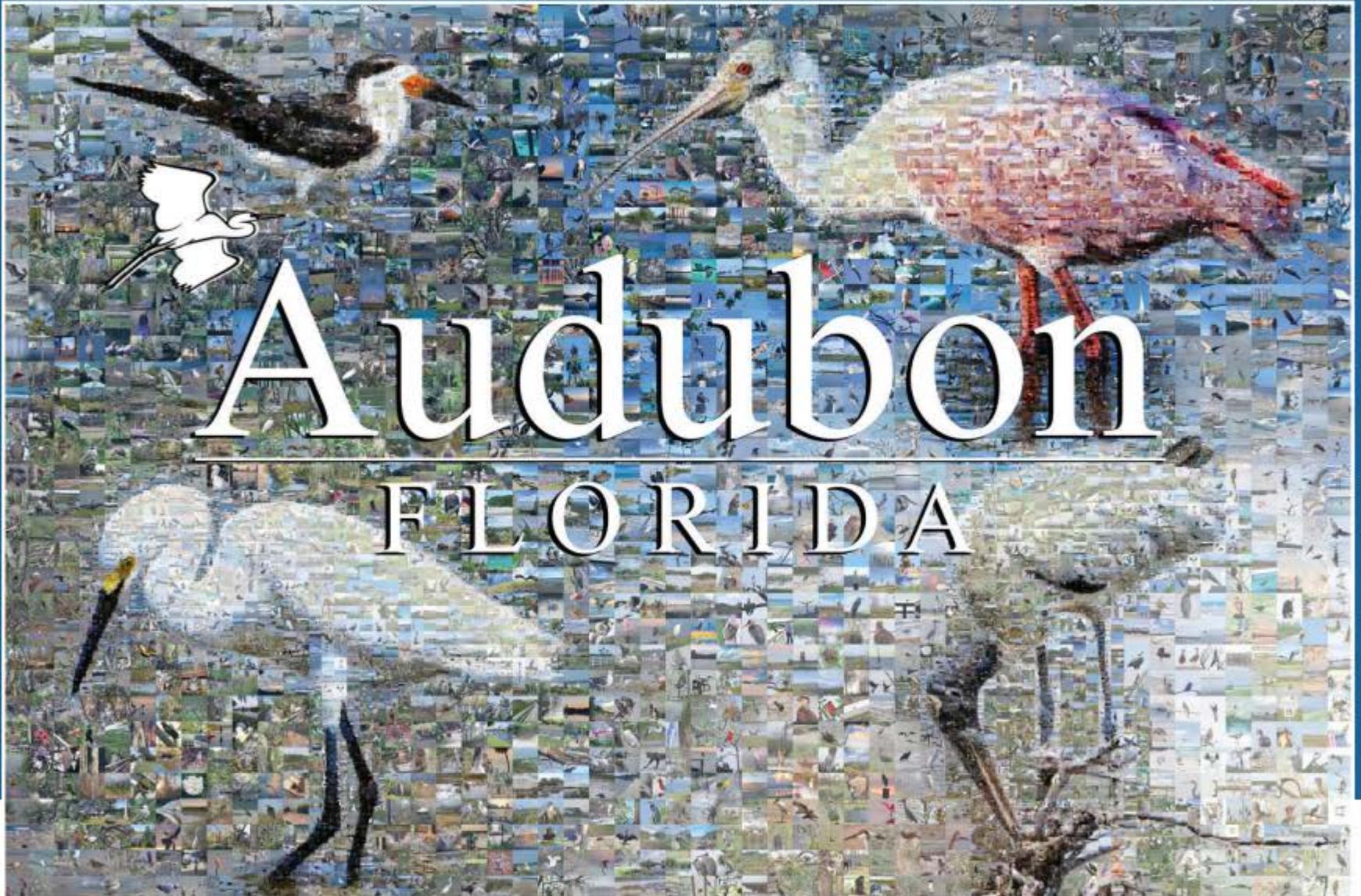


Audubon Florida 2021

Natural Climate Solutions

AUDUBON WORKS TOWARDS A MORE RESILIENT FLORIDA



Audubon Florida members contributed more than 2,400 photos of what they hope to protect in their communities, from beautiful birds to natural landscapes. We brought those images together in this collage representing Florida's most iconic species.

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GUIDANCE ON THE 2022 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 ratified by the Audubon Florida Board of Directors.

Regional Conservation and Statewide Policy Priorities

Audubon's Florida chapters are organized into seven geographic and ecological regions and meet together as Regional Conservation Committees (RCCs). Chapter leaders, supported by policy staff, recommend conservation priorities that reflect a commitment to work together and prioritize regional efforts. State policy priorities are recommended by Audubon Florida's Board Public Policy Committee and staff to frame our approach to important issues and campaigns and to leverage our resources to the greatest effect.



STATE CONSERVATION PRIORITY: COASTAL CONSERVATION 2022

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. The geology of Florida's coasts is always in flux and Florida's birdlife is too.

Florida's coasts are home to a remarkable diversity of habitats, birds, and other wildlife. Marshes, beaches and shoals, barrier islands and inlets, seagrass meadows, maritime hammocks, coastal scrub, and mangroves constitute a complex and rich mosaic of living coastal systems that have evolved in response to climate and geophysical events. Many coastal bird species are now state or federally listed, designated species of greatest conservation need, or considered priority species by National Audubon Society.

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, continued development, coastal armoring, dredging and filling, recreational disturbance, and rising sea levels.

Gulf Coast marine environments supporting shorebirds, seabirds, wading birds, and waterfowl are threatened by excessive nutrient loads in surface water runoff from urban and agricultural fertilizer applications, stormwater, septic tank drainage, and periodic wastewater treatment plant failures that discharge to estuarine systems draining to both the Gulf and Atlantic coasts. These high nutrient loads contribute to cyanobacteria blooms in coastal estuaries and to the persistence and spread of red tide outbreaks in Gulf waters for which there are no short-term corrections. Coastal waterbird die-offs are increasingly common from both known and unknown causes and require increased resource investment to analyze and resolve.

Because of the extraordinary value and tremendous vulnerability of these resources, Audubon Florida has long ranked coastal conservation among its highest priorities. National Audubon Society has also elevated coastal habitats as a national priority under the auspices of its Strategic Plan, the Atlantic Flyway Initiative, and Gulf Coast Conservation Program.

Additionally, Audubon Florida advocates for natural climate solutions in the face of climate change and sea level rise together with adaptation and mitigation strategies, especially for coastal habitats like saltmarsh, the beach-dune system, and maritime hammock. We have

been leaders in Florida on the restoration of the Gulf of Mexico after the Deepwater Horizon oil spill disaster.

Florida's ecological connection to the other Gulf States was underscored by the shared adversity of the Deepwater Horizon disaster and our continued efforts to work together on recovering the Gulf's waterbird populations and habitats. Audubon's Gulf of Mexico network helped pass the federal RESTORE Act to commit penalty funds from the spill to Gulf restoration and recovery of coastal waterbird populations.

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 engages in coastal conservation through our geographically distributed staff expertise, volunteer steward leadership, local Audubon organizations, and our many partner agencies and organizations. Site-based habitat and species management throughout Florida produce tangible results. In addition to on-the-ground improvements, the resulting data inform our policy work by identifying immediate threats to Important Bird Areas and imperiled species.

Deep and diverse expertise in these issues combined with a large cadre of committed volunteers makes it possible to provide leadership to the Florida Shorebird Alliance—a partnership of Audubon Florida, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Florida State Parks, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, municipalities, and other strategic organizations. Our broad grassroots base positions us well to advocate at local levels for sea level rise mitigation strategies that can 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 stewardship and habitat restoration projects and, in fact, to 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 coastal bird populations and coastal habitat changes helps inform adaptive strategies as birds and people face sea level rise. Long-term coastal resource conservation and management work provide a foundation of data and perspective that gives a long view to support 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 diverse grassroots networks, and will work with diverse conservation allies, business and community leaders, public officials, and agencies to:

Employ Sound Science to Guide Conservation

- Connect a diversity of people to nature using coastal birdlife as a way to engage them in protection of Florida's special coastal places through partnerships such as Audubon's Atlantic Flyway Initiative's Coasts program and the Florida Shorebird Alliance;
- Recruit, train, and deploy a broad diversity of volunteers in a variety of stewardship capacities at Gulf Coast and Northeast Florida beach-nesting, rooftop-nesting, and wading bird rookery sites to actively help conserve coastal birds;
- Improve the management of coastal Important Bird Areas and other special places through bird stewarding programs and partnerships with Audubon chapters and other local communities;
- Partner with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission to convene spring and fall shorebird partnership meetings on the Gulf Coast and in Northeast Florida to identify and address conservation successes and challenges;
- Actively engage in nesting site disturbance abatement with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and through stewardship initiatives incorporating volunteers and Florida Shorebird Alliance partners;
- Actively seek funding opportunities for coastal habitat creation, enhancement, and restoration projects that provide additional habitat for coastal waterbirds as their habitats shift due to sea level rise;
- Implement migratory and wintering coastal bird population data collection focused on Red Knot, Piping Plover, and migratory shorebird feeding and roosting flocks at key Gulf Coast sites to better conserve non-breeding bird hotspots; and
- Help assess the impacts to birds and habitat from post-nesting season storm events like Hurricanes Irma and Michael, and in-season storm events like subtropical storm Alberto to identify priorities for recovery or restoration efforts.

Advocate 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;
- Advocate for freshwater management rules and policies that will reduce nutrient loads in coastal waters from wastewater, urban and agricultural fertilizer applications, and stormwater sources in order to decrease the frequency, duration, and intensity of cyanobacteria and red tide outbreaks as well as the spread of novel bacterial pathogens affecting wild birds;
- Promote planned shoreline retreat for vulnerable human communities, rather than armoring, in the face of climate change;
- Promote habitat protection strategies to provide sites for coastal habitats and wildlife to persist in coastal areas and also routes to migrate upslope ahead of sea level rise;
- Encourage the planning authorities of coastal local governments to consider sea level rise in decisions about zoning, affordable housing, planned development, and future infrastructure;
- Advocate for the value of coastal habitats for protection from the effects of climate change in ways that will prevent climate change gentrification in communities of color (e.g., carbon sequestration and wave attenuation value of marshes and shoals);

- Ensure adequate resources exist to enforce Critical Wildlife Area protections through collaboration with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission by implementing patrol schedules and increased officer effort at key nesting sites;
- Remain vigilant regarding attempts to open Florida's nearshore waters and the eastern Gulf of Mexico to oil and gas exploration, drilling, and production, and promote clean energy alternatives;
- Encourage use of RESTORE Act, other oil spill penalty monies, and hurricane recovery funding for ecosystem restoration and resilience rather than harmful development schemes or coastal armoring; and
- Collaborate with Audubon's Gulf Policy Team and hurricane recovery team to secure funding for restoration projects that benefit birds and their habitats.

STATE POLICY PRIORITY: WATER 2022

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. Florida's aquatic systems and unique position in the Atlantic Flyway make it a critical resource for resident and migratory birds.

Alteration of Florida's landscape has drastically reduced its ability to store the plentiful water that the state receives. This has resulted in over-drained wetlands and depleted aquifers, while simultaneously delivering harmful amounts of nutrient-laden water to our coastal ecosystems. Climate change represents an existential threat to Florida's environment, economy, and way of life. As the planet warms, Florida is ground zero for impacts such as sea level rise, extreme heat and stronger storms exacerbating the effects of Florida's rainy and dry season extremes. Red tide and blue-green algae events are increasing as warming temperatures and increasing nutrient pollution discharges create a perfect storm resulting in fish kills and dangerous health risks for Floridians. People, industry, and nature are without sufficient water during dry periods and droughts. Florida's birdlife, including the iconic wading birds of the Everglades, has suffered significant harm from the loss of water available to natural systems. We must address these problems at the source.

Increasingly high demands for water throughout Florida combined with dwindling natural storage capacity have created an intense, and unfortunate, struggle for water between people and the environment. Agricultural, industrial, and public uses all compete for the water needed to maintain healthy springs, rivers, and wetlands.

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

Access to clean, safe water for consumption and recreation is a basic human right. Communities of color and low-income communities are often faced with more than their fair share of water pollution challenges. These same communities are also more likely to be exposed to unsafe drinking water and toxic pollution.

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 Audubon 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, Rivers, Lakes, and Springs

- Engage with Water Management Districts (WMDs) as key stakeholders in healthy water systems in the state of Florida;
- Encourage WMDs to identify and reserve water needed for the health of natural systems on a priority basis, including water made available by and for restoration projects;
- Encourage WMDs to set protective limits for flows and levels in water bodies, and implement effective recovery strategies where these are not met;
- Advocate for sufficient funding, including avoidance of rolled back tax rates for WMDs to perform direct water supply duties including water conservation, ecosystem restoration, alternative water supply, water storage projects, and water quality monitoring programs.
- Encourage expansion and improvement of floodplain, springshed, and water recharge protection through public land acquisition, conservation easements, and restoration programs;
- Promote restoration projects that improve freshwater flows to and expand the spatial extent of wetlands as a preferred method for achieving restoration goals;
- Integrate the science and observations of climate change-driven ecological impacts into regulatory, restoration, and research-based water resource efforts;
- Assist water managers in creating operational plans that are protective of natural systems and deliver the benefits expected from restoration projects;
- Use birds as a visible and meaningful metric of health of priority ecosystems;
- Work to improve wetland protections at state and local levels to ensure no loss, seek enhanced protection and oversight of permitting associated with the state's assumption of the section 404 of the Clean Water Act governing dredge and fill activities;
- Work with private landowners to encourage improved habitat and watershed connectivity through payment for environmental services, wetland restoration, and conservation easements in priority areas like the Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed and the Everglades Headwaters National Wildlife Refuge; and
- Prioritize work to improve ecological conditions in important aquatic resources throughout the state including the Springs Coast, Big Bend, the Apalachicola River and Bay, the Green Swamp ecosystem, the Greater Everglades ecosystem, and Audubon's Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary.

Advocate for Sustainable Water Supplies for Natural and Built Systems

- Advocate for water conservation programs to include water use reduction and beneficial use of alternative water supplies as conditions in water supply consumptive use permits;

- Advocate for stronger efficiency standards for all water uses in combination with sustainable limits on use that ensure the protection of aquifers and aquatic habitats;
- Promote development and funding of water conservation efforts, including education and incentives;
- Promote sustainable alternative water supply projects, including those using reclaimed and storm water, that improve conditions in natural systems; and
- Encourage decision-makers to support projects that have a positive effect on water availability for natural systems.

Advocate for Water Quality Improvements

- Campaign for stronger state and local stormwater and wastewater treatment requirements that protect ecological health;
- Endorse requirements, especially in impaired basins, for:
 - Connections to central sewer and the use of enhanced nitrogen-removing septic systems where appropriate
 - Fertilizer use to be limited to the standard of “no harm” to water resources;
 - Elimination of land application of sewage biosolids; and incentivize innovative technology to dispose of biosolids.
- Encourage reclaimed water use in ways that benefit or protect the water quality of natural systems;
- Engage agencies to ensure water quality milestones from the Restoration Strategies for Clean Water for the Everglades plan are met on schedule and the consent decree overseeing Everglades phosphorus standards remains in place;
- Assist agencies in the creation and revision of Basin Management Action Plans that focus on source controls, include a higher level of oversight of permits and permitted facilities, effective projects and strategies to reduce nutrient impacts on receiving water bodies;
- Work to improve enforcement of state water laws, including those established or modified by recent legislation, to achieve water quality improvements throughout the state;
- Seek to improve agricultural water use and management through the improvement of the substance, funding, enrollment in, and enforcement of agricultural best management practices.

Continue our Long-standing Work to Protect and Restore America’s Everglades

- Secure increased and consistent funding at the state and federal levels to advance the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan and other key Everglades restoration programs in order to increase freshwater storage, maximize freshwater flows and achieve maximum ecosystem benefits as quickly as possible;
- Honor Legacy Florida Act’s commitment of at least \$200 million annually towards Everglades’ restoration projects and programs and secure at least \$200 million from the federal government to match Florida’s commitment. Recurrent funding is critical to maintain momentum on ongoing projects like the C-43 Reservoir, C-44 Reservoir, Stormwater Treatment Areas in the Northern Estuaries, Picayune Strand in SW Florida, and the Everglades Agricultural Area Reservoir and Stormwater Treatment Area;

- Expedite the completion of the Everglades Agricultural Area Reservoir and advance the Central Everglades Project to direct more water to Everglades National Park and Florida Bay.
- Make water quality a priority – strengthen efforts at the local, state, and federal levels that reduce excessive nutrients from entering Lake Okeechobee and the Northern Estuaries and advocate for water management decisions that prioritize the ecological functions and long-term health of Lake Okeechobee and the Northern Estuaries;
- Advocate for Lake Okeechobee management practices which build in operational flexibility to ensure that water is sent south through the Everglades, to minimize harmful discharges to the estuaries, to prevent extreme lake levels, and to include recovery modes for all these systems after damaging events;
- Continue to advocate for increased cooperative water storage solutions north of Lake Okeechobee to provide additional capacity, reduce excessive water flows, and enable water quality treatment;
- Evaluate Everglades restoration projects that have come on line to measure restoration success;
- Continue efforts to improve our knowledge on the status and ecology of Roseate Spoonbills, Wood Storks, Southern Bald Eagles, and the Everglades Snail Kite – important indicator species that are being used to assess and refine Everglades restoration;
- Educate people about the ecological benefits of Everglades restoration through Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary and Audubon’s EagleWatch programs;
- Bring elected officials into the Everglades ecosystem by offering educational tours of Lake Okeechobee and Florida Bay with Audubon’s science and policy staff;
- Advocate for equitable water policies that ensure all people have access to clean, safe, and affordable water supplies;
- Research and assess where new policy can support environmental justice;
- Provide opportunities for meaningful engagement with diverse communities and groups as policy is shaped; and
- Advocate that local, state, and federal environmental programs and agency decisions are administered fairly and without regard to race.

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

Solving human-induced climate change requires collective, industrial, and institutional changes. Heat-trapping gases already in the atmosphere have set us on a path to a hotter future with even more climate-related impacts. The magnitude of climate change beyond the next few decades depends primarily on the amount of heat-trapping gases that human activities continue to emit globally, now and in the future.

A changing climate negatively effects ecosystems and the benefits they provide to society, overwhelming their capacity to adapt to and mitigate some of the impacts of extreme events like fires, floods, and severe storms. Observed alterations in the timing of critical biological events such as spring bud burst and substantial range shifts of many species illustrate the already occurring impacts to biodiversity. Accelerated climate change creates an increased risk of species extinction. Events such droughts, floods, wildfires, and pest outbreaks associated with and exacerbated by climate change are already disrupting and destroying ecosystems. These changes limit the capacity of ecosystems to continue to play critical roles in reducing the impacts of these extreme events on flora, fauna, infrastructure, and human communities.

Bird wintering ranges have shifted and some birds have altered their migration habits to adapt to changes in temperature or other environmental conditions. Long-term studies have found that bird species in North America have shifted their wintering grounds northward by an average of more than 40 miles since 1966, with several species shifting by hundreds of miles.

Florida is especially vulnerable to sea level rise, hurricanes, increased average temperatures, and other intense weather patterns. Prolonged droughts and intense storms will reduce nesting season productivity for many bird species. Wildlife and natural systems will not adapt easily, or quickly, to the drastic changes in temperatures, seasons, and rainfall patterns.

Globally and within the state, climate change is already having a disproportionately larger effect on Black people and people of color, women, working families with low-wage jobs, the elderly, and other vulnerable populations. Studies have shown that these groups overwhelmingly carry the brunt of environmental stressors like increasing temperatures, climate-driven migration, and decreasing water and food security. Building resilient

societies, economies, and infrastructure with an increased focus on environmental justice is critical to ensuring a more equitable and livable future.

Florida is just beginning to address issues of climate resiliency such as shoreline migration and intrusion of saltwater on drinking water sources. In addition to resiliency, Florida lags in developing and adopting mitigation actions to reduce our emissions as Local governments are leading the charge on conversion to renewable energy generation, fuel-efficient electric or hybrid vehicle fleets, improved public transportation, regional coordination, and other actions.

Since the state is so vulnerable to the effects of climate change, Florida should and could be a leader in policies and actions that reduce GHG emissions, absorb carbon, mitigate and adapt to rising sea levels and increased storm activity, improve water supply security, and develop energy efficiency plans to limit the effects of climate change.

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 Greenhouse Gas Emissions

Encourage local and state governments to target reductions that significantly reduce carbon dioxide pollution:

- Commit to GHG emission and carbon sink inventories of government operations and communities;
- Use these inventories to identify and adopt policies that would result in significant emission reductions; and
- Advocate for corporate responsibility of emissions and sequestration of carbon.

Renewables

- Promote state policies that encourage, and do not discourage, electricity production from renewable sources;
- Oppose drilling for oil and gas off Florida's coasts and on public lands;
- Oppose fracking and acid matrix stimulation for oil and gas until adoption of rules to avoid excessive use of water and prevent harm to water resources and air quality as well as to prevent methane from escaping into the atmosphere;
- Support responsible siting of solar energy facilities, in partnership with local governments responsible for land use regulation; and
- Make investments in solar energy generation, energy storage/battery technology, and improved energy efficiency.

Energy Efficiency

- **Provide incentives and grants** for investments and assistance to improve energy efficiency in low-income communities;
- Promote incentives that facilitate energy efficiency upgrades for homes and workplaces, like weatherization;
- Encourage conservation and efficient water use, as water supply and treatment requires large amounts of electric power;
- Support green building standards to reduce electric power demand, for example, encourage local governments to require green building certification such as LEED or Florida Green Building Coalition standards for all new construction.

Transit

- Adopt policies that facilitate a transition to electric vehicles for municipal fleets and the public, such as “electric vehicle ready city” standards for new construction; and
- Oppose transportation projects that increase dependence on single passenger vehicle use and support alternatives, including expanded public transportation.

Promote Ecologically Sound Natural Infrastructure Projects

- Encourage/conduct research and monitoring to document and report on habitats, birds, and other wildlife to inform coastal and statewide resiliency programs;
- Advocate to increase capacity for the Florida Resilient Coastlines program to provide significant levels of resilience planning and project support at the local government level, focusing on efforts to improve natural infrastructure;
- Educate the public and policymakers about impacts of a changing climate on birds and other wildlife, habitats, and water resources;
- Encourage local governments to protect tree canopy and engage residents in tree-planting to address rising temperatures;
- Encourage the use of Adaptation Action Areas to promote the protection of coastal and other habitats of importance for birds and other wildlife;
- Prioritize the protection of shorelines using natural infrastructure and oppose ecologically harmful and expensive adaptation strategies, including beach armoring, seawalls, and other practices that marginalize or eliminate habitat;
- Support conservation land acquisition of corridors that allow for coastal habitats to migrate upslope ahead of sea level rise and land acquisition of habitat that mitigates flooding and stormwater issues;
- Support policies and programs that assist in development of carbon sequestration projects, such as blue carbon, forestry, and ranching;
- Support adaptation strategies such as Everglades restoration to make coastal and inland habitats more resilient;
- Support coastal retreat policies that help relocate residents and businesses away from dynamic coastal areas; and
- Address saltwater intrusion threats to Florida’s aquifers through protective legislation, regulation, and funding.

Promote Statewide and Regional Collaboration

- Encourage reappointment of a state Chief Resilience Officer and appropriate staffing to accomplish the goals of the office;
- Facilitate partnerships amongst governments, organizations, and businesses to analyze climate change impacts and develop regionwide resilience plans;
- Encourage adoption of regional-specific statewide sea level rise projections and impacts to support scientific decision making when planning for impacts to coastal areas; and
- Partner with local communities of color and representative organizations to ensure equitable resilience planning, funding distribution, policies, and outcomes.



STATE CONSERVATION PRIORITY: WORKING LANDS 2022

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

Audubon and partner organizations have designated a network of Important Bird Areas throughout the western hemisphere. Audubon Florida is committed to developing and promoting important bird area conservation strategies within the state that support the state's bird population as well as the habitats upon which their existence depends.

Although human activities have altered much of natural Florida, federal, state, county, and local governments have protected and restored considerable acreage as parks and other conservation lands. Of Florida's 35 million acres, 28% has been designated as conservation land. In addition to public land, many millions of acres of ecologically important bird and wildlife habitat occurs on privately owned ranches and forest land. Forests, farmlands, and natural areas, including wetlands, also provide essential natural benefits such as drinking water protection, flood hazard prevention, and carbon storage. State and local budget cuts have taken a toll on efforts to protect conservation lands and agencies are under pressure to surplus public lands. Public conservation land is also subject to negative impacts from linear facilities such as highways which may result in proposed crossings through conservation land.

Private lands serving as important bird and wildlife habitat are also subject to development pressure, and potential conversion from ranches, forests, and scrublands to sites for urban development and linear facilities such as highways. Florida's ranches, and working forests yield food and timber, support local economies, safeguard clean water, and form some of our nation's most beautiful landscapes.

Florida's Important Bird Areas benefit from active constituencies of habitat and bird stewards whose observations and advocacy are essential to good management of public lands and to building public and private landowner support of these ecologically important areas especially in a future of changing climate conditions.

Therefore be it resolved:

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

- Support state laws and local land use decisions and programs that protect conservation lands and provide resources for managing those lands to restore and maintain wildlife and habitats;
- Support increased state funding for the expansion of conservation easement purchase programs including less-than-fee Florida Forever acquisitions and the Rural and Family Lands Protection Program;
- Partner with private landowners on carbon sequestration initiatives;
- Educate decision-makers about the climate adaptation and mitigation benefits of climate-informed private land management, particularly forests, ranches, and farms;
- Continue to grow and improve the effectiveness and diversity of volunteer participation in the Audubon Florida Jay Watch and Eagle Watch program efforts;
- Continue to grow and improve the quality of data and data management for Audubon Florida Jay Watch and Eagle Watch programs to provide historical datasets that can be used to detect the effects of changing climates on focal bird species;
- Collaborate with private landowners to encourage conservation of habitat on ranchlands and privately-owned forest lands;
- Seek guidance from chapters and partners to focus resources on the most appropriate places such as 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;
- Work to protect conservation lands from loss by surplus determinations;
- Seek to develop practical consensus measures to prevent or minimize damage to conservation lands due to highway projects and other linear facilities. Influence decisions on the location and design of new highways and highway expansion projects to require maximum avoidance of conservation lands and to require transportation agency purchases of new conservation lands in conjunction with major highway projects. Following up on the former M-Cores Task Force process, engage with FDOT Expressway Authorities and regulatory agencies to influence the detailed routes that may be proposed, to reduce or eliminate their negative environmental impacts;
- 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 similar programs that allow land to remain in agricultural use while protecting important habitat features; and
- Engage partners from communities of color and low-income communities in land development or linear facilities projects to ensure equity and inclusion are considered by decision-makers as well as solutions proposed by Audubon.



STATE CONSERVATION PRIORITY: BIRD FRIENDLY COMMUNITIES 2022

Florida is home to a remarkable diversity of habitats, plants, birds, and other wildlife. Natural ecosystems contribute to Florida's economic vitality and quality of life; yet human causes, including climate change and development are putting increasing pressure on the natural resources and bird populations have decreased by 30% over the past 50 years.

Florida's significance as part of the Atlantic Flyway is evident throughout the state. Over 500 species of birds occur in Florida including year-round residents, seasonal nesters and those passing through. Neotropical songbird migrants, facing the daunting odds of long overwater flights, use Florida as last southbound jumping off points and first northbound landfall. In short, in Florida ample food, clean water and shelter are critical to the survival of many species of birds.

At the same time, warm winter temperatures lure humans-- both visitors and a growing population. While federal, state, county, and local governments have protected and restored considerable acreage as parks and other conservation lands over the past century, urbanization continues to fragment and transform ecologically productive land with roads, buildings, sterile lawns and exotic plants. Human created hazards such as walls of glass, pesticides and domestic predators limit the function of urban areas for birds.

We can mitigate for some of these impacts, however, with the choices we make for our communities.

Native plants are the foundation of the food chain and provide shelter and safe spaces for birds to raise their young. By simply choosing native plants for our yards and public landscapes we can restore vital habitat for birds within our communities in hopes that they will adapt and survive in the face of climate change. Audubon's Plants for Birds program is designed to enable anyone to have a positive impact by recreating habitat that supports birds right where they live.

The reflective qualities of glass windows lead to bird strikes. Bright city lights can distract and confuse birds migrating at night. Combined, these two urban features result hundreds of millions of birds perish each year. Concerted "Lights Out" campaigns begin to address this threat.

As development reduces natural nesting opportunities, cavities, trees, snags, and burrows, providing artificial alternatives become increasingly important. Nest boxes and bird houses, nesting platforms and man-made burrows can offset the nesting challenges birds face within urban and suburban communities.

The Audubon grassroots network is well versed in outreach and education. Their events and programs connect and inspire all ages to enjoy birds, to understand the challenges they face in an increasingly urbanized world, and to advocate for the laws that protect them. Where birds thrive, people prosper.

Chapter programs also present an opportunity to engage new, more diverse audiences to broaden Audubon's community and achieve our ambitious goals for equity, diversity and inclusion.

Audubon Florida along with many of our partner organizations and the 45 Audubon chapters is well positioned and committed to developing and promoting Bird Friendly Communities throughout the state.

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 chapters, members and grassroots networks, and will work with conservation allies, business and community leaders, public officials, and agencies to:

Promote and Support the Plants for Birds Program:

- Encourage Florida's 45 chapters to partner with like-minded organizations on plants sales, speakers and projects that mobilize communities to promote the use of native plants in all landscapes;
- Work with Florida Power & Light Company to include bird-friendly elements through the Solar Stewardship program;
- Engage other utilities to educate them on bird-friendly elements as they develop and expand community solar programs;
- Promote the use of native plants to both public and private entities such as utilities (treatment wetlands), home-owners associations and other large land users; and
- Coordinate with the Audubon Florida/Florida Power & Light Company *Plants for Birds* grant program (now in the 3rd year).

Minimize Building Strikes and Lighting Distractions (Bird-friendly Buildings):

- Share information on National Audubon Society's "Lights out Program" and other local actions to reduce disorientation and building strikes especially during migration;
- Promote NAS educational materials on and solutions to window strikes, a major cause of avian mortality;

Provide Good Homes for Birds (Avian Architecture):

- Coordinate with the EagleWatch program through the Center for Birds of Prey and other partners to replace Osprey platforms, track damage to Bald Eagle nests destroyed during weather events;
- Encourage grassroots supported Eastern Bluebird trails, and building of nest boxes, platforms, Burrowing Owl starter burrows, arrays for Purple Martins, etc. through a variety of grant program; and
- Encourage installation and monitoring of SE American Kestrel nesting boxes.

Increase and Engage Audubon Membership through Outreach, Education, Conservation, and Advocacy:

- Promote Audubon Adventures Plants for Birds edition for use in the classroom and afterschool programs;
- Leverage opportunities to educate community members and others about the climate benefits of native plants;
- Support the creation of college-level Audubon Chapters or sub-chapters;
- Provide speakers and share presentations on relevant topics; and
- Recruit advocates on statewide and national issues such as Migratory Bird Treaty Act and the Endangered Species Act.



2022 REGIONAL CONSERVATION PRIORITIES: SOUTHWEST FLORIDA

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

A primary means of protection is public land acquisition and management through programs such as Florida Forever, Rural and Family Lands Protection, Lee County's Conservation 20/20, and Conservation Collier. Southwest Florida Audubon organizations perennially advocate public support for buying highly ranked local projects that benefit the Greater Everglades Ecosystem and Western Everglades' Big Cypress and Corkscrew Swamps.

As a result of FGCU's Water School's initiative, and Audubon's and many other advocates' support, all 14 Southwest Florida local governments have now agreed to participate in the Southwest Florida Regional Resiliency Compact. Assuring this vital collaboration is productive at both climate change adaptation work and greenhouse gas mitigation is critical. Among the climate impacts, poor water quality that feeds harmful algal blooms remains a major threat in this region. This climate issue also intersects regional wetland protection, restoration, stormwater, and pollution prevention policies.

Regarding the vitally important issue of equity, diversity, and inclusion, Audubon and its chapters recognize the underrepresentation of diverse communities in our leadership, membership, programs, and staff. This lack of diversity, including not only in race, but also age and socioeconomic status, is a challenge to be addressed for everyone's collective benefit.

Therefore be it resolved:

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

- Lessen harmful algal bloom (hab) crises in Southwest Florida by advancing nutrient source control, watershed restoration, wetland preservation, and working to protect the connected coastal and inland habitats from Lake Okeechobee, Caloosahatchee River,

and the Big Cypress and Corkscrew Swamps to their downstream estuaries and beaches;

- Advocate that our legislative delegations support 2022 session budgets to fund purchase of high priority local Florida Forever and Rural and Family Lands projects;
- Promote regional and local sea level rise/climate change adaptation and mitigation planning and implementation, including participating in the Southwest Florida Regional Resiliency Compact, and assuring the Army Corps' coastal storm risk studies, the UF/FGCU ACUNE+, and other tools are fairly and effectively crafted to protect both human and wildlife communities at risk; and
- Pursue strategies which aim to broaden the diverse participation in, and benefits from, all our chapters' conservation work and programs in order to better reflect the vital diversity of the communities in which we all live and ultimately better achieve our common conservation objectives.

Implementation actions include: engaging legislative delegation members; advocating to agencies on policies and permits for pollution source control, wetland preservation and restoration on a watershed scale; coastal bird habitat protection; promotion of local renewable energy generation and efficiency; participation in the Southwest Florida Regional Resiliency Compact; and creative public outreach. Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion objectives may continue to be achieved through conscious planning and integration into all the work of our organizations, including seeking the input and participation directly of people from local diverse communities, young people, and others missing from our ranks.

2022 REGIONAL CONSERVATION PRIORITY: EVERGLADES

The lower east coast of Florida, known for its beautiful beaches, productive estuaries, unique wildlife, and proximity to the Everglades, attracts many people. Out of the three national parks in the region, 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, coastal ecosystems such as Biscayne Bay, Florida Bay, Lake Worth Lagoon, the Southeast Florida reef system, and other wildlife habitat in Southeast Florida.

Restoring the Everglades, other freshwater and marine habitats, and terrestrial landscapes in the region provides critical life support and services for people and wildlife. Benefits include recharging and conserving water supplies, absorbing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, mitigating the impacts of sea level rise and extreme weather events, 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 within our wetlands, and the Mangrove Cuckoo, a Florida specialty bird, in our coastal habitats. As a result of the draining of wetlands for flood control, agriculture, and residential development, in addition to the misuse and pollution of both fresh and marine water resources, many species are jeopardized. Preserving current populations and enabling the return of wading bird supercolonies and other indicator species that once symbolized the Everglades are the best measures of conservation success.

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 goals.

Therefore be it resolved:

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

Everglades Restoration

- Utilize birding field trips and other relevant programming to educate the public, private sector, and governmental entities on the benefits of Everglades restoration projects, particularly in relation to conservation and water quality, to expedite and improve implementation throughout the entire Greater Everglades Ecosystem;
- Participate in the Everglades Coalition (EVCO) to support advocacy efforts to fund, restore, and protect the Greater Everglades Ecosystem; and
- Monitor projects at the county and municipal level to ensure that Everglades restoration goals are being met, support projects that meet our objectives, and oppose those that may impede restoration progress.

Bird and Wildlife Conservation

- Facilitate bird monitoring programs such as coastal shorebird monitoring, hawk watches, the Christmas Bird Count, banding stations, and other community science projects to enhance the understanding of birds in the Everglades, coastal habitats and other Southeast Florida ecosystems, and enable the implementation of regional conservation projects when possible, such as Project Perch;
- Encourage the expansion of wildlife habitat in Southeast Florida's dense urban corridor through promotion of the Plants for Birds program. In addition to chapter-level education and outreach programs, we hope to establish the framework for a regional Southeast Florida Audubon Bird-Friendly Habitat Certification Program focused specifically on South Florida native plants and birds; and
- Advocate for the protection of target species and habitats when threatened by development, pollution, or other threats.

Climate Change

- Educate chapter members, community members, and decision-makers on current and potential future impacts of climate change on human-constructed and natural environments, such as freshwater supplies, sea level rise, storm frequency and intensity, habitat degradation, and shifts in bird and other wildlife behavioral and distributional patterns; and
- Advocate for mitigation and adaptation policies that promote regional resiliency to climate change as outlined in the Southeast Florida Climate Compact, particularly in adopting new technologies and methodologies such as renewable energy sources, energy efficiency measures, and the use of natural infrastructure.

Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

- Educate ourselves and our members about equity issues by sharing information and creating space for discussion (i.e., at board meetings, general meetings, via newsletter and social media) and by listening to, learning from, and amplifying a diverse range of voices and perspectives.

- Initiate and commit to an ongoing organizational review process to define and reshape the beliefs, practices, and policies we will embrace in our pursuit of antiracism and justice.



2022 REGIONAL CONSERVATION PRIORITIES: INDIAN RIVER LAGOON

The Indian River Lagoon Regional Conservation Committee's 2022 conservation priorities continue four efforts from last year: increase funding for conservation initiatives throughout the region, seek long-term solutions for safe use of biosolids, continue public education on the values of native landscaping, and increase equity and inclusion of all people with Audubon. These priorities address local issues and also help improve resilience toward a global issue of unique importance to the region: sea level rise due to climate change. Chapters will advocate, educate, and perform outreach among all sectors of our community, from elected officials to the public-at-large, by meeting with officials, attending public meetings, sharing information through individual and form letters, social media, and the press, making presentations, and by any other means to effectively convey our messages.

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

Support Local, Regional, and State Initiatives to Increase Funding for Conservation Initiatives

- Florida is challenged with water issues including over-drainage and nutrient pollution that start in our watersheds, end up in our waters, and threaten our quality of life and biodiversity. Florida also has a treasure of state lands that have ongoing management, maintenance backlogs, and expansion and buffering needs. IRL chapters will work with local governments to explore local bond initiatives for land acquisition and conservation. Developing local funding stimulates cost share on projects, multiplying overall funding concomitantly; and
- Beyond local governments, IRL chapters will work with state legislators to restore and sustain funding for Florida Forever and associated programs at the \$300 million per year level, and work with Water Management Districts to sustain millage rates and direct funding toward land and water conservation projects on public and private lands.

Work Together to Advocate for Improved Regulation of Land Application of Biosolids, and to Foster New Strategies for Beneficial Use of Biosolids

- The Indian River Lagoon and St. Johns and St. Lucie watersheds have experienced increasing problems with harmful algal blooms that are being exacerbated by recent increases in land application of biosolids. We will educate local governments about the issue and support passing ordinances regulating biosolids applications, as well as supporting legislation to close the Class AA "fertilizer loophole" that allows application

without proper accountability, and supporting funding at all levels for innovation to find alternate uses of biosolids (e.g. energy) than land application.

Encourage Native landscaping

- Landscaping with native plants creates better habitat for wildlife, including resident and migrating birds and pollinators, than exotic plants. Because they are adapted to Florida, natives thrive with natural water and soil conditions, conserving water, lessening the need for polluting chemicals to sustain them, and increasing climate resilience through that adaptability;
- A new emphasis will be supporting native landscaping in all new developments and re-developments; and
- With about 20% of Florida urbanized and the IRL RCC counties having grown by more than 150,000 people since 2010, the amount of beneficial habitat that can be created in urbanized areas is significant. RCC chapters will work to educate decision makers, homeowner associations, garden clubs, and other groups of citizens on the benefits of native landscaping and how to implement best management practices.

Promote Equity and Inclusion in Chapter Activities

- Audubon and our nation have a reinvigorated focus on historical and ongoing discrimination and inequity based on race, gender identity, religion, and other group identifications. Audubon traditionally has been welcoming to all people, but passive acceptance has not created enough interaction with diverse communities. IRL RCC chapters will actively solicit involvement from these communities in programs, field trips, and other activities (COVID-19 guidelines permitting). It is important to emphasize that we cannot merely invite diverse groups to join us, but that we also must join them in their community activities, on a two-way street of fostering closer relationships.



2022 REGIONAL CONSERVATION PRIORITY: CENTRAL FLORIDA

The Central Florida Regional Conservation Committee includes much of the remaining conservation corridor through the central peninsula. While continuing our regional priorities of partnering with landowners and property managers and protecting water quality and water resources, the following goals reflect our shared focus in 2022.

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, and 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 & Oklawaha Valley 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, the headwater of the Harris Chain of Lakes, and an important central Florida reclaimed water/stormwater management infrastructure component.

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

- Chapters will work together to advocate for full funding for Florida Forever and the Rural and Family Lands Protection Act to secure money to purchase identified conservation property (such as those listed below) by meeting with legislators to build support for specific properties rather than lobbying solely for the umbrella programs.
 1. Lenholt Farm: a vital property which links Ocala National Forest and the extensive state holdings along the Wekiva River
 2. Conlin Lake X/Kirchman Tract: an 11,000-acre, pristine property at the headwaters of the Econlockhatchee and Kissimmee Rivers watershed
 3. Purchase of conservation easements on Kissimmee Valley ranchlands where owners are interested and willing to participate
 4. Green Swamp: Florida's hydrologic heart and its related uplands are a critical part of the central portion of Florida's Wildlife Corridor running through Polk, Lake, Sumter,

Hernando, and Pasco counties. Land use plans must ensure the integrity of both the Floridan Aquifer and the Florida Wildlife Corridor.

Equity, Inclusion, and Diversity

- Just as biodiversity strengthens natural systems, the diversity of human experience strengthens our conservation efforts for the benefit of nature and all human beings. Therefore, the Central Florida RCC resolves that each chapter will develop and implement action plans to increase diversity and inclusion of its board and its membership that reflects the diversity of their local community.



2022 REGIONAL CONSERVATION PRIORITIES: 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 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 and red tide threaten offshore and 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:

Take an Active Role in Local and Regional Habitat Management Initiatives and Continue to Raise the Audubon Profile as a Stakeholder by:

- Using chapter fieldtrips, Christmas Bird Counts, Great Backyard Bird Counts, Hooked Bird campaigns, Shorebird Stewardship, surveys, and community science programs to

recruit volunteers and generate data using programs like eBird as relationship building tools and the foundation for advocacy, conservation, and education;

- Identifying and supporting advocates to speak at local and regional public meetings regarding issues facing coastal and other environmentally sensitive areas;
- Seeking opportunities to serve on advisory boards, publicly acknowledge/celebrate successes, participate in land management reviews, build relationships with local agency staff; and
- Engaging cordially and in a proactive manner.

Weave Climate Change into Existing Work through Education and Communications by:

- Promoting climate change education both within and beyond the chapter network;
- Collaborating with local partners to develop climate resilient solutions such as restoring natural coastlines to respond to the effects of sea level rise; and
- Underscoring the benefits of natural areas, wetlands, natural shorelines, and the Plants for Birds and Shorebird Stewardship programs as natural and nature-based climate solutions.

Expand the Effectiveness of Audubon as a Conservation Organization by Engaging New Audiences and Perspectives by:

- Elevating the Engagement, Diversity, and Inclusion (ED&I) conversation within chapter leadership and members;
- Communicating a commitment to ED&I and sharing resources such as statements, articles, and stories; and
- Using all chapter projects and activities as for opportunities to engage new audiences and partners.

Support the Conservation Leadership Initiative by:

- Coordinating with Audubon Florida CLI on best ways to support the program through local activities.



2022 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.

History supports the vulnerability of the Panhandle to catastrophic damage from hurricanes. It is very likely that future storms impacting the Panhandle will be more intense and frequent due to climate-change.

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:

Build the Case for Strategic Land Conservation and Sustainability in the Panhandle Using a Variety of Tools Including Written and Public Comments, eBird, Field Trips, Programs, etc. to:

- Mutually support chapters across the Panhandle on conservation activities and projects that engage the collective power of an inclusive community invested in environmental equity and justice;
- Initiate integrated planning for hurricane preparation and response among Panhandle chapters to develop viable support plans for maintenance of chapter operations, recovery of affected members, assessment of damage to and restoration of wildlife and habitat;
- Protect and sustain the Panhandle's biodiversity by supporting the DOD sponsored NW FL Sentinel Landscape program and partnering with established, and evolving Panhandle Estuary programs, which will provide multiple layers of oversight and protection to critical habitat and conservation areas of specific interest to Audubon Florida's mission; and
- Continue to support the acquisition of critical conservation lands, with particular emphasis on the Florida Forever projects such as the Apalachicola River and the Forest and Lakes Ecosystem (Knight Tract) projects.



2022 REGIONAL CONSERVATION PRIORITIES: 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, 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:

Share Resources, Ideas, Successes, and Failures among Chapters in the RCC to Facilitate Shared Conservation Goals, Including:

- Using conservation messages in social media and chapter activities;
- Educating resource managers and the public in the use of eBird; and
- Promoting the value of treatment wetlands.

Engage Partners to Achieve Regional Conservation Goals, Including:

- Climate change education and resiliency planning;
- Creation of native, bird-friendly communities;
- State and local policies that improve bird conservation; and
- Improved management of conservation lands.

Continue to participate in monitoring and stewardship programs, including EagleWatch, Jay Watch, kestrel box monitoring, Lights Out Northeast Florida, the Prairie Creek Preserve Bird Banding Lab, and local shorebird partnerships.

Chapters will consider their current practices and policies as they relate to equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility. Chapters will work to ensure a welcoming, inclusive, and safe environment for people to engage with the chapter, especially in nature-based and conservation activities, and to remove barriers and create opportunities for increased participation, representation, and leadership from local communities of color.