



Audubon FLORIDA

Annual Report 2017

Naturalist



American Goldfinch
Photo: Will Stuart

2017
Florida Audubon Society
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Jud Laird, Chair
Florida Audubon Society

Dear Audubon Members and Supporters,

Audubon Florida has experienced a big year, and it's been an honor to serve as chair while we celebrate another year of conservation together. First of all, I am excited to share that Eric Draper was tapped to lead Florida's State Park System, a system of parks and public lands that Audubon members helped to create and that we all love. If you had a chance to attend the Audubon Assembly in October, you saw the kind passion and commitment that Eric has brought to all of his roles during his 22 years at Audubon.



Please join me in wishing Eric the best, and we look forward to accomplishing great things together for Florida. Audubon Florida's Julie Wraithmell will serve as interim executive director while a national search is undertaken.

As we celebrate for Eric and welcome Julie, I am reminded of the hardy volunteers, dedicated chapters, expert staff, and generous supporters who all made 2017 a big year for Audubon. Together, we:

- Secured a huge win for America's Everglades in the signing of Senate Bill 10 (2017) into law after a long battle in Tallahassee,
- Sold-out another Audubon Assembly- bringing together hundreds of chapters, experts and conservation leaders to discuss water for Florida's future,
- Answered the call to help when Hurricane Irma devastated special places across the state including damage at Audubon centers and sanctuaries, and
- Much more.

Wow! The new year is right around the corner, and the birds are counting on our strong Audubon network to continue advancing conservation in Florida.

We're going to need you to make 2018 a great year for birds and special places. Can you help Audubon start off 2018 strong?

- Join your local Audubon chapter at Audubon.org/Chapters
- Sign up to engage in our action network at FL.Audubon.org/SignUp
- Make a generous, tax-deductible gift to Audubon Florida at GiveToAudubonFlorida.org

The new year brings new opportunities for conservation in Florida, and I hope the stories in this edition of the Naturalist inspire you in the same way they inspire me. Stay tuned to our website and social media to get the latest on conservation in Florida, and I hope you continue joining me in spreading our message with your family, friends, and neighbors.

With gratitude and appreciation,



Julie Wraithmell, Interim Executive Director
Audubon Florida

Dear Friends,

Audubon is an organization like no other. Truly. This year's Audubon Assembly in St. Augustine reminded me of that. I enjoyed the exchange of ideas, the diversity of perspectives, and the single-mindedness of purpose shared by those in attendance.

Government leaders including Senate Appropriations Chair Rob Bradley, Department of Environmental Protection Secretary Noah Valenstein, and St. Johns River Water Management District Executive Director Dr. Ann Shortelle mixed with Audubon chapter leaders and attendees from across the state. Bright-eyed college students participating in Audubon's Conservation Leadership Initiative sat side-by-side with Audubon Florida's board in sessions on solving Florida's biggest conservation challenges. Together, we all cheered conservation award winners and challenged each other to do more for water, wildlife, and wildlands we hold dear.

And from more than one newcomer to the Assembly—guest speakers, business sponsors, new members—I heard an awestruck “I had NO idea!”

That is the thing about Audubon: Because we have always been a melting pot of skills and experiences, professionals and volunteers, scientists and advocates, we have been able to borrow the best of each of us and exceed expectations. Our diversity in both skills and backgrounds make us stronger. It's the same audacious conservation that made the women of the early 1900s think they could pass sweeping international bird protections before they even had the right to vote.

In that same tradition, Audubon Florida has had a remarkable year advancing the restoration of America's Everglades and our Gulf of Mexico, standing up for springs and beaches, water and wildlife, and working to save the places that make Florida special. Hurricane Irma threw us all a curveball. But we are using it as an opportunity to drive restoration and resilience, so that Florida's resources are better than they were before.

As we look back on all that we have accomplished together this past year, I thank each of you for your dedication and investment in this important work. I look forward to the coming year and the opportunities it brings to audaciously make Florida better for birds and people alike.

Sincerely,

P.S. – I hope you enjoy flipping through the pages of the Winter 2017 Naturalist. If you've enjoyed this edition, please consider making a gift to Audubon Florida using the included envelope. It would mean a lot to the birds and to all of us at Audubon. Thank you.



The eye of Hurricane Irma brushed Audubon's Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary on September 10 while staff and volunteers sheltered in the Blair Audubon Center. When they emerged, they found toppled trees making the center's entrance and boardwalk impassable. With help from dedicated staff, devoted volunteers and generous donors, the Sanctuary reopened part of its boardwalk on October 4, 2017 and celebrated its full reopening on December 7, 2017.

Recovery and Resiliency

Audubon's response to 2017's challenges

This year brought extreme weather events that are making us all evaluate our role in and opportunities for Florida's recovery.

For more than 100 years, Audubon has held complementary roles in Florida conservation:

- Organizing people in local science, education, and stewardship at our sanctuaries and centers and other special places and
- Using sound science to advocate for actions and resources to conserve, restore, and manage habitats.

These interconnected roles work because our shoes on the ground, boats in the water, and scopes on bird nests give us a special understanding of the stresses on birds and wildlife.

These roles also oblige Audubon Florida's board and staff to strategize responses to threats as varied as extreme weather events, oil spills, invasive plants and animals, human population growth, and habitat alteration.

Increasingly frequent and intense storms and droughts threaten Florida's natural resources — we saw it firsthand in 2017 with Cindy, Irma, Harvey, Nate, the spring drought and wildfires and more.

Audubon's goal for recovery from these events is to increase resilience while improving habitat values:

- To recover and make our sanctuaries and centers more resilient and
- To give habitat and wildlife and water management agencies the direction, authority, and funding they need to recover and restore natural systems and produce net habitat improvement.



Burrowing Owl Photo: Jean Hall

The Challenges of 2017

Drought – Two-thirds of Florida experienced prolonged drought in 2017. Wildfires burned across the Big Cypress. Water restrictions were in place. Florida Bay lost thousands of acres of seagrass from lack of freshwater. Lake Okeechobee was drained to irrigate sugarcane farms, and Everglade Snail Kites did not nest in the spring.

Early wet season rainfall events – By mid-June, coastal areas were getting twice their usual rainfall, and by the end of June, Tropical Storm Cindy drowned thousands of shorebird nests at sites along the Gulf. A dry spring turned into a very wet summer as 30 inches of rain fell in America's Everglades- drowning sensitive habitats and leading to an emergency as water was pumped into Lake Okeechobee and then harmfully dumped to coastal estuaries.

Harvey – Fifty inches of rainfall along with storm surges drowned major bird sanctuaries along the Texas coast, and even overwashed nesting colonies in the Florida Panhandle. Filled and over-drained wetlands contributed to the tragic flooding in Houston and other coastal cities. A lesson for similarly flat Florida.

King Tides – Seasonal high tides, known as king tides, inundated urban areas like Miami Beach and amplified the effects of storms, as evidenced by the major tide-driven flooding seen in Jacksonville after Hurricane Irma.

Irma – This powerful storm decimated the hardwood hammocks of the middle Keys on its way to plow into Southwest Florida. The shores of nesting islands in Florida Bay were blanketed in wrack, and erosion took its toll here as well as at nesting islands along the entire Southwest coast to Tampa Bay. University of Florida researchers found that more than 40 endangered Snail Kite nests were flooded out on Lake Okeechobee—a painful loss in an already poor breeding year. In Northeast Florida, dunes and beaches were washed away, toppling houses and prompting emergency armoring that will block this habitat from ever recovering. The storm plus high tides drove unprecedented flooding up the St. Johns River and into the heart of Jacksonville, providing a glimpse of the future of rising seas.

Audubon's Road to Recovery and Resilience

It's not enough to just recover from these events. We must use recovery to advance natural resiliency in the face of future challenges. Fortunately, Audubon's strengths are well suited to this work—and we need your help:

Science and Public Policy Expertise

Audubon is influential when we come to the table with expertise about the science behind environmental challenges as well as environmental laws and rules and how they apply in specific conditions. Our knowledge makes us especially valuable to decision-makers and their staff.

Advocacy

Audubon's strong volunteer leaders will be needed to use local examples to engage decision-makers at the community level, making issues real and relevant.

Influence

Influential board and chapter members help Audubon successfully advance solutions to the challenges facing our communities.



Everglade Snail Kite Photo: Mac Stone

Northwest Florida

Protecting the **Upper Apalachicola River Ecosystem** is critical to protecting rare and endangered species. This project encompasses 37,895 acres along both sides of the Apalachicola River's floodplain, filling nearly all the gaps among the many existing conservation lands and projects that have been established through decades of conservation efforts. Together, these lands harbor more plant and animal species and more endemic species than any other area the same size in Florida and are home to more than 100 rare and endangered species.



Gulf Coast

Completion of the **Lake Wales Ridge (LWR) Ecosystem** rank high on the Critical Natural Lands list and are a top land conservation priority for the Gulf Coast region. Fragile, ancient scrub ecosystems provide character, biodiversity, and opportunity to study the iconic Florida Scrub-jay and over 21 species of federally listed plant species. The Florida Scrub-jay is Florida's only endemic bird. The purchase of roughly 25,000 acres in Lake, Osceola, Polk and Highlands Counties would complete the Lake Wales Ridge project.



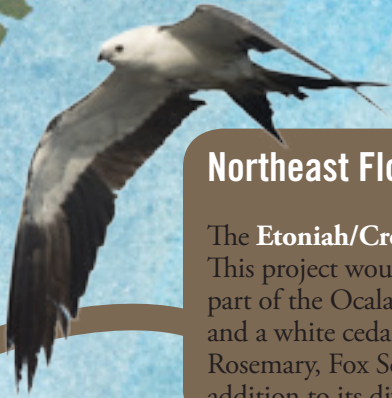
Southwest Florida

In the Southwest Florida region, the 68,000 acre **Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed (CREW) project** would protect and save some of Florida's most important wetlands. The CREW project provides natural flood protection, recharges the aquifer for the region's drinking water supply, and gives vital habitat for a large portion of the Western Everglades, with Audubon's Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary at its heart. As development in the region grows, protecting the remaining parcels in the watershed is critical.

The Places that Inspire Floridians

An important means of building resiliency in Florida is to protect the wildlands that recharge our drinking water, provide habitat for our wildlife, and support our quality of life. While Audubon works hard to restore state funding to our historic land conservation program, Florida Forever, the program is just a name. The real reason we work so hard to see land conservation funded is described on this page by our Regional Conservation Committees, Audubon chapters who have come together to identify the special places vulnerable to development and available for protection if funding is appropriated.

To learn more about Florida Forever, these projects and others like them near you, visit bit.ly/floridaforever today.



Northeast Florida

The **Etoniah/Cross Florida Greenway Project** is a highly ranked Critical Natural Lands project. This project would support many rare habitats and endangered species, and form an important part of the Ocala to Osceola wildlife corridor. Habitats include high-quality scrub, sandhill, and a white cedar swamp that help support many rare plants and animals including the Etoniah Rosemary, Fox Squirrel, and Indigo Snake. It also provides improved recreation for the area in addition to its diverse and robust conservation values.

Central Florida

Lenholt Farm and the Conlin Lake X/Kirchman Tract are top priorities for Central Florida. These two projects would fill in the missing pieces of two larger conservation corridors. Lenholt Farm would link the Ocala National Forest with Wekiva River conservation lands. The Conlin Lake X/Kirchman Tract is 11,000 pristine acres at the headwaters of the Econlockhatchee and Kissimmee rivers. Connecting conservation lands helps ensure that wildlife has sufficient space to establish territories away from the dangers of development and highways.

Indian River Lagoon

The **Indian River Lagoon Blueway** is a group of 36 potential conservation acquisitions spread along the entire 150-mile length of the lagoon and representing five counties. The lagoon struggles with numerous water quality and human development challenges. This project will protect remaining marine tidal marsh and maritime hammocks and scrub along its edges to protect the shoreline and lagoon itself. Migratory and resident birdlife, along with people, will greatly benefit.



America's Everglades

In southern Miami-Dade County, along a limestone ridge east of America's Everglades, lies the remaining tiny fragments of subtropical hardwood hammocks and pine rockland forests unique in the United States. Pine rocklands contain the highest plant diversity of any habitat in Florida and support endemic species like the endangered Miami Tiger Beetle, yet only two percent of this imperiled ecosystem remains. The **Dade County Archipelago** project will protect the best remaining examples of hammocks and rockland forests, saving a rich piece of our natural heritage.

The Heart of America's Everglades Wounded

Lake Okeechobee Suffers from High Water Levels Brought on By Hurricane Irma

One of the earliest reports of ecological damage from Hurricane Irma was from the University of Florida. Forty-four Everglade Snail Kite nests on Lake Okeechobee were destroyed. But that's not all. Storm surge caused water levels on one side of the lake to rise to 20 feet and drop to 9.5 feet on the other while harmful sediments on the lake bottom were stirred up.

Heavy rainfall from Hurricane Irma caused Lake Okeechobee to rise more than 3.5 feet in a single month. And despite the fact that lake levels in advance of Hurricane Irma were unusually low for this time of year, this one storm brought the lake's water levels above 17 feet- its highest level since Hurricane Wilma in 2005.

The last time Lake Okeechobee water levels reached 17 feet, the lake lost about 70 square miles of plant communities after they drowned in the deep, dirty water while fisheries collapsed and did not recover for almost a decade. Underwater plant communities serve important nutrient filtration functions and are the nursery for the famed large-mouthed bass and black crappie fisheries. With the loss of water treatment capacity provided by this vegetation, water quality in the lake declined. Audubon scientists warn that a similar scenario is now unfolding.

Hurricane Irma serves as a reminder that there must be additional water storage projects outside of Lake Okeechobee that move water to the right places at the right time and provide a relief valve for water in the lake. Unfortunately, even while the current disaster on Lake Okeechobee is developing, some policymakers are advocating that the lake be intentionally held at its current damaging deep levels more often in the future. Higher lake levels would create even more dangerous conditions for the people living around the lake and dampen the progress of Everglades restoration. As more extreme weather events hit Florida, Audubon will continue reporting on the health of Lake Okeechobee and advocating for true restoration projects that protect our communities and ecosystems from extreme weather events.



Learn more about America's Everglades in Audubon Florida's latest State of the Everglades report at:

FL.Audubon.org/StateOfTheEverglades



Lake Okeechobee Photo: Adobe Stock



Intergenerational Conservation Leadership: Father's Legacy on Audubon Florida Board Fulfilled by Son

Doug Pitts Jr. Follows in Father's Footsteps

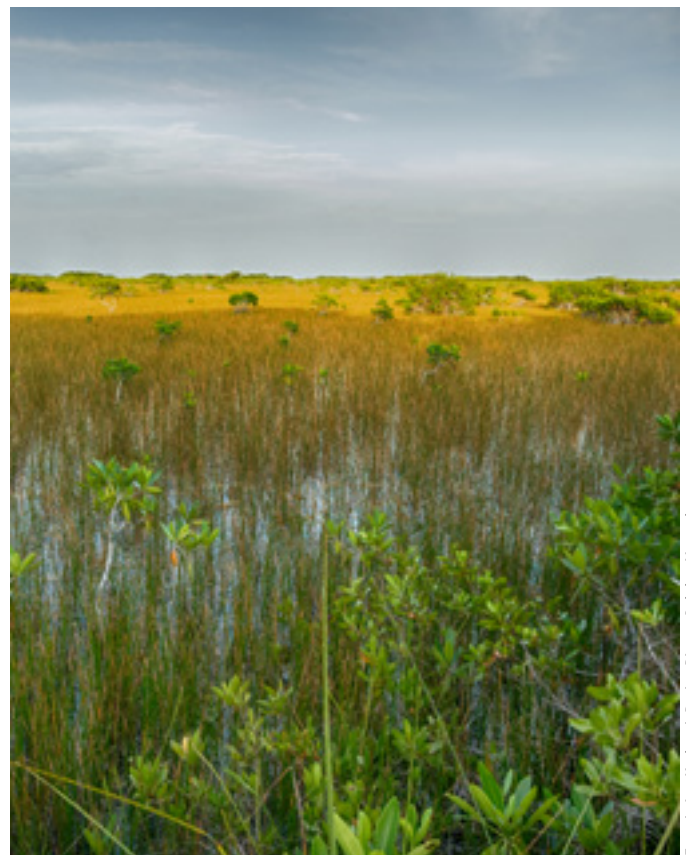
At the core of Audubon is the idea that we all walk in the footsteps of others. Audubon exists because volunteer leaders pitched in time and money to stop the plume trade in America's Everglades. More than a century later, the threats are different, but the way Audubon operates is the same: harness the work, wisdom, and wealth of a volunteer board that is as committed to conservation today as our founders were.

More than 20 years ago, we recruited Miami businessperson Doug Pitts Sr. to help build our capacity to advance Everglades restoration. Doug Sr. had a keen and declared interest in Audubon's work because he had grown up hunting and fishing in the Everglades and over his life saw the degradation of the water conservation areas and other parts of South Florida. Firsthand knowledge of the loss of insects, frogs, and other indicators of ecosystem health is part of Doug's drive to push conservation in America's Everglades. No Audubon meeting is complete without a version of the question, "When are you going to fix the water in the Everglades?"

Doug Sr. served on the Audubon Florida board for more than a decade and set the standard for board governance and performance—making generous donations every year, leading the rebuilding of the Audubon Center for Birds of Prey, and insisting on a business-like approach to managing the organization.

He recently retired from the Audubon Florida board and left a challenging void to fill. In addition to following his dad as a successful businessperson, Doug Jr. recently joined the Audubon Florida board. He has the same warmth, humor, and passion for natural Florida as his father. And still, no conversation is complete without him mentioning being out in America's Everglades with his dad.

From the first Audubon leaders to today's highly engaged board, from father to son, the sense of duty and continuity moves our cause and organization forward.



Everglades National Park Photo: Reinier Munguia

Audubon Members Approve 2018 Conservation Action Agenda at Annual Assembly, Set Ambitious Goals for Audubon Priorities

Hundreds of Audubon members gathered at the 2017 Audubon Assembly to set Audubon Florida's 2018 Conservation Action Agenda. Twelve resolutions – seven regional and five statewide – provide guidance on priority issues and conservation efforts for members, chapter leaders, board directors, staff, and the community. Audubon Florida is the only statewide conservation organization that uses an open and public process to set its policy agenda with all stakeholders invited to participate.

Regional priorities unite Audubon Florida chapters in seven regions. State priority issues integrate with National

With Priorities Set, Audubon Florida Prepares for 2018 Legislative Session

Florida's annual legislative session begins earlier this year with committee weeks happening in Tallahassee this fall and winter, and the 60-day annual legislative session scheduled to begin in January 2018. Lawmakers will be eager to make their mark on Florida as all members in the Florida House of Representatives and half of the Florida Senate are up for reelection in their home districts.

Audubon's priorities before the Florida Legislature include:

Land Conservation Funding

Audubon supports agency budget requests for Florida Forever and the Rural and Family Lands Protection Program that recommend strong funding for land acquisition and conservation easements. Audubon is seeking \$150 million for land conservation.

Everglades Funding

With the successful passage of the Legacy Florida Act in 2016 and Senate Bill 10 in 2017, we must continue to follow through on commitments to America's Everglades. Audubon supports the Florida Department of Environmental Protection's legislative budget request that seeks

Audubon Society's strategic plan (available at StrategicPlan.Audubon.org). The 2018 Conservation Action Agenda (available at FL.Audubon.org/ActionAgenda) centers on these core conservation priorities:

- Everglades Ecosystem,
- Climate Change,
- Water for the Environment,
- Coastal Conservation, and
- Important Bird Areas and Waterways.

\$305.8 million in Everglades funding— the largest single request ever by the agency.

Springs Funding

Funds appropriated by the Florida Legislature can be combined with other funding sources to increase the investments to Florida's Springs that advance projects and programs to improve water quality and increase freshwater flows. Audubon is seeking \$50 million for Florida's Springs.

Other Issues

Audubon is seeking \$5 million for Lake Apopka Restoration.

Audubon counts on its action network to influence lawmakers. To help advance Audubon Florida's conservation work you can:

- Get Involved: FL.Audubon.org/GetInvolved
- Support our Work: GiveToAudubonFlorida.org
- Join our Action Network to Stay informed: FL.Audubon.org/SignUp



Volunteers Answer the Call for Conservation Service Year Round

When Hurricane Irma hit Florida, it created a mess at the Audubon Center for Birds of Prey in Maitland and mangled the boardwalks at Audubon's Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary in Naples. With the same hardy spirit and passion as always, caring volunteers helped Audubon recover quickly. But it doesn't take a natural disaster for volunteers to help Audubon in their communities.

Did you know that more than 1,000 individuals volunteer and contribute more than 30,000 hours of service with Audubon every year?



Photo: RJ Wiley

In the field

In addition to restoring Audubon sanctuaries and centers, volunteers also serve as citizen scientists collecting data on species like the Florida Scrub-jay and Bald Eagle.



Photo: Maggi Diercks Roberts

On the shores

Each year Audubon volunteers take to the beaches to protect rare and endangered coastal birds that nest right on the beach.



Photo: Audubon's Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary

In the community

Florida has 45 Audubon chapters, and each chapter is led by a volunteer board. Volunteers also meet with elected leaders or attend government meetings to advocate for conservation.

2017 was a great year thanks to you! Thank you to our supporters and volunteers who give so generously to Audubon.

Need a New Years' resolution? Visit FL.Audubon.org/GetInvolved to learn more about how to engage with Audubon.

Audubon's Conservation Leadership Program Trains 25 Young Conservation Leaders

Audubon Florida hosted its annual Conservation Leadership Initiative (CLI) at the 2017 Audubon Assembly. The Initiative is a one-of-a-kind leadership development program for conservation-minded college students. Twenty-five students were part of this year's class. Through the Initiative, students from throughout the Sunshine State learn about Audubon's work to protect, conserve, and restore the places that make Florida special.

Audubon Florida is one of the only conservation organizations in the country that actively recruits and inspires college students to protect and conserve their environment. The opportunity includes a mentorship program with Audubon chapter leaders and a special leadership session to train the next generation of conservation leaders. Not only are students better equipped to land a career in conservation after attending CLI, Audubon leaders learn more about how to inspire and engage future generations to care for the environment. Many CLI alums are now Audubon chapter board members, Audubon interns, and employed in the conservation field.

This year, Publix, Darden, SeaWorld, and Audubon staff served on a leadership panel to help students learn how to build their resumes, secure internships, and land a conservation job after graduation! Six students were also selected as Audubon ambassadors and stayed for the entire Audubon Assembly.



Conservation Leadership Initiative Class of 2017 | Photo: Allyson Webb

The class of 2017 was one of the most competitive classes to apply with more than 80 applicants. With a growing network of CLI alumni, Audubon Florida is setting the example for all conservation organizations and building a strong, diverse, and passionate group of CLI graduates each year.

Applications for next year's class will open in Fall 2018. Visit FL.Audubon.org/CLI to learn more.

Did you know: Nearly half of Florida's water use goes toward watering yards, making native landscaping a key tool for water conservation?

Learn how to make your yard bird-friendly by visiting Audubon.org/PlantsForBirds



Audubon Assembly 2017

The 2017 Audubon Assembly was held in St. Augustine this year, and the sold-out event fired up conservation leaders from across the Sunshine State. Florida's water crisis took centerstage as attendees learned in engaging sessions and heard from experts on panel discussions. Underwater photographer and University of Florida Ph.D student Jennifer Adler-Owen headlined the event, showcasing how she connects underwater spring photographs with children to inspire them to care about Florida's water. Thank you to everyone who joined us this year. We look forward to creating even more unforgettable memories as we work to save Florida's environmental future, together.

2017 Award Winners:



Champion of the Everglades
Senator Rob Bradley



Florida's Special Places
Dr. Richard Hilsenbeck



Guy Bradley Award
Team OCEAN, Rookery Bay NERR



Distinguished Philanthropist
Dorothy and John Blair (awarded posthumously)



Volunteer of the Year
Dr. Ann Harwood-Nuss



Small Chapter of the Year
Cedar Keys Audubon



Large Chapter of the Year
Tampa Audubon



Staff Award of Distinction
Carol Cassels



Staff Person of the Year
Celeste De Palma

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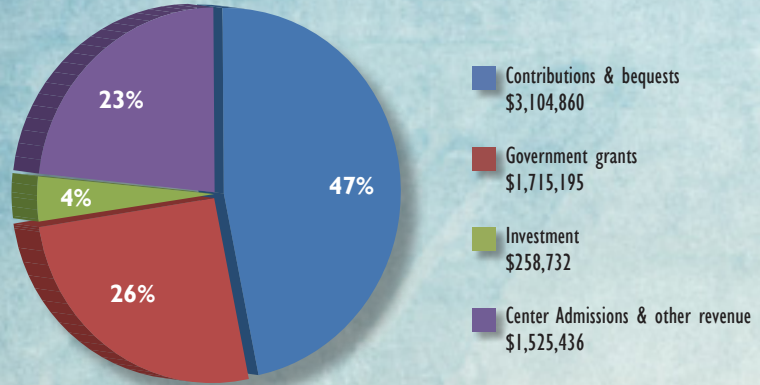
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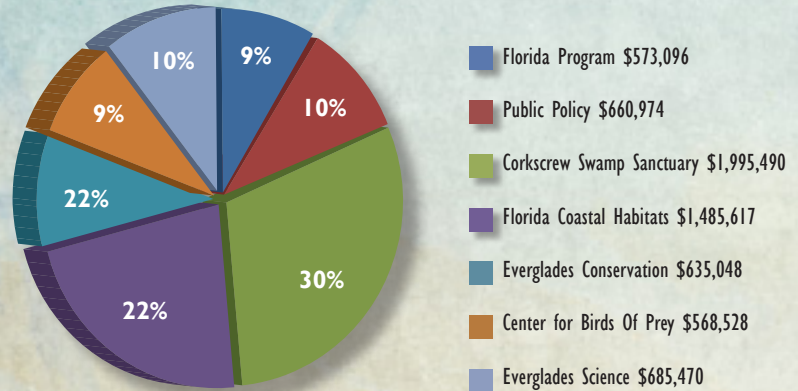
Florida Audubon Society and National Audubon Society operate together as Audubon Florida – led by a state board and operating team. Contributions and other income to Audubon Florida are used to support state level science, education, and conservation programs. Contributions to Florida Audubon Society are used to train volunteer leaders, support advocacy, and build our state endowment. For more on how your funds and planned gifts are used to advance Audubon's mission, please contact Helen Marshall at 305-371-6399 ext. 140 or hmarshall@audubon.org.

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Revenue Sources



Expenses by Program



FLORIDA AUDUBON SOCIETY, INC.

Statement of Assets, Liabilities, and Net Assets As of June 30, 2017

ASSETS

Current Assets		
Cash		24,160
Cash - Restricted		19,348
Charles Schwab Investment		4,324,561
Charles Schwab Investment -Restricted		1,019,732
Receivable - NAS		18,180
Total Current Assets		5,405,981
Other Assets		
Land		3,060,010
Building & Improvements		2,247,387
Furniture & Equipment		44,459
Accumulated Depreciation		-1,209,938
Total Other Assets		4,141,918
TOTAL ASSETS		9,547,899

LIABILITIES & EQUITY

Liabilities		
Equity		16,755
Land-Preservation		503,612
Board Designated Aquisition Fund		3,336,177
Unrestricted Net Assets		4,264,727
Temporarily Restricted Net Assets		581,782
Permanent Restricted Net Assets		300,000
Net Income		544,846
Total Equity		9,531,144
TOTAL LIABILITIES & EQUITY		9,547,899



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Annual Report 2017

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You are what hope looks like to a bird.



Painted Bunting Photo: Jack Rogers

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