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Audubon FLORIDA

2017 Conservation Action Agenda

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GUIDANCE ON THE 2017 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.

Approval of the Resolutions

A presenter summarized key points of each resolution during the Audubon Assembly at the Friday afternoon session. Approval was granted by voice vote of those in attendance.



STATE POLICY PRIORITY: IMPORTANT BIRD AREAS AND WATERWAYS CONSERVATION

Florida is home to 69 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, many of Florida’s native birds and water-based ecosystems face greater threats.

Audubon and partner organizations have designated a network of Important Bird Areas (IBAs) throughout the hemisphere. Audubon Florida has pledged to develop and promote IBA conservation strategies within the state.

Many IBAs overlap with protected waterways. Water defines Florida’s natural ecosystems. Seasonally abundant rainfall seeps into vast aquifers, wetlands, and floodplains. Freshwater flows through springs and rivers to nourish coastal marshes and seagrass beds.

Although humans have altered much of natural Florida, federal, state, county, and local governments have protected considerable acreage as parks and other conservation lands. Of Florida’s 35 million acres, 28 percent 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 for budget reasons, while the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) is reviewing proposals to increase development and agricultural uses on conservation lands.

The Florida Legislature cut funds for conservation lands in spite of 75 percent voter approval of the Water and Land Conservation Amendment. Lawmakers have also failed to strengthen laws to protect springs and estuaries.

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:

- Actively support state and local laws and programs that protect conservation lands and provide for managing those lands to restore and maintain water, wildlife, and habitat;
- Support the use of funds from Amendment 1 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 and oppose efforts to weaken Florida's water laws;
- 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 bird life 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 (IRL)** is the most biodiverse lagoon ecosystem in the Northern hemisphere and is home to more than 3,000 wildlife and plant species. The IRL is part of the longest barrier island complex in the nation. 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 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 work with the water management district to 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;
- 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 POLICY 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 found on Audubon's Watch List.

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 produces 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 provides a foundation of data and perspective that gives a long view to our recommendations.

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;
- 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;

- 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; and
- Study and understand the effects of sea level rise and other threats to saltmarsh and propose strategies to reduce those threats.

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 and other oil spill penalty monies for ecosystem restoration rather than harmful development schemes; and
- Push for Gulf restoration projects that benefit birds and their habitats.



STATE POLICY PRIORITY: GREATER EVERGLADES ECOSYSTEM

Super-colonies of wading birds and an abundance of other wildlife once defined the Greater Everglades Ecosystem. The diversion of water in the Everglades for development and agriculture resulted in significant wildlife declines and water management challenges. The State of Florida and the federal government launched Everglades restoration to improve the quality, quantity, timing and distribution of water and to increase the spatial extent of wetland habitats.

The Greater Everglades may be thought of as having “four corners” – the Northern Everglades and the Kissimmee River flood plain; the Central Everglades’ Lake Okeechobee and Water Conservation Areas; Everglades National Park, and Florida and Biscayne Bays in the south; and the Western Everglades’ Big Cypress and Corkscrew Swamps flowing into coastal estuaries.

The mismanagement of Lake Okeechobee and its watershed often results in too much water in the wet season or wet years that is discharged in harmful releases to the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee estuaries in order to protect the aging Herbert Hoover Dike and the Lake’s marshes. This often leaves too little water in the dry season and dry years and results in competition for the Lake’s water between agriculture, the Lake and the Caloosahatchee. The Lake’s water carries high levels of nutrients from upstream agriculture and development.

Water that flows south from the Water Conservation Areas meets a series of levees and canals that serve as barriers to sheetflow and additional nutrients added from the Everglades Agricultural Area. Further south, the water flowing into Florida Bay is currently disconnected from upstream freshwater sources.

Wetlands in the Everglades are often drained and filled or otherwise converted for commercial and residential development, agricultural use, and mining. This has led to additional losses of habitat and as much as a 90 percent reduction of historic populations of wading birds.

Roseate Spoonbills, Wood Storks, Everglade Snail Kites, and Bald Eagles are indicative of the harm that has occurred to the natural system. Audubon measures success in Everglades restoration by the increases in populations of these and other native birds in their Everglades habitat, and the forage fish on which they depend. The Greater Everglades Ecosystem 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.

Everglades restoration projects will provide for and push against rising seas and saltwater intrusion that are already occurring as a result of climate change.

Audubon's history is closely aligned with Everglades conservation. Starting with wildlife wardens and continuing with field research, sanctuaries, and advocacy, Audubon's presence in all parts of the Everglades gives our organization a special role and responsibility. Working with allies, staff, and volunteer leaders, we use science to shape the best conservation and restoration decisions and then policy, communications, and advocacy to advance specific conservation results.

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, including projects that reconnect Lake Okeechobee to the Southern Everglades and provide additional storage in the Everglades Agricultural Area;
- 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

- Engage and influence permitting agencies to do a better job of assessing wetlands and giving appropriate values to short-hydroperiod wetlands;
- Promote restoration projects that expand the spatial extent of wetlands, such as the Broward County Water Preserve Areas and the C-139 Annex project; 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 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 lease;
- 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, 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
- Conduct a program of outreach to communicate with, educate, and engage people, with an emphasis on diverse audiences, about the ecological benefits of restoration.



STATE POLICY 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 we receive each year. 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, competition for water between people and the environment. Irrigation, industrial uses, and public supply reduce the amount of water available for our springs, rivers, and wetlands. Reduced supplies force water managers to apply the concept of “shared adversity” to their decisions, though natural systems often suffer most of the harm.

Impaired water quality is also a significant source of harm throughout the state. Pollution from agricultural, industrial, and urban sources has been transforming Florida’s waterways and harming ecological communities. Farm and urban fertilizers combined with human and animal waste have impaired our 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 are not receiving the funding and priority required to address the magnitude of the challenges we face.

The combined effects of drainage, pollution, and overuse of water threaten the sustainability of Florida’s natural systems, its economy, and quality of life for its citizens.

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, set protective limits on other uses, and implement recovery strategies for impacted water bodies;
- 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 management decisions, and adequately fund 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 wetland permitting criteria and practices to be protective of the ecological roles of wetlands, avoiding off-site mitigation when location is important.

Advocate for Sustainable Water Supplies

- Require water conservation programs with defined savings goals as a condition for issuance of 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 incentive programs;
- 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 storm water, that improve conditions in natural systems; and
- Discourage water supply projects that take water away from natural systems.

Advocate for Water Quality

- Strengthen state and local stormwater treatment requirements to be protective of ecological health;
- Require new and existing water users to connect to central sewer where feasible and beneficial;
- 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.



STATE POLICY PRIORITY: CLIMATE CHANGE

Scientific consensus, documented by the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), is that atmospheric concentration of greenhouse gases (GHG) are increasing and causing climate change. The primary GHG is carbon dioxide (CO₂).

Increased concentration of GHG is leading to increased average annual global temperatures, which is causing altered weather patterns and warmer seas. Effects of warming include sea level rise, severe droughts and storms, and shifting seasonal temperatures. The current rate of change is unprecedented. Effects on humans, wildlife, and natural systems are predicted to be severe and to include disruptions to water supply, global food production, and coastal flooding.

Florida is especially vulnerable to sea level rise, 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.

Carbon dioxide accounts for nearly three-quarters of global greenhouse gas emissions and 82 percent of U.S. greenhouse gas emissions. Fossil fuel power plants are the largest source of U.S. CO₂ emissions, comprising 31 percent of total GHG.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) recently issued their Clean Power Plan (CPP) with final emission guidelines for states (including Florida) to develop plans to reduce GHG emissions from existing fossil fuel-fired electric generating units (EGUs). When the Clean Power Plan is fully in place in 2030, carbon pollution from the power sector will be 32 percent below 2005 levels.

Previously, the EPA determined that greenhouse gas pollution threatens the welfare of Americans by leading to long-lasting changes in our climate and a range of negative effects on human health and the environment. EPA rules require Florida to submit a final plan to ensure that power plants individually, together, or in combination with other measures achieve interim CO₂ emissions performance rates from 2022 to 2029 and final CO₂ emission performance rates, rate-based goals or mass-based goals by 2030.

The Clean Power Plan encouraged Florida to adopt a Clean Energy Incentive Program (CEIP) which will reward early investments in no-carbon renewable energy (RE) generation and demand-side energy efficiency (EE) measures that generate carbon-free energy or reduce end-use energy demand. Emission Rate Credits (ERCs) allow states to encourage early zero-emitting wind or solar power projects and EE projects. Incentives will encourage EE investments in low-income communities.

The Clean Power Plan allows states to select energy efficiency and solar as a compliance path.

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 submit a state Clean Power Plan to the EPA that produces:
 - Target reductions that help meet a nationwide 32 percent reduction goal for CO₂ by 2030 and interim goals that significantly reduce carbon dioxide pollution;
 - Early 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 the adoption of rules 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, with new purchases being ENERGY STAR labeled products;
- Encourage local governments to require ENERGY STAR qualified appliances for all new construction;
- Encourage use of online meetings, ride sharing, bicycling, walking, and public transportation and support the transition to hybrid and electric vehicles;
- 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.

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 habitats and water resources;
- Oppose ecologically harmful and expensive adaptation strategies, including beach armoring, sea walls, 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.



REGIONAL CONSERVATION PRIORITY: CENTRAL FLORIDA

The Central Florida Regional Conservation Committee (RCC) encompasses nine chapters in seven counties with 47 miles of beaches on the Atlantic Ocean, which are year-round home to many species of birds, mammals, reptiles and amphibians as well as wintering grounds for tens of thousands of gulls. It covers the central ridge of Florida with all its native biodiversity. These ecosystems are home to many important species that 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, which are vital to humans as well as wildlife. Some of these ecosystems include the Indian River estuary, Lake Wales and Mount Dora ridge areas, the Kissimmee, St. Johns and Wekiva River Basins, the Green Swamp and its associated rivers (Hillsborough, Ocklawaha, Peace and Withlacoochee).

While continuing our work begun with regard to 2016 regional priorities; i.e.: to protect, enhance and acquire conservation lands by partnering with land owners 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 nine 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 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 and 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 Bird Habitat

- With the reduction of state review of local government land use decisions, Audubon chapters will work together to monitor the agendas of county and city boards and commissions that make land use decisions, intervene by using organized public comment and testimony opposing proposals that adversely impact important bird habitat, recommend changes to land use and land management plans that conserve larger habitat areas, and oppose unwise decisions to surplus public land.



REGIONAL CONSERVATION PRIORITY: NORTHEAST FLORIDA

From Nassau to Flagler along the coast, and Marion to Hamilton counties inland, the Northeast region covers sixteen counties and is served by seven Audubon chapters and two Audubon staff – one based on the coast and 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;
- Educating resource managers about bird-related data and tools available to them through citizen-science efforts like eBird;
- Increasing our outreach and conservation capacity by increasing participation in citizen science programs;
- 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.



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 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 state waters although allowed in some federal waters in the Gulf of Mexico and other Gulf states' nearshore waters. However, this 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 implementation of Amendment 1 and the sound management of public conservation lands, defending them from incompatible use proposals ranging from oil and gas exploration to recreational over-development and
- Support meaningful Gulf restoration by participating in NWFLWMD SWIM process, advocating for conservation uses of RESTORE Act funds, and engaging in coastal bird citizen science and stewardship.



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 newly 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:

Build our conservation and advocacy capacity featuring citizen science programs (such as EagleWatch, Bluebird Trails, Shorebird stewarding, Colony Watch, Jay Watch, Climate Messengers, etc.) to expand partnerships and engage new audiences by:

- Developing and training on guidelines for engagement and best practices for advocacy;
- Recruiting and coaching advocates to speak at public meetings in support of environmentally sound projects and green corridors and against projects that threaten “Special Places”, climate strongholds and coastal habitats;
- Following up with local college and university students that attended the Audubon Assembly Conservation Leadership Initiative (CLI) to with the goal of bringing young climate messengers into the Audubon network; and
- Engaging Audubon members and partners to support the establishment of Critical Wildlife Areas (CWAs).



REGIONAL CONSERVATION PRIORITY: INDIAN RIVER LAGOON

The Indian River Lagoon is in crisis.

The Indian River Lagoon RCC will continue to advocate for acquisition of sites listed in the Florida Forever IRL Blueway project, coordinate local and regional efforts to compel the Florida legislature to appropriate Amendment 1 funds for IRL restoration and acquisition of conservation lands, and educate local governments and communities about climate change impacts to at-risk bird species and to the 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:

Promote the use of Amendment 1 funds to buy land south of Lake Okeechobee for water storage

- IRL chapters will work to get support for State Senator Negron’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 goal is to reduce harmful releases of water from Lake Okeechobee to the IRL by sending more water south through the EAA and building more system-wide storage. 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.).

Monitor the IRL Council’s project planning process and promote projects consistent with our RCC priorities

- IRL chapters will work together to obtain city and county match for those NEP and state funded projects that are consistent with our RCC priorities. We will use primarily the IRL Council’s list of restoration and priority projects as the basis to identify such projects, and will jointly explore and promote options for local funding (e.g., Brevard County’s proposed 0.5 percent sales tax for IRL water quality projects). As above, our chapters will identify, track and report metrics to evaluate the result of these actions.



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, and helping to secure federal and state public lands. Audubon Florida and its five Southwest Florida chapters 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.

Beginning in summer, 2016, the Army Corps of Engineers initiated the Western Everglades Restoration Project, a three-year planning effort to identify an approximately \$2 billion set of restoration projects. The scope of the potential plan is still being determined and many vital ecological restoration opportunities exist throughout the Southwest Florida region.

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 disappear unless better planning for resource-oriented adaptation and mitigation occur.

These chapters utilize the science and policy base provided by the Audubon Florida staff network, especially that of Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary scientists, as well as their own intimate local knowledge.

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, public officials, and governmental agencies to cooperatively advance two regional priorities:

- Advocate for a beneficial scope and plan for the Western Everglades project in the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan and

- 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 between local governments and agencies.

Implementation of these priorities will require diverse strategies and creative collaboration amongst these five Audubon organizations. Some expected actions include advocating wetland restoration on a watershed scale, proactive participation in the WERP federal planning process, promoting the removal of obsolete drainage infrastructure in the Big Cypress Swamp, coastal bird habitat protection and acquisition, promotion of local renewable energy generation and efficiency, engagement of local government officials, and advancing 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 provides 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 is 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 to 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;
 - **Wildlife:** Improve performance of Everglades restoration projects to increase populations of wading birds, Everglade Snail Kites and other wildlife. Locally, contribute to the restoration and preservation of wildlife habitat, including reducing population of invasive species, so pockets of quality habitat exist within the urban environment;
 - **Ecosystem Protection:** 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 contribute to efforts to reduce emissions causing climate change; and
 - **Funding:** Advocate for intended use of Amendment 1 funds for restoration projects, including Everglades restoration. Increase funding for the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) by reaching out to elected officials and members of the SFWMD Governing Board.

Bird Conservation

- Participate in bird monitoring programs, increase and enhance the body of knowledge involving birds in the Everglades and Southeast Florida and use this knowledge to prevent further degradation and fragmentation to reestablish a contiguous migratory bird habitat that aid in increasing survival of resident and migratory species and
- Halt threats to critical bird habitat, such as elimination of Arthur R. Marshall Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge.