



Audubon FLORIDA

*Naturalist*

Spring 2017

# Water for Florida's Future



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Dear Audubon Members and Supporters,

Living in South Florida, I am surrounded by beautiful waterways. From the Miami River, to Biscayne Bay to the Atlantic Ocean, water is seemingly everywhere. But it's also a treasured resource for Floridians. All of us depend on this natural resource for survival, and it's important for us to focus on water for birds, wildlife, and humans. Impacting water policies is one key aspect of our work, but policy alone won't be enough to address these challenging issues. Audubon and our partners:

- Engage the public on water management and water quality issues;
- Restore habitats along rivers, wetlands, and coasts; and
- Explore practical solutions with all stakeholders that contribute to the achievement of our water goals.

Audubon has a proven track record of working with local, state and federal government agencies to protect and conserve Florida's water supply. Our team sounds the alarm when bad decisions are being made and activates our action network when government isn't listening. We also let decision-makers know when they've made the right moves by recognizing their good work. In an ever-expanding state, Florida must manage its water resources appropriately.

Water for Florida's Future is a topic that you'll hear us discuss often. In fact, our next Audubon Assembly will focus on this very important subject. You know this, but mismanaged water resources threaten our drinking water supply and our birds. I say this often, but I am proud to support Audubon's hardworking staff and scientists who are doing the research necessary to identify the problems and offer solutions. I hope you'll join me in supporting their endeavors as well, and do your part to conserve one of our most precious resources.

With appreciation,



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**Eric Draper**, Executive Director  
Audubon Florida

Dear Friends,

The other night we ate a dozen oysters. They were so good, fresh and salty, that we ordered another dozen. Apalachicola oysters, smoked mullet, redfish, swatting no-see-ums and watching herons roost as the sun set over saltmarshes – this is our coastal heritage.

Which is why it was hard to hear our lawyers report that Florida failed to get the Supreme Court of the United States to order Georgia to let more water reach the Apalachicola River. When Audubon filed a friend of the court brief in the case, I was certain that our bird and fish science would inform the Special Master of the unfolding crisis in the Apalachicola Bay. The Special Master recommended against the State of Florida.

Other watersheds are affected by this bad decision. The Suwannee River runs low most years, and most of the other rivers that flow from Georgia and Alabama to Florida's Gulf are stressed as well. The case also matters because in North Florida springs are flowing well below historic levels – too much groundwater is being pumped out. The Suwannee watershed, which includes part of Georgia, is short 130 million gallons per day. Two-thirds of the excess water withdrawals take place outside the watershed.

It seems easy to blame our water problems on Georgia's bad habits except while Florida fights our neighbor, we are depleting our own water resources. Water managers rarely reject permits, and decision-makers in Tallahassee have cut both water agency budgets and science that could help predict and prevent our pending water resource crisis. Worse, the Florida Legislature rolled back water regulations under the terribly false pretense that environmental protections cost jobs.

From the Everglades to the St. Johns River, Florida is allowing water to be pumped and drained from natural systems – and in the process granting irreversible rights to take water from natural systems.

In a recent speech, I put it this way, “No water, no fish...no fish, no herons.” To paraphrase that, no water, no oysters, no oysters, no American Oystercatchers. You get my point.

Help Audubon deploy the science and advocacy needed to protect our water resources. Go to [GiveToAudubonFlorida.org](http://GiveToAudubonFlorida.org).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Eric Draper". The signature is fluid and cursive.

# Land Conservation is the Best Way to Preserve Florida's Water Resources

Pam Meharg, Conservation Chair, Seminole Audubon Society

Water is the elixir of Florida; it brings life to the plants, wildlife, and people that call Florida home. It is the reason why we are surrounded by beautiful ecosystems that support the varied birds and other wildlife that share this magical place with us. But, we are faced with great challenges as we look for ways to provide enough clean water to meet the demands of a rapidly growing population and protect the ecosystems that are supported by our water. While there are many approaches to water conservation, the approach that provides the strongest protection for our water resources is land conservation. This is what voters overwhelmingly approved when they passed the Florida Water and Land Conservation Initiative (Amendment 1) in 2014.

Forests and wetlands are very effective at moderating the influences of pollution and naturally clean pollutants from water. Land conservation is an investment in the future as it steers growth away from sensitive water resources while providing recreational opportunities. Studies show that spending to protect forests, wetlands, and aquifer recharge areas saves money over time as the need for costly water treatment infrastructure is avoided. As Floridians struggle to fix the many problems plaguing our waterways and look for the billions of dollars needed to fund these fixes, we should remember that conserving Florida's special places protects our valuable resources at their source.



Bald Eagle  
Photo: Karsten Reis

Fortunately, Florida has the tools to provide protection for critical lands that protect our water resources. Land conservation programs like the Florida Forever Program and the Rural and Family Lands Protection Program provide the framework and mechanisms needed to protect these valuable lands. And the Water and Land Conservation Amendment (Amendment 1 in 2014) provides the funding. What are we waiting for?

## Remembering John Hankinson, Continuing His Legacy

Eric Draper, Executive Director, Audubon Florida

Florida lost an environmental giant in March with the passing of John Hankinson. I got to know John in 1983 and was quickly joined to his lifelong cause of restoring the Ocklawaha River. For those who did not know John well, consider what he fought for.

The Ocklawaha River is an ecosystem – part of the prettiest part of Florida. However, the Rodman Dam chokes the Ocklawaha. It impounds 16 miles of one of our best rivers, and its reservoir drowns 9,000 acres of floodplain. That is a lot of habitat and beauty – the remnant of a terrible idea. Restoration back to the area's historic beauty has faced political challenges since the 1980s.

John passed away on March 3. We were friends and conservation collaborators, and I already miss his good counsel. I last saw him at the 2016 Audubon Assembly when he gave an opening talk titled “One Gulf.” That is the way he saw things. I asked him to play a tune and sing and his verbal response is still with me. “One Love”, he said. That really is how he saw things with an enormous sense that we and the earth are one.

So John, to honor your legacy, we are going to keep going until the Ocklawaha is “One River” again.



John Hankinson  
Photo: Courtesy of the Orlando Sentinel

# WATER ENERGY BIRDS



Swallowtail Kite

## It's All Connected



### Energy

We all use energy in our daily lifestyle. Be conscious and save energy to reduce environmental impact.



### Water

Our most important resource. All living things depend on it.



### Birds

They play an important role in the health of our environment.

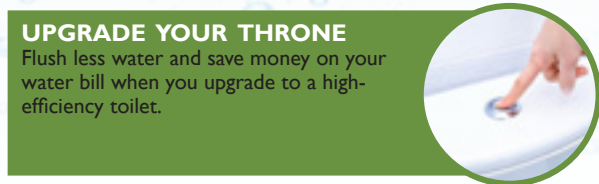
## Audubon Florida launches Water for Florida's Future

Each action you take will make an impact on our water use and save water for our important ecosystems, wildlife and humans that depend on it. Audubon will encourage Floridians to make a difference in conserving our most precious natural resource: water. Here are a few things you can do:



### INSTALL A FAUCET AERATOR

Cut your faucet water use by 30 percent! Faucet aerators are inexpensive and easily attach to most sink faucets.



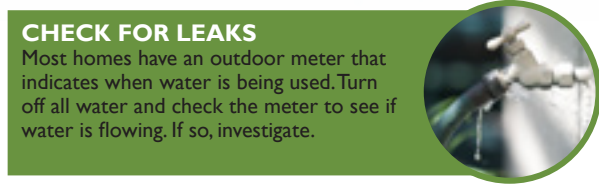
### UPGRADE YOUR THRONE

Flush less water and save money on your water bill when you upgrade to a high-efficiency toilet.



### EACH DROP COUNTS

Be mindful of your water usage. Turn off water when brushing your teeth and take shorter showers. Use dishwashers and washing machines for full loads only.



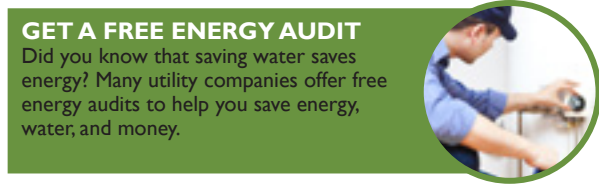
### CHECK FOR LEAKS

Most homes have an outdoor meter that indicates when water is being used. Turn off all water and check the meter to see if water is flowing. If so, investigate.



### PLANT A GARDEN

Save water outdoors by ditching the grass and planting native plants. Visit [Audubon.org/PlantsForBirds](http://Audubon.org/PlantsForBirds) to learn more.



### GET A FREE ENERGY AUDIT

Did you know that saving water saves energy? Many utility companies offer free energy audits to help you save energy, water, and money.



## BECOME A WATER MESSENGER IN CENTRAL FLORIDA

Florida is surrounded by water, yet it is one of our most over used resources. To encourage water conservation, Audubon Florida is launching Water for Florida's Future. In partnership with Duke Energy, Audubon will train volunteers to serve as Audubon Water Messengers and help spread conservation in four Florida counties: Orange, Osceola, Pasco and Pinellas.

For information on how to get involved email [watermessenger@audubon.org](mailto:watermessenger@audubon.org) today!

[WaterForFloridasFuture.com](http://WaterForFloridasFuture.com)

# Audubon Florida's Role in Solving Florida's Water Crisis

Every part of Florida is suffering from water quality and water supply challenges. In most cases, government agencies have fallen short in keeping our water clean and protecting natural systems. Budget cuts and political opposition to water resource protection have created a backlog of problems that require new solutions.

Audubon Florida has been at the forefront of almost every successful effort to protect wetlands and water resources. Using birdlife as the measure of healthy ecosystems, we put science and advocacy behind our recommendations to keep more water in the watershed and keep pollution out. Audubon has a presence everywhere in Florida - meaning that we have members, centers and local Audubon chapters in every part of the Sunshine State.

## **In thinking through Audubon's role, it is helpful to recount our current engagement.**

Audubon's science helps guide Everglades water management decisions, while our policy office is at the forefront of every legislative and agency debate about getting more freshwater in the right place at the right time. Audubon's Lake Okeechobee Sanctuaries give us a unique voice for Florida's largest lake and for reducing unwanted discharges to the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee estuaries. Audubon's Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary is a proving ground for protecting and restoring the shallow wetlands that wading birds need to thrive in the Western Everglades.

Audubon helped shape a Wekiva Springs protection plan and has played a role in other Central Florida watersheds including the Green Swamp, Kissimmee River and the Econlockhatchee River. We work with others to improve Tampa Bay, which is home to some of the Gulf's largest concentrations of nesting wading birds.

In North Florida, Audubon has partnered with others to advocate for restoring the Ocklawaha River and protecting springs from pollution and overuse of groundwater. More recently, we were the lead on a friend of the court brief asking the U.S. Supreme Court to stop Georgia's over consumption of water to protect the Apalachicola River ecosystem.

With our local chapters from Biscayne to Pensacola Bay we are engaging statewide in watershed restoration.

## Audubon Florida Water Action Plan for 2017-2018

Florida's waterways are in serious trouble, and Audubon is stepping up efforts. To be effective, we must harness the power of individuals, science, and government.

### Science-Based Policy

Clean water and water resource management depend on effective agency action. We have good water laws, but weakened state agencies with diminishing resources. State officials have not made water protection a high priority. Other issues often override the importance of protecting water resources. Lack of public involvement and attention reduces the environment's political relevance.

Our water policy laws were put in place in response to citizen pressure reinforced by the news media and business. With the right attention and political will, these laws can accomplish their stated goals. Audubon focuses on solutions – policies, programs, and funding – required to solve Florida's water challenges.

#### Priority Actions:

- Recover \$200 million a year that has been cut from water management district budgets.
- Require reporting and pollution control at the source to achieve a 20 percent statewide reduction in watershed nutrients.
- Encourage efficient water use by agriculture and utilities to conserve and leave 10 percent more water in every watershed statewide.

### Influence

Audubon is effective at mobilizing people at grassroots and decision-making levels while working with other organizations who share our purposes. To be influential, we enlist people to participate in public policy decision-making. Our chapters, centers, science programs, and communications will engage others to be even more influential to accomplish our goals.

#### Priority Actions:

- Leverage the Audubon chapters in 45 communities along with centers and sanctuaries to influence water management and water quality plans, decisions, and actions.
- Partner with like-minded people, businesses, organizations and local agencies to advance solutions even against the conservation wall of indifference put up by many elected leaders.
- Train our members and others to understand and influence water policies and decisions. Individual actions to reduce water use and pollution make a measurable difference.

# Suwannee River Water Management District Brings People Together to Protect Water Resources

Noah Valenstein, Executive Director, Suwannee River Water Management District

No issue is more important to North Florida than water. Our farms, towns, and environment depend on sharing and carefully managing our water.

To recover the flows and water quality of our rivers, springs, and estuaries, and make sure we have enough water for future needs, all stakeholders must work together on solutions.

That's why the Suwannee River Water Management District—the government agency responsible for protecting and managing the water resources of the Big Bend—is placing a priority on working with others to keep more, cleaner water in the natural system.

Progress is made project by project, and I am particularly proud of the District's investment in buying land and projects to treat aquifer-polluting stormwater.

Consider the urgent challenge of Mill Creek Sink near the town of Alachua. Currently, stormwater runoff drains into Mill Creek Sink, threatening Hornsby Spring and the Santa Fe River. Prioritized by science and in partnership



Swallow-tailed Kite  
Photo: James Gray

The Suwannee River Water Management District is in Florida's Big Bend, a region full of spring-fed rivers and nesting Swallow-tailed Kites



When Noah Valenstein is not working to protect Florida's water resources, he enjoys the state's special places with his family.

with our stakeholders, the District is advancing the Mill Creek Sink Water Quality Improvement Project to capture and treat stormwater runoff from I-75, US 441 and nearby development before it drains to the aquifer.

This stormwater treatment project is urgently needed and will go a long way to reducing this particular pollution source.

The Suwannee River Water Management District board and staff are highly committed to securing state and federal funds for projects like these and raising awareness of this important region for water resource spending. I am especially proud of our progress collaborating with local governments, farmers and water conservation advocates.

The work of organizations like Audubon Florida is key to the success of the District's efforts. Audubon's staff helps inform the science behind our projects, makes key land acquisitions possible, and partners on community events to get the public out enjoying the resources we care so deeply about.

To take care of our water, we need to bring people together to put the best ideas forward and secure the resources to get things done. Audubon is a critical partner to achieving that goal.

**Audubon in Action:** While Lake Okeechobee was already below the minimum level set by the state to protect the Lake from severe harm, a state agency used taxpayer dollars for pumps to take even more water out of the Lake for sugarcane irrigation. This contributed to the loss of all but one of the remaining Everglade Snail Kite nests. Audubon used science to defend the Kites and the pumps have not been used since.



## Fighting for the Future of the Apalachicola



Lanark Reef. Photo: Jean Hall

Audubon Florida works statewide to protect rare and sensitive bird habitat. In Northwest Florida, the Apalachicola River and Apalachicola Bay are some of the most diverse ecological waterways in the southern U.S. In 2010, Audubon Florida acquired the last remaining inholding on Lanark Reef, an island complex in Apalachicola Bay that is of global importance for species like the American Oystercatcher. When healthy, Apalachicola Bay supports an oyster industry that yields more than 10 percent of U.S. oysters.

Conservation in this region is complicated by its intimate connection to upstream water sources that originate out of state. Water flowing through the Chattahoochee and Flint Rivers in Georgia join together near the Florida border to form the Apalachicola River, which flows into Apalachicola Bay. Georgia's water use therefore has a fundamental impact on the Apalachicola region and the birds and wildlife that call it home.

Audubon and other conservation groups support the State of Florida in litigation before the U.S. Supreme Court that seeks to resolve a decades-long debate about how water can be allocated between Georgia, Alabama, and Florida. Recently, a court-appointed Special Master found that Florida is harmed by the lack of flow into the Apalachicola River. Unfortunately, the Special Master stopped short of recommending limitations to Georgia's overconsumption of water. He also did not recommend a more even distribution of water between the states, noting that many water decisions are made by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and not at the state level.

With the conservation focus shifting from a legal to a policy strategy, Audubon thanks champions like Senators Nelson and Rubio and Representative Neal Dunn for seeking solutions that can more appropriately balance the consumptive water needs of Georgia and the ecological water needs of Florida. Audubon will continue to weigh in on behalf of the birds and wildlife that are impacted by these threats to the Apalachicola region.

**Audubon in Action:** When the State of Florida needed science to back up its lawsuit demanding that Georgia reduce its water use, Audubon provided scientific information on birdlife in Apalachicola Bay in a friend of the court brief to the U.S. Supreme Court.



American Oystercatcher  
Photo: Emily Hampton

# The Lake Apopka North Shore: A Birding Paradise

Deborah Green, Past President, Orange Audubon Society



Sunset at Lake Apopka. 2016. Orange Audubon Society Chertok Photo Contest, Youth Category, Second Place Winner. Photo: Jessica Kamuda.

Sometimes birds just need a lucky break, and Audubon Florida works with local Audubon chapters to save Florida's special places and protect our birds. For years around Lake Apopka, farmers and others sent nutrient-rich water into the lake, polluting what was once a world-class bass fishing destination. Hoping to reverse that trend, the St. Johns River Water Management District bought this land and began a restoration project that would benefit birds and wildlife as well as the local economy. The 20,000-acre former agricultural area is now a mecca for birds and, of course, birders.

Black-necked Stilts and many other wetland species breed at Lake Apopka North Shore. Ponds host thousands of Ring-necked Ducks, other overwintering waterfowl, and year-round Fulvous and Black-bellied Whistling Ducks. A pair of Groove-billed Anis, Southwestern birds, has been seen for three years near the Clay Island overlook.

In the fall, high Arctic shorebirds on their way to South America stopover in an area called the sod fields. After Hurricane Matthew, Buff-breasted and Stilt Sandpipers stayed a few days and Pectoral Sandpipers hung around a little longer before flying south. Northern Harriers and other raptors, alligators, otters, and bobcats also call the area home. As of March 2017, 369 unique species were recorded, more than any other inland site in the U.S.

In 2012, Orange Audubon Society helped launch the Lake Apopka Wildlife Festival and Birdapalooza, a free festival introducing the community to the wonders of the Lake Apopka North Shore. Responding to constant requests



Immature Little Blue Heron and Tree Frog. 2016 Orange Audubon Society Chertok Photo Contest, Novice Category, First Place Winner. Photo: Lynn Marie Folts.

for access, the District opened the popular Lake Apopka Wildlife Drive in 2015. This 11-mile drive allows viewing and photography from the comfort of a car. The District also opened an 18-mile hiking/biking trail along the lake's shore, in cooperation with Orange and Lake Counties. Although only open Friday, Saturday, Sunday, and federal holidays, the Drive has been used by more than 130,000 visitors since opening two years ago and brought a substantial boost to the local economy.

With the help of two collaborative grants from Audubon Florida, Orange Audubon Society, working with Orange County, has installed interpretive kiosks along both the drive and the trail. Starting in 2017, Orange Audubon Society added a four-day Birding Festival to Birdapalooza (January 18-21, 2018) with guided access into areas where driving is normally prohibited. Lake Apopka truly is a conservation success story, and the birds and birders here demonstrate that restoration and recreation can go hand-in-hand.

To learn more about Birdapalooza and birding at Lake Apopka, visit [birdapalooza.com](http://birdapalooza.com).

# Audubon Internships, Preparing the Next Generation of Conservation Leaders

Sydnee Peterman, Communications Intern, Audubon Florida  
Junior at Florida State University

Audubon Florida has a reputation for defending natural Florida, fighting for conservation, and creating a stronger environmental future in our beautiful Sunshine State. Working in the state policy office, I'm now witnessing first-hand what it takes to effectively support statewide conservation in an ever-evolving state. As a public relations student at Florida State University, I'm grateful I've had the opportunity to work in my area of study and apply my coursework to real-life issues.



policy experts and scientists have taught me that America's Everglades are unlike any other wildlife ecosystem in the world. This magical place is full of beautiful species like the Roseate Spoonbill and Great Egrets.

Now entering my senior year at Florida State, I will take the knowledge and experiences while interning at Audubon and apply each to being a well-informed conservationist, Floridian, and professional. We only have one planet and I'm grateful for the privilege I've had working to conserve the resources near and dear to my hometown and Florida.

Growing up in the Tampa Bay area, I am starting to see how Audubon's conservation efforts apply in my own hometown. I'm now learning that the scenic beaches and sand dunes with bold "Keep Out" signs were intended to protect and conserve the limited beauty our state has left; not to move my monthly beach picnics. My appreciation for Florida's special places has grown in realizing just how beautiful and precious each and every unique ecosystem is in Florida. I've lived in Florida my entire life and didn't know much about the gem just south of my hometown: America's Everglades. Audubon's team of

See how you can  
get involved with  
Audubon Florida's  
work by visiting  
[fl.audubon.org/GetInvolved](http://fl.audubon.org/GetInvolved)



"Interning with the Audubon Center for Birds of Prey in Maitland has been the most challenging but rewarding experience! I've learned so much in just a few months but it will last me a lifetime. I love working with passionate people who do what they love and do it exceptionally well!"

— Paige Hansen, Senior at Rollins College



"A sanctuary as large as Audubon's Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary has a surprising number of moving parts — land management, policy, research, outreach, and more. As an intern, I have mentors from every aspect of refuge management and the experience has been unparalleled for professional development."

— Kristina Hsu, Recent Graduate of American University



"Working at Audubon's Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary in Naples has allowed me to gain a newfound appreciation and scientific understanding of our natural world. I feel that the wide variety of job responsibilities will thoroughly prepare me for a future career in environmental science."

— Nicholas Charles, Recent Graduate of University of Central Florida

## Major Everglades and Estuaries Victory in the Florida Legislature

Toxic algae blooms and other coastal water crises led Audubon Florida to make advancing water storage south of Lake Okeechobee our top legislative priority this legislative session. Senate Bill 10, that will speed up the timeline for the Everglades Agricultural Area (EAA) Reservoir, was championed by heavy hitters in the Florida Legislature including Senate President Joe Negron and Senator Rob Bradley. The bill passed overwhelmingly, and Governor Scott has signaled that he will sign this important Everglades restoration legislation. The passing of Senate Bill 10 is the culmination of a long battle to prioritize Everglades restoration projects that can store and clean water. Water storage helps reduce dangerous discharges from Lake Okeechobee to sensitive coastal estuaries and moves freshwater south to nourish the parched Southern Everglades and Florida Bay. Audubon will fight to ensure the goals of the water storage are met as implementation of Senate Bill 10 gets underway.



Roseate Spoonbills depend on a healthy Greater Everglades Ecosystem.  
Photo: Cynthia Hansen

## Florida is Starting to Realize its Solar Potential



Florida Power & Light Solar Power Plant in DeSoto County

In recent years, Florida has increasingly lived up to its name as the Sunshine State, with more and more solar panels dotting our landscape. Just in the last few months, Florida Power & Light have committed to building eight new solar power plants. Solar energy makes so much sense for Florida's natural environment because every watt of solar electricity reduces energy produced by traditional generation. Increased solar power capacity, along with water and energy conservation and highly-efficient use of natural gas, will help reduce Florida's greenhouse gas emissions. Audubon has already begun partnering with solar power plants to recommend bird and pollinator friendly vegetation.

Along with saving water and reducing air pollution, solar plants have an additional benefit. The land used to build fields of solar panels can also be used to enhance habitat for birds and other wildlife. Fallow land repurposed for solar can also recharge groundwater by allowing rainfall to soak into the earth. With so much of natural Florida being gobbled up by development and agriculture, we should use every acre we can to restore some lost wildlife habitat.

Audubon encourages all Floridians to recognize how Water, Energy, and Birds are connected in a WEB, conserve energy/water, and promote efficient energy production and water use. For more, visit [FL.Audubon.org/climate](http://FL.Audubon.org/climate).

# Federal Rule to Protect Wetlands is Under Attack



America's Everglades | jovannig

*“Unless we can bring clarity, science and reasonableness to how we protect wetlands, we will continue to see imperiled species like Wood Storks disappear from their historic landscapes like Audubon’s Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary and America’s Everglades. There has been no nesting by storks in eight of the last 11 years at the sanctuary, which is unprecedented at this former stronghold for the species. That is largely due to loss of shallow, seasonal wetlands – types that lose protection under unclear rules.”*

*— Jason Lauritsen, Director of Audubon’s Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary*

Wetlands are ecosystems that make up some of Florida’s most biologically rich habitat. In addition to supporting birds and other wildlife, wetlands help improve water quality and provide flood control benefits. In recognition of these important functions, the federal government has an established policy of “no net loss of wetlands” to ensure that the total acreage of wetlands across the country does not decrease. But determining which water bodies qualify as protected “wetlands” under this policy has proven challenging. The Trump Administration has announced a plan to repeal and replace the 2015 Waters of the United States (WOTUS) Rule that determines which wetlands and streams are protected under federal law.

Decisions in two U.S. Supreme Court cases in 2001 and 2006 created confusion about what water bodies are considered wetlands and therefore protected under the Clean Water Act. President Obama developed the WOTUS Rule to eliminate this confusion and protect sensitive wetlands. Audubon scientists have documented a significant increase in wetland losses across Florida since these Supreme Court decisions. In fact, for every one acre of wetland restored from 2004 – 2009, two acres were destroyed. Specific types of wetlands, such as shallow, seasonal wetlands, are disproportionately affected. In Florida, the total acreage of wetlands has decreased by about 44 percent over the past 150 years. At the same time, there has been a 90 percent loss in wading bird populations. These massive losses of wetlands require an urgent and large scale response. The vast and diverse benefits that wetlands provide must be considered in any federal rulemaking that impacts wetlands protections. Any revision of the WOTUS Rule must protect wetlands and wildlife.



Wood Stork  
Photo: Roger Williams

# Bird Rookery Island Cleaners Help Prepare for Annual Nesting Season

Lisa D. Mickey, a Florida Master Naturalist at the Marine Discovery Center and member of Halifax River Audubon



Snowy Egrets  
Photo: Jean Hall

If you watch birds along Florida's coasts, you may have seen them flying with fishing line trailing from their bodies or fishing hooks hanging from their bills. You may have also witnessed the heart-breaking sight of birds fatally entangled in tree branches.

Each year in early February, a team of naturalists from the Marine Discovery Center in New Smyrna Beach makes a visit to the two local bird rookery islands located on the Indian River Lagoon. To make the island safer for nesting birds, the team removes fishing line, equipment, and debris from the mangrove trees.

Throughout the year, the center's naturalists regularly free birds entangled in fishing line or cut down those that could not escape death. These rescues happen around the island.

The February trip offers the chance to walk onto the islands for the only time all year. Long boat hooks, scissors, and knives are used to cut and pull down line before the birds arrive en masse to begin spring courtship and nesting.

It's not a pleasant task to clean these islands of fishing line, but it's a necessary one. Determined workers walk or crawl underneath the mangrove trees looking for fishing line, equipment and debris. Others patrol the perimeter of the islands, pulling down line from the outside of the trees.

These two islands host between 150-200 nests annually with Brown Pelicans, Great Egrets, Snowy Egrets, Cattle Egrets, Black-crowned Night-Herons, Tricolored Herons, and Double-crested Cormorants entering the world here. Many return each year.

Most fishing line is not biodegradable and can last up to 600 years. Because much of it is transparent and thin, birds and other wildlife often become entangled in line that has been improperly disposed in or around the water where these animals live and feed. A bird with yards of trailing fishing line is a danger not only to itself, but also to the rest of the birds in the colony.

Cleaning the rookery islands is an annual tradition that is both sad in what is evident, and uplifting, in what will come. It's the thought of cacophonous squawking that signals spring each year – an event none of us would want to miss.

## Did You Know?

In addition to educating fishers, Audubon cleans up and restores sensitive bird habitats across Florida? Preventing birds from becoming entangled in the first place is the best way to help them.

# What Can You Do?

- Never leave fishing line unattended.
- Never enter an active colony to retrieve entangled wildlife. Instead, call the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission at 1-888-404-FWCC (3922).
- Cast with care and avoid trees, utility lines, bridges, reefs, wildlife, and other anglers.
- If your line gets snagged or breaks, make every effort to safely retrieve it.
- Collect and properly discard line, debris, and other abandoned fishing gear.
- Do not feed wildlife, as it associates humans as a food source and tempts wildlife to approach fishing boats and anglers.
- Participate in fishing line recycling.
- Volunteer for fishing debris clean ups in the fall. Be sure to secure permission before entering an area for clean up.
- Report all entangled wildlife to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) at 1-888-404-FWCC (3922).

Learn more at [myfwc.com/unhook](http://myfwc.com/unhook)



## Thank you to the hosts and sponsors of Conservation & Cocktails in Tallahassee



Events hosts Mike Sheridan and Judy Wilson with honoree Sandy Proctor.

In March, Conservation and Cocktails was held in Tallahassee to support Audubon's coastal conservation efforts and recognize the lifetime achievements of Tallahassee-based wildlife artist Sandy Proctor. More than 150 people attended this wildly successful event. Conservation and Cocktails was the idea of Audubon Florida board member and Tallahassee resident Mike Sheridan and his wife, Judy Wilson. Audubon Florida thanks our generous event hosts and sponsors for investing in our efforts to protect Florida's coastal birds and their habitats.

### Host Committee Members

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# Save the Date: Audubon Assembly October 20-21, 2017

World Golf Village Renaissance St. Augustine - Marriott



Registration Opens August 1, 2017  
Details at [fl.audubon.org/Assembly](http://fl.audubon.org/Assembly)

Wood Duck  
Photo: Robert Bunch