



Audubon | FLORIDA

# 2020 Conservation Action Agenda

*Approved at the 2019 Audubon Assembly in Gainesville, Florida.*



Sandhill Cranes. Photo: Mac Stone

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## **GUIDANCE ON THE 2020 CONSERVATION ACTION AGENDA**

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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.



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**STATE CONSERVATION PRIORITY: COASTAL CONSERVATION**

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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.

Florida's coasts are home to a remarkable diversity of habitats, birds, and other wildlife. Marshes, beaches and shoals, 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, human 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 fertilizer applications, biosolids disposal sites, septic tank drainage, periodic sewage treatment plant failures, urban pavement, and agricultural operations that discharge to Lake Okeechobee and to riparian 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.

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 Atlantic Flyway Initiative and Coasts program.

Additionally, Audubon Florida advocates 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 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 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 leadership, and local Audubon 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 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, Florida State Parks, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, municipalities, and other strategic partners. 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 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 habitat changes helps inform sea level rise strategies. Long-term coastal resource conservation and management work provide a foundation of data and perspective that gives a long view to support our recommendations. Our experience also prepares us to address new challenges, such as the response and restoration efforts resulting from catastrophic storms like Hurricanes Irma and Michael.

*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**

- Connect 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 volunteers in diverse 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 partnership with Audubon chapters;
- 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;
- 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 biosolids disposal, septic tanks, urban fertilizer applications, and agricultural sources in order to decrease the frequency, duration, and breadth of cyanobacteria and red tide outbreaks;
- Promote planned shoreline retreat for 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, planned development, and future infrastructure;

- 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);
- 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;
- Oppose and organize opposition to oil and gas exploration, drilling, and production in Florida's nearshore waters and the Eastern Gulf of Mexico and promote clean energy alternatives;
- Encourage use of RESTORE Act, other oil spill penalty monies, and hurricane recovery funding for ecosystem restoration and resilience rather than harmful development schemes; and
- Collaborate with Audubon's Gulf Policy Team and hurricane recovery team to secure funding for restoration projects that benefit birds and their habitats.

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**STATE CONSERVATION PRIORITY: WATER**

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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 overdrained wetlands and depleted aquifers, while simultaneously delivering harmful amounts of nutrient-laden water to our coastal ecosystems. People, industry, and nature are without sufficient water during dry periods and droughts. This has caused significant harm to Florida's birdlife as evidenced by the 90% loss of wading birds in the Everglades.

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.

*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, Lakes, and Springs**

- Engage with Water Management Districts as a key stakeholder in healthy water systems in the state of Florida, and:



- Encourage WMDs to identify and reserve water needed for the health of natural systems, including water made available by restorations projects;
  - Encourage WMDs to set protective limits for flows and levels in water bodies, and implement recovery strategies where these are not met;
  - Advocate for sufficient funding 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;
  - Assist water managers in creating operational plans that are protective of natural systems and deliver the benefits expected from restoration projects;
  - Focus research and messaging on systems where birds are a visible and meaningful metric of health;
  - Work to improve wetland protections at state and local levels and ensure no loss of protection occurs from any changes in permitting associated with section 404 of the Clean Water Act governing dredge and fill activities;
  - Work with public and 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 use of alternative water supplies as conditions in water supply consumptive use permits;

- Enact 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 treatment requirements that protect ecological health;
- Endorse requirements for, especially in impaired basins, for:
  - Connections to central sewer;
  - 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 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 the 2016 “Water Bill” (SB 552), to achieve water quality improvements throughout the state;

- Seek to improve agricultural water use and management through the improvement of the substance, funding, 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 \$200 million from the federal government to match Florida's commitment. Recurrent funding is critical to keep momentum on ongoing projects like the C-43 Reservoir, C-44 Reservoir, Stormwater Treatment Areas in the Northern Estuaries, Picayune Strand in SW Florida, as well as for the Lake Okeechobee Watershed Restoration Project in CERP;
- 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;
- 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; and
- Bring elected officials into the Everglades ecosystem by offering educational tours of Lake Okeechobee and Florida Bay with Audubon's science and policy staff.

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**STATE CONSERVATION PRIORITY: CLIMATE**

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

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

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

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

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

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

Florida businesses, residents, and visitors are significant consumers of energy and our activities contribute significantly to GHGs in the atmosphere. Since the state is so vulnerable to the effects of climate change, Florida should be a leader in policies and

actions that reduce GHG emissions and develop energy efficiency plans to limit the effects of climate change.

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

*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 Gases

- 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;
  - Use these inventories to identify policies that would result in significant reductions;
  - Make investments in solar energy, energy storage/battery technology, and improved energy efficiency;
  - Provide incentives for investments in energy efficiency in low-income communities;
  - Adopt “electric vehicle ready city” standards for new construction;
  - Support local government fleets conversion to zero emission electric vehicles.
- 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;

- Oppose transportation projects that increase dependence on single passenger vehicle use and support alternatives, including expanded public transportation; and
- Encourage local governments to protect tree canopy and engage residents in tree-planting.

### Encourage Energy Conservation in Homes, Workplaces, and Communities

- Encourage residents and businesses to improve energy efficiency of homes and workplaces including weatherization and equipment maintenance;
- Encourage the public to use ENERGY STAR energy-efficient appliances and lighting;
- 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;
- Encourage efficient consumer energy use in homes and business, including turning off unused appliances;
- Encourage waste recycling and reduced food waste to reduce methane emissions from landfills and emissions from waste-to-energy plants; and
- Encourage conservation and efficient use of water, as water supply and treatment requires large amounts of electric power.

### Promote Ecologically Sound Sea Level Rise Adaptation Strategies

- Encourage/conduct research and monitoring to document and report on coastal habitats, birds, and other wildlife to inform coastal 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 the rising waters on birds and other wildlife, habitats, and water resources;
- 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 sequester carbon;
- 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.

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**STATE CONSERVATION PRIORITY: WORKING LANDS**

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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 persistence 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. 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 be proposed crossing 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.

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;
- Continue to grow and improve the effectiveness 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 the M-Cores Turnpike Task Force Process to require maximum avoidance of conservation lands and to require transportation agency purchase of new conservation lands in conjunction with turnpike projects, in the event that they proceed; 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 similar programs that allow land to remain in agricultural use while protecting important habitat features.

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**STATE CONSERVATION PRIORITY: BIRD-FRIENDLY COMMUNITIES**

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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 activity and development are putting increasing pressure on the natural resources and bird populations are being compromised.

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 these impacts, however, with the choices we make for our communities.

Native plants provide the foundation of the food chain, as well as shelter and spaces for birds to raise their young. By simply choosing native plants for our yards and public spaces, we can restore vital habitat for birds within our communities and help them 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 planting native plants that will help 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 can address this threat.

As urban features replace natural nesting opportunities, cavities, trees, snags, and burrows, providing artificial alternatives becomes increasingly important. Nest boxes

and bird houses, nesting platforms and artificial burrows can offset the nesting challenges birds face within urban communities.

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.

These 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 societies (chapters), members and grassroots networks, and will work with conservation allies, business and community leaders, public officials, and agencies to:*

Promote and Support the National Audubon Plants for Birds Program by:

- Recruiting all 45 chapters to sign up as FL partners and resources;
- Partnering with like-minded organizations on plants sales, speakers, projects to mobilize communities to promote the use of native plants in all landscapes;
- Engaging with corporate partners to advance the use of native plants and bird friendly elements on larger landscapes such as Florida Power and Light's "Solar Sanctuaries;"
- Following and advance Duke Energy's pollinator research; and
- Supporting Plants for Birds programs through the Collaborative grants, Burke Center for Native Plants, Audubon in Action and Audubon Florida/Florida Power and Light grant processes.

Bird Friendly Buildings – Minimize Building Strikes and Lighting Distractions by:

- Sharing information on best practices on lights out and how to avoid window strikes on homes and smaller buildings.

#### Avian Architecture - Providing Good Homes for Birds by:

- Coordinating with the EagleWatch program through the Center for Birds of Prey and other partners to replace Osprey platforms, track damage to Eagle nests destroyed during weather events;
- Encouraging grassroots supported Bluebird trails, and building of nest boxes, platforms, starter burrows, etc. through grant programs such as Collaborative Grants and Audubon in Action grants; and
- Working with local utilities to install and monitor SE American Kestrel nesting boxes.

#### Outreach, Education, Conservation and Advocacy - Increase and Engage Audubon Membership by:

- Promoting Audubon Adventures Plants for Birds edition for use in the classroom and afterschool programs;
- Supporting the creation of College level Audubon Chapters or sub-chapters;
- Making sure printed resources, banners, signs are relevant and available as needed;
- Providing speakers and sharing presentations on relevant topics; and
- Recruiting advocates on statewide and National issues such as Migratory Bird Treaty Act and the Endangered Species Act.



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**REGIONAL CONSERVATION PRIORITY: SOUTHWEST FLORIDA**

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Audubon has a long history in the Western Everglades region, beginning with the hiring of wardens to protect wading bird colonies from plume hunters, later creating the Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary (now a vital partner for these chapters), and now 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. Bitter disappointment with the Legislature's past refusal to fund Florida Forever led the Southwest Florida Audubon organizations to pursue an active campaign to advocate local delegation support for buying highly ranked local Florida Forever and Rural and Family Lands projects and federal projects that would benefit the Greater Everglades Ecosystem and Western Everglades' Big Cypress and Corkscrew Swamps.

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.

*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 three regional priorities:*

- Lessen harmful algal bloom (HAB) crises in Southwest Florida by advancing nutrient source control, watershed restoration, wetland preservation, and educating the public and policy makers on HAB science from reliable sources.
- Advocate that our legislative delegations support a 2020 budget to fund purchase of high priority local Florida Forever and Rural and Family Lands

projects, and support protection of connected, vital wetlands and habitats in the Southwest/Central Florida M-CORES connector study area.

- Promote regional and local sea level rise/climate change adaptation and mitigation planning and implementation, including advancing a possible Southwest Florida regional climate change compact of local governments and agencies.

Implementation actions include engaging legislative delegation members; advocating for wetland preservation and restoration on a watershed scale; coastal bird habitat protection; engagement in the FDOT M-CORES study; promotion of local renewable energy generation and efficiency; participation and use of the Collier SLR model and adaptation planning regionally; and creative public outreach. A Southwest Florida Climate Change Compact would fold several of these strategies into a coordinated plan.

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**REGIONAL CONSERVATION PRIORITY: EVERGLADES**

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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, 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, such as 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, the Everglade Snail Kite within our wetlands, and the Mangrove Cuckoo, a Florida specialty bird, in our coastal habitats. Many species are jeopardized as a result of the draining of wetlands for flood control, insufficiently treated run-off from agriculture and residential development, in addition to the misuse and pollution of both fresh and marine water resources. 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**

- Take advantage of existing birding fieldtrips and educational programs to promote and advocate for Everglades restoration projects and water quality and conservation efforts for our existing communities and new audiences in order to expedite and improve their implementation throughout the entire Greater Everglades Ecosystem;
- Educate the new administration, new Florida legislators, and new Congress on the significance of consistently funding Everglades restoration projects and programs at the pre-determined State and Federal levels;
- Educate new South Florida Water Management District Governing Board members on the importance of a restored budget so they can fulfill their mission; and
- Advocate for timely implementation of CEPP to augment even more southern freshwater flows. As projects come online, ensure operations deliver maximum ecological benefits as envisioned.

## **Bird and Wildlife Conservation**

- Participate in bird monitoring programs, enhance the body of knowledge involving birds in the Everglades, coastal habitats, and other Southeast Florida ecosystems, including through birding trips and community science monitoring programs, and use this knowledge to prevent degradation and fragmentation and to reestablish a contiguous migratory bird habitat that aids in increasing survival of resident and migratory species;
- Utilize each regional chapter's Plants for Birds program to create and implement an Audubon Bird-Friendly Habitat Certification Program that includes specific resources to South Florida for creating native plant habitats; and
- Educate local governments, schools, and the public about the importance of reducing plastic pollution and creating wildlife corridors in our backyards.

## **Climate Change**

- Educate chapter members, community members, and decision-makers on the effects 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;

- Advocate for policies that reduce dependencies on nonrenewable resources and promote energy efficiency; and
- Create Florida specific educational anti-fracking materials to educate chapter members, community members, and decision-makers about the threats fracking poses to water and air quality.

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**REGIONAL CONSERVATION PRIORITY: INDIAN RIVER LAGOON**

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The Indian River Lagoon Regional Conservation Committee's 2020 conservation priorities shall include efforts to increase funding for conservation initiatives throughout the region and to seek long-term solutions for safe and effective use of biosolids. Chapters will do outreach, advocacy, and education by meeting with elected officials, attending public meetings, sending and sharing individual and form letters, working through social media, and the press.

*Therefore be it resolved:*

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

**Support 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 regionally through city councils, county commissions, and state legislators towards restoring funding for Florida Forever and associated programs back to the \$300 million per year level, work with Water Management Districts to increase millage rates to restore lost funding, and direct those monies exclusively 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 support local ordinances governing



biosolids applications, DEP's rulemaking to increase oversight of Class B applications, and legislation to close the Class AA "fertilizer loophole" that allows application without proper accountability, and innovation to find alternate uses of biosolids (e.g. energy) than land application.

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**REGIONAL CONSERVATION PRIORITY: CENTRAL FLORIDA**

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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 land owners and property managers and protecting water quality and water resources, the following goals reflect our shared focus in 2020.

*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 & 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.

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

- Conlin Lake X/Kirchman Tract: an 11,000-acre, pristine property at the headwaters of the Econlockhatchee and Kissimmee Rivers watershed.
- Purchase of conservation easements on Kissimmee Valley ranchlands where owners are interested and willing to participate.
- Green Swamp: Florida's hydrologic heart abuts the central wildlife corridor to the west, running through Polk, Lake, Sumter, Hernando, and Pasco Counties.

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**REGIONAL CONSERVATION PRIORITY: FLORIDA GULF COAST**

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

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

Additionally, the effects of climate change and sea level rise 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 restoration, enhancement and management initiatives, and continue to raise the Audubon profile as a stakeholder by engaging in the process on both private and public lands as follows:

- Use chapter scheduled fieldtrips, Christmas Bird Counts, Great Backyard Bird Counts, and surveys to generate data using e-bird as relationship building tools and the foundation for advocacy, conservation and education;
- Use all Chapter projects and activities as opportunities to engage, educate, and encourage new audiences and partners;
- Provide baseline data and recruit advocates through community science projects using well established programs such as Eagle Watch, Bluebird Trails, Shorebird stewarding, Colony Watch, Jay Watch, Hooked Bird Project, Christmas Bird Counts, and Climate 2.0;
- Create and share resources for individual homeowners and HOAs to encourage planting native plants for birds and wildlife;
- Recruit and train advocates of all ages to speak at local and regional public meetings regarding issues facing coastal and other environmentally sensitive environments;
- Seek opportunities to serve on advisory boards, publicly acknowledge/celebrate successes, participate in land management reviews, build relationships with local WMD staff, and set a goal to have an RCC representative present at SWFWMD Board meetings;
- Hold one or more regional Conservation Leadership Initiative events to develop the next generation of conservation leaders and promote relationships with local universities and colleges; and
- Always engage cordially and be proactive.

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**REGIONAL CONSERVATION PRIORITY: NORTHWEST FLORIDA**

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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 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, e-bird, field trips, programs, etc. to:

- Mutually support chapters across the Panhandle on conservation activities and projects;
- 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, supporting the FL Panhandle National Heritage Area initiative, and the Great NW Coastal Trail, which will provide multiple layers of protection to critical habitat conservation areas; and
- Continue to support the acquisition of critical conservation lands, with particular emphasis on the Florida Forever projects such as Apalachicola River and the Forest and Lakes Ecosystem (Knight Tract) projects.

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**REGIONAL CONSERVATION PRIORITY: NORTHEAST FLORIDA**

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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:*

**Conserve Birds and Their Habitat through Action, Advocacy, and Regional Sharing of Resources.**

- Use Audubon's Plants for Birds program and other relevant tools to build bird-friendly communities that provide habitat and conserve water by fostering improved landscaping practices for residential, public, and commercial properties;
- Assist in surveying and stewardship activities throughout the region, including EagleWatch, Jay Watch, Climate Watch, Kestrel box monitoring, and shorebird steward programs along with rookery surveys;
- Partner with resource managers to acquire and improve bird conservation on their lands and integrate bird-related data and tools from community science efforts including eBird;
- Engage policy makers and advocate for policies and programs that further bird conservation;
- Promote the value of treatment wetlands using the Sweetwater Wetlands/Alachua Audubon model;
- Continue to strengthen our stakeholder status on conservation lands through communications with land managers about our activities on their lands;
- Include conservation messaging in social media and chapter activities such as bird walks, programs, and events currently without a specific connection to our conservation goals;
- Educate members and the public about eBird and encourage its use when birding; and
- Increase outreach to more diverse populations.