastal marshes are essential nurseries for fish and invertebrates, while coastal scrub and maritime hammocks are home to resident bird species and provide essential breeding and foraging areas for migrating birds. Birds of conservation concern include the Least Tern, American Oystercatcher, Black Skimmer, Gull-billed Tern, Piping Plover, Red Knot, Worthington’s Marsh Wren, Clapper Rail, Reddish Egret, Roseate Spoonbill, Wood Stork, Burrowing Owl, Bald Eagle, Swallow-tailed Kite, and Painted Bunting.

Special places in Northeast Florida include some of the largest magnitude springs in the world whose outflows feed rivers such as the Ichetucknee, Ocklawaha, St. Johns, Silver, and Suwannee. Large sandhill lakes provide for recharge of the Floridan aquifer. These systems are being severely impacted by excessive nutrients and over-pumping of the aquifer. Mining, surface-water withdrawals, and dredging pose additional threats in the region. Local communities, dependent on nature-based economies, are suffering from the degradation of these water resources.

Special places such as the Ocala and Osceola National Forests, state forests, parks, and preserves are home to bird species of conservation concern such as the Red-cockaded Woodpecker, Florida Scrub-jay, Southeastern Kestrel, Bachman’s Sparrow and Northern Bobwhite. Adequate monitoring and habitat management measures are critical for long-term protection of wildlife in these areas as pressures from human activity continue to increase.

Therefore be it resolved:

The Audubon chapters in the Northeast Florida Region, in alignment with Audubon Florida and the Atlantic Flyway program, and using information derived from sound science, will work together to strengthen Audubon’s role as a conservation leader in Northeast Florida using the following strategies:

- Solidifying our stakeholder status on conservation lands through communications with land managers about our activities on their lands;

- Improving communications among chapters to generate timely and widespread responses to important conservation issues;
- Assisting in surveying and stewardship activities throughout the region, including the EagleWatch, Jay Watch, and shorebird steward programs along with rookery surveys;
- Educating resource managers about bird-related data and tools available to them through citizen-science efforts like eBird;
- Building bird-friendly communities that provide habitat and conserve water by fostering improved landscaping practices for residential, public, and commercial properties;
- Promoting the value of treatment wetlands using the Sweetwater Wetlands/Alachua Audubon model; and
- Creating a conservation context for chapter activities, including bird walks, programs, and events currently without a specific connection to our conservation goals.