

Audubon FLORIDA

Naturalist
SUMMER 2016



One
Gulf

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Photo By Ralph Arwood



Getting Conservation Done at the State Level

*Steve Lynch, Chairman
Florida Audubon Society*

Dear Audubon Members and Supporters,

I was recently appointed to South Florida Water Management District's Water Resources Advisory Committee. The group meets monthly to review the District's work in water resource management. Now that I am semi-retired, I enjoy volunteering to advance Audubon Florida's agenda. It gives me a way to give something back and to do my part to protect the Everglades and water, about which I am passionate.

In October, the Audubon Florida board will select my replacement as chair. Rotating our board leadership is one of the many good practices we follow at a board level. I am excited to report that we have an excellent board – a board that participates 100% in our budget and programs by giving time and money. Our success as an organization is due to outstanding staff, great chapter relations, and having an active, engaged board of directors.

Willingness to serve has been the basis of Audubon during our long history in Florida. Florida Audubon Society was created 115 years ago to harness the efforts of many to protect fast-declining wading birds. We are still at it today.

In October 2016, hundreds of Audubon members will once again gather at the Audubon Assembly to celebrate accomplishments, share new information on topics such as climate change and Everglades restoration, and set our Florida Conservation Action Agenda for 2017.

This year's action agenda will include plans from seven regions of the state where local Audubon chapters are working together to help solve the crisis in the Indian River Lagoon, restore the Everglades, and protect coastal birds.

Our state action agenda will include new commitments to work on climate, water policy, and protect our coasts and other habitats.

If you, like me, thrive on getting involved, you should be at the Audubon Assembly. It carries forward the Florida Audubon Society tradition by bringing people together to solve today's conservation challenges. Hope to see you there.

Sincerely,

Steve Lynch
Chairman, Audubon Florida



Protecting Florida's Coastal Water

*Eric Draper, Executive Director
Audubon Florida*



A young Eric Draper enjoying Sulphur Springs with family.

Dear Friends,

A childhood photograph of Sulphur Springs brought back early memories of swimming at the Tampa resort before it was closed from high bacteria levels. Central Florida was once so rich with swimming holes and had so much access to open water that I took cooling off in lakes and rivers as a given.

My school years were filled with adventuresome outings to rivers and lakes - canoe trips, rope swings, swimming Hurricane Pass – open water was an invitation to my inner Huck Finn.

This year's algae blooms and closed beaches made me rethink the assumed right to clean water. I started my career as an advocate for passage of the Clean Water Act. The goals of the law gave me purpose – fishable and swimmable waters – what common sense. And like open water swimming, the goals of the Clean Water Act still inspire me.

A recent trip to Stuart during the worst of the algae bloom filled me with anger. Green goo covered the St. Lucie River and coated the shoreline. The algae gave off a horrible, choking smell. Touching the water was to risk serious illness.

My anger is fueled from watching years of neglect. Successive Governors, Agriculture Commissioners, and legislators turned back efforts to control pollution and repealed rules on fertilizer, human waste, and farm animals.

On the other hand, we won bans on dumping sewage sludge in the Lake Okeechobee watershed and septage on open land throughout Florida. And we defeated preemption of local government restrictions on lawn fertilizer.

Controlling pollution sources is undermined by aspirational state cleanup plans that, in the case of Lake Okeechobee and coastal estuaries, do not deliver. Worse, the plans protect dischargers from enforcement so toxic, algae-causing nutrients from fertilizer and poop keep washing into lakes, rivers, and estuaries. And Florida becomes ever less fishable and swimmable.

I still know some good lakes and beaches where the water is safe, but their best days are over. We have to work together to take care of this sandy peninsula we call Florida so that again “fishable and swimmable” is a reality, not a goal. There are things you can do and ways you can hold government accountable.

Our theme for this year's Audubon Assembly is One Gulf. Join us as we create an action agenda to make our coastal waters safe for swimming and abundant with birds – nature's first fishers. As an added benefit, St. Pete Beach is still a sweet place to swim. See pages 14-15 for more information.

Hope to see you there!

Sincerely,

Eric Draper, Executive Director
Audubon Florida



ONE GULF

Before Deepwater Horizon, our political boundaries seemed more important: Florida and Texas, Collier County and Escambia County, St. Petersburg and New Orleans. All thought of the Gulf as their Gulf.

But when disaster struck, those boundaries emerged as starkly artificial. The oil didn't pile up at state lines on the map as though it were running into a glass wall. And the wildlife affected in Louisiana were the same affected in Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida. Quickly, all the different interests in the Gulf of Mexico realized the Gulf didn't recognize boundaries, and neither did the tragedy.

Similarly, Audubon knows that restoration must be blind to artificial boundaries if we want it to be successful.

We have one Gulf of Mexico, and no time to spare – it will take our many hands to make the Gulf ecosystem whole again. And so, Audubon has applied ourselves to the task. With Audubon-supported restoration projects already in proposal (and some in-progress around the Gulf), we are bringing our unique blend of science, local knowledge, grassroots engagement, and policy acumen to what may be the biggest conservation opportunity of a generation.

In Florida, these projects include many dedicated people and organizations that participate in a wide array of restoration activities, like:

- 1 Audubon coastal bird technicians like Holley Short, who engages dozens of volunteers each year to protect beach-nesting birds in Sarasota County.
- 2 Audubon chapter members like Francis M. Weston Audubon's Barbara Albrecht, who is bringing local knowledge and accountability to the update process for the Northwest Florida Water Management District's Surface Water Improvement and Management plan.
- 3 Members of Audubon Florida's Board of Directors like Tampa's Hal Flowers, who advocates for new protections for some of our most vulnerable bird habitats like the Mosaic Company's Richard T. Paul Alafia Bank Sanctuary.
- 4 Audubon Everglades scientists like Pete Frezza, crafting restoration plans to staunch the accelerating erosion of southwest Florida's Cape Sable.
- 5 And Audubon policy staff, led by Deputy Director for Policy Julie Hill-Gabriel, who help turn our conservation vision into a reality.

Audubon stories like these span the Gulf of Mexico and bridge the Gulf that previously existed between more isolated efforts.



Least Tern



Brown Pelican

Be a Gulf Ecosystem Advocate

Audubon members were among the most active advocates in securing passage of the RESTORE Act in 2012 and celebrated last year's historic settlement with BP.

Now that implementation of Gulf Restoration from several funding streams is gearing up, Audubon voices will be needed once again, to speak for the Gulf's natural resources.

Dates for public meetings, public comment, and webinar dates in September/October will be announced any day now. Decision-makers need to hear your voices on the following subjects:

RESTORE: A revision to the comprehensive plan that guides RESTORE spending will be released soon. Advocates need to thank decision-makers for addressing many of our concerns in the revision and emphasize how important it is that projects are selected with rigorous criteria that accurately gauge their restoration benefits.

Natural Resource Damage funding: Florida will likely choose to spend its first round of NRD funding on water restoration projects. Decision-makers will need to hear from you that land acquisition is a critical part of protecting watersheds and that all of Florida's Gulf watersheds should be eligible for restoration dollars, not just those in the Panhandle. The Gulf cannot be restored with work in the Panhandle alone.

Gulf Environment Benefit Fund: A Gulf restoration plan that will guide GEBF spending coordinated by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission will be available in draft form soon, along with the updates to Surface Water Improvement and Management plans for several water management districts. The draft restoration plan, as well as the draft SWIM plans, will need local knowledge like that of Audubon's chapters to evaluate their proposed priorities and projects.

To receive notification from Audubon when these opportunities to comment are advertised, be sure you sign up to receive our Gulf Restoration electronic newsletter at <http://fl.audubon.org/signup>.



Willet



Addressing Florida's Coastal Water Crisis

Audubon's Eric Draper observes the algae bloom in Stuart, Florida.

Florida's major environmental story of 2016 surrounds the sadly-familiar reports of thick, toxic, blue-green algae blanketing coastal waters.

While the Treasure Coast dealt with closed beaches, freshwater discharges from Lake Okeechobee also impacted the Caloosahatchee estuary on the Gulf Coast. The releases turned clear water dark and disrupted the delicate balance of salt and freshwater that make the Caloosahatchee one of the most productive estuaries in the nation.

At the same time that too much freshwater is impacting central Florida estuaries, drought conditions have led to a massive sea grass die-off in Florida Bay. Because the natural connection to a source of freshwater from the upstream Everglades has been severed, Florida Bay has not been able to recover from dry conditions that altered the delicate balance of fresh and saltwater over a year ago. Audubon scientists at the Everglades Science Center at Tavernier have witnessed fish kills related to the mats of dead sea grass blocking sunlight and preventing oxygen production from live sea grass underneath. Even with more favorable recent weather patterns, it is possible that the Bay could suffer a deeper ecological collapse, including algae blooms of its own.





Audubon's Pete Frezza holds up dead seagrass in Florida Bay.

High rainfall and drought events occurred in the historic River of Grass, but the impacts were never felt so hard or for so long. But with current human development, those historic conditions will never be what they once were. Everglades restoration is the largest environmental restoration effort in the world for a reason. And that's because the need to mirror natural conditions as closely as possible is crystal clear.

Freshwater in the Right Places at the Right Times

Infrastructure built for flood control is designed to quickly drain water from the central Everglades to the coasts. To remedy the kind of problems seen this year, reconnecting the southern flow of water from Lake Okeechobee through Everglades National Park and into Florida Bay is one of the main goals of Everglades restoration.

Construction of the Central Everglades Planning Project will begin to break down the barriers to freshwater flow in this critical pathway. Water storage projects that are aimed at catching the large volumes of water currently being discharged from Lake Okeechobee are also needed.

Planning for projects that could store water and improve hydrology north of Lake Okeechobee and in the Western Everglades began this summer. But a project to store and move water just south of the Lake in the Everglades Agricultural Area has been delayed until 2021. Audubon is leading the call for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the State of Florida to begin the EAA planning effort this year. Until additional projects to store and move water south are brought online, the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee estuaries will remain the only outlets for massive Lake Okeechobee discharges as Florida Bay continues to be impacted by the lack of sufficient upstream freshwater.

Reducing Nutrients Reaching Lake Okeechobee and Coastal Estuaries

While too much or too little freshwater harms the salinity balances in delicate coastal estuaries, concurrent excess nutrient pollution compounds the impact of unnatural freshwater flows. The Everglades developed as a unique biological wonder, in part, because it is home to species that thrive under extremely low levels of nutrients.

The striking algae bloom on Lake Okeechobee that covered nearly 250 square miles – so big it could be seen from space – gained international attention. This bloom was fueled by decades of excess nutrients entering the Lake.

High levels of phosphorus and nitrogen continue to enter Lake Okeechobee and the northern estuaries from wastewater, urban stormwater, farm fertilizers, and animal feed. A Lake Okeechobee Basin Management Action Plan has been developed by state agencies to reduce this nutrient loading. But future phases and updates of the plan are needed to address the negative water quality impacts that are caused by unnaturally high nutrient levels. More focus on monitoring and enforcement of on-farm Best Management Practices is also needed to stop the input of nutrients at the source.

Algae blooms will fade. Attention will be drawn elsewhere. Still, it is likely that the impact to submerged vegetation, fish, and water birds in the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee estuaries and Florida Bay will be felt for many years.

The solutions needed to prevent future coastal water crises are complex, but they are not new. To ensure that these events do not become a recurring new normal, we must remain steadfast in our advocacy for long-term solutions.

A large flock of birds, likely White Ibis, is captured in flight over a body of water. The sky is a mix of blue and orange, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The birds are silhouetted against the bright light of the sun, which is low on the horizon. The water in the foreground is dark and still, reflecting the light from the sky. The overall scene is a dramatic and beautiful representation of wildlife in its natural habitat.

Securing the Habitat Florida's Wildlife Need to Thrive

Warden Carol Cassels documents White Ibis at the Mosaic Company's Richard T. Paul Alafia Bank Bird Sanctuary.

This year, Audubon partnered with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission on an ambitious new effort to protect many of Florida's most important waterbird sites from disturbance.

These protections, called "Critical Wildlife Areas," are designated areas within which FWC can prohibit public access. Most often, these are places where waterbirds like terns, plovers, oystercatchers, herons, egrets, and pelicans are nesting, where disturbance can cause the death of eggs and chicks, or where rare and declining birds are resting and feeding to prepare for their long migrations. The FWC has also created CWAs to protect bat maternity caves and gopher tortoises.

CWA status is of critical importance because the signs designating the buffer area must be located in the water. CWA designation is the only tool we have to close the waters between a sign and shoreline in Florida, affecting navigable waters. And without permission to post in the water, the best we can do is post on land—too close to the birds to provide them the protection from disturbance they need.

The FWC established CWAs in the 1970s and 1980s, but the 1990s brought an establishment drought. From 1993 until 2014, the FWC designated no new Critical Wildlife Areas. During that same time, Florida's population grew by 6 million, our annual tourist visitation grew by 57 million, and populations of some of our most charismatic wildlife species struggled or declined.

Because of FWC Chairman Brian Yablonski, FWC is back in the business of creating CWAs, billing this as the Commission's "Teddy Roosevelt moment." Just as Teddy Roosevelt created America's National Wildlife Refuge system beginning at Pelican Island in Florida, we need to create protected areas for the most vulnerable concentrations of species – and time is of the essence.

At Yablonski's direction, FWC staff launched into action this spring—soliciting and assembling ten proposals for new CWAs and improvements for another five existing CWAs. With a rigorous schedule of public meetings this summer, FWC has gathered public input from Floridians about these proposals. And Audubon Florida has been there every step of the way.

While it seems like common sense to protect these birds, and their vulnerable eggs and chicks, there are always some individuals who do not want their activities to be inconvenienced in any way—even if it comes at the birds' expense. While there are alternative-use sites for all these proposed CWAs, some members of the public are unmoved by the vulnerability of these birds and the few remaining places they can nest successfully. The birds can't speak for themselves, so Audubon members have stood up to speak for them.

The great majority of the public meetings were well attended by Audubon members and others not only supporting the FWC proposals but urging them to be more protective and ensure enough law enforcement would be present to implement the protections. In the same spirit that early conservationists spoke out against the plume trade, ending that exploitation and ultimately forming the Audubon Society, our advocates again stood up and spoke for the birds.

We're not done yet, though. The designations will not be final until the November meeting of the FWC in St. Petersburg—and we will continue to need your help to see these important protections to completion. Please, lend your voice to the birds through one or more of the following mechanisms:

1. Send written comments supporting one or more of the CWAs to cwacomment@myfwc.com. Be sure to review the list of CWAs (<http://myfwc.com/conservation/terrestrial/cwa/workshops/>) and include the title of the relevant proposal(s) in your email's subject line.
2. Join Audubon's Julie Wraithmell to speak in support of the CWAs at the Commission's meeting in St. Augustine September 8th or 9th (TBD). Email jwraithmell@audubon.org for details.
3. Join Julie and other advocates from around the state to support the final designation of these CWAs at the Commission's meeting in St. Petersburg November 16 or 17 (TBD). Again, email jwraithmell@audubon.org for details.



Proposed New Critical Wildlife Areas

- BC49 (Brevard)**
- Dot-Dash-Dit Islands (Manatee)**
- Estero Bay (Lee)**
- Flag Island (Franklin)**
- Lanark Reef (Franklin)**
- Pine Island Sound (Lee)**
- Port Orange Colony (Volusia)**
- Roberts Bay (Sarasota)**
- Stick Marsh Rookery (Brevard)**
- Withlacoochee State Forest Bat Caves (Citrus)**

Proposed Expansions to Existing Critical Wildlife Areas

- Alafia Bank (Hillsborough)**
- Bird Islands (Nassau & Duval)**
- Myakka River (Sarasota)**
- Rookery Island (Collier)**
- St. George Island Causeway (Franklin)**



Ospreys:

Rehabbing the Premier Fisherman of the Gulf Coast



Ospreys and their nests are some of the most iconic sights on the Gulf Coast. In fact, sometimes you find Osprey nests in some odd places, like on top of stadium lighting, telephone poles, or power poles. The Osprey (or Fish Hawk) is an expert flier and an even better angler - able to catch a fish by hovering over water and in some rare cases they might catch fish over 4 lbs in weight! Their reliance on healthy aquatic habitats makes them excellent indicators of ecosystem health, like the Gulf Coast and its many associated waterways.

The Audubon Center for Birds of Prey in Maitland, Florida typically receives over 100 Osprey annually; 55 during June and July 2016 alone. The majority arrive from Orange County. However, many arrive from the coastal areas including Hillsborough and Pinellas. Human-wildlife conflicts cause most injuries, including strikes by vehicles, falls from nests, and unfortunately, powerline strikes. Audubon routinely works with power companies and wildlife agencies to document and report powerline strikes and identify areas and poles in need of retrofitting to make them bird-safe.

The clinical stay for an Osprey is a bit more challenging. Although Osprey have long wings to soar over lakes and specialized talons with spicules on the bottoms of their feet to help catch fish, they can be quite a challenge to rehabilitate after arriving at the Center's Raptor Trauma Clinic.

The veterinary technicians describe these "seahawks" as goofy, scatterbrained, and just downright obstinate. To the clinic team, these expert fishermen are the most awkward patient to treat. They become stressed, easily confused, and don't seem to remember to eat the tasty fish given to them.

With their large wingspan, housing Osprey in kennels is challenging because they can easily injure themselves. Their blue feet aren't very good for anything but fishing, so when they are set on their feet for a moment, they seem to forget how to walk. More than anything, Ospreys are stubborn birds that don't want to cooperate once in the clinic.

As these patients graduate from clinical care, they move to the Center's 100' long Magic of Flight Barn for reconditioning. In the barn, these birds can practice flight and gain the strength and stamina needed for life back in the wild. Thanks to the dedication and leadership of many generous volunteers and donors, Audubon can rehab and release many of the Ospreys that spend time at our hospital.

The next time you visit the Gulf Coast and see an Osprey swoop down to the water and come up with a fish, know that bird may have been given a second chance at life at the Audubon Center for Birds of Prey.

The public can view live Osprey under rehabilitation in the Center's flight barn here: <http://www.acfbop.org>.

Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary: Essential to the Vitality of our “One Gulf”



It may not be apparent walking beneath the dense canopy of oaks, pines, and cypress at Audubon’s Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary, but this important wetland is also a critical component to the overall health of the Gulf Coast ecosystem.

An aerial perspective of southwest Florida makes this connection to the Gulf much easier to see as inland expanses of the Big Cypress, ranchlands, and agriculture meet suburban sprawl that begins on the coast and continues ever farther inland. At the heart of the Western Everglades lies the Corkscrew Watershed, the largest intact watershed in southwest Florida and an essential natural filter for inland freshwater as it drifts toward the coast.

Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary is central to the Corkscrew Watershed. In the rainy season, Corkscrew’s wetlands fill with water, renewing life in the swamp and funneling freshwater into the Imperial and Coghatchee Rivers that feed the Gulf. Along the way, native vegetation filters sediments, nutrients, and pollutants before it reaches the estuaries. Water that remains in the wetlands slowly seeps into the ground, recharging the aquifers and feeding the hungry groundwater reserves that supply our ever-growing coastal population.

Besides all of the public programs, Audubon’s Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary has a dedicated team stewarding our 13,000+ acres for the benefit of birds and other wildlife within the Sanctuary and downstream in our estuaries and our Gulf.

Land managers like Audubon’s Allyson Webb and her crew of land stewardship interns spend their days in the field helping maintain this inland ecosystem in optimal condition. Many non-native plant species use more water than our native plants and alter natural fire regimes. Controlling non-native plants fosters native plant communities that use water appropriately and uptake nutrients efficiently, and helps maintain healthy soils. This team also uses prescribed fire as a critical tool for maintaining healthy inland ecosystems. In addition to reducing understory fuel loads and stimulating the growth of many native plant species, fire is also beneficial to soil nutrient availability and carbon storage which helps ensure future wetland productivity.

As our land managers work to maintain Corkscrew’s wetlands for efficient water filtration and storage, Audubon Florida’s research and policy teams are working to maximize the impact of our inland wetlands by protecting and restoring additional wetlands throughout the Western Everglades. Improving the science behind wetland restoration allows us to fine-tune the restoration process and take full advantage of the ecological lift that restoration provides.

By restoring, maintaining, and protecting our freshwater wetlands, Audubon Florida’s Western Everglades team is helping ensure the continued delivery of clean, fresh water to the Gulf and the growing number of residents along Florida’s coasts.

Audubon Chapters are Leaders for Conservation Action

Photo by Richard Baker



Audubon Chapters Rally to Support Critical Wildlife Area Nominations.

Whoever said “Audubon chapters are dormant in the summer” clearly has not been to Florida.

When the opportunity emerged to establish 15 new Critical Wildlife Areas in Florida this year, Audubon jumped at the chance to support these important protections in every way possible. With 14 public meetings in five weeks this summer, Audubon chapters came to the rescue, turning out their boards and membership, officers and allies, to urge the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission to protect these important and vulnerable places.

Pelican Island Audubon turned out dozens to support the proposal for Stick Marsh CWA advanced by Audubon Florida board member David Cox. Attendance at the public meeting for Alafia Bank included leaders from St. Petersburg, Tampa and Sun City Center Audubons, as well as local allies enlisted from Sierra Club and Defenders of Wildlife. The meeting for Bird Islands CWA in Fernandina Beach enjoyed support from

leaders of Duval and St. Johns Audubons, as well as devoted area EagleWatch volunteers. At meeting after meeting, the Audubon response was broad and deep!

“We shared the opportunity with the chapters,” said Chapters Conservation Manager Jacqui Sulek, “and their response was overwhelming. I was particularly inspired by chapters working together through their Regional Conservation Committees (RCCs) to support one another and these proposals.” The result was a loud, eloquent and undeniable voice for the birds, with the overwhelming majority at many meetings not just supporting the proposals, but calling for them to be more protective and well enforced.

Thanks go to all those who helped spread the word, attended the meetings and voiced their support, once again illustrating the power of the Audubon network! And if you missed out on these meetings, it’s not over—we still need your voice! Learn more about how you can help on pages 8-9.

Gulf Coast Audubon Academy in Tampa Focuses on Developing Climate Messengers



At a recent Audubon Academy (developed by the chapters for the chapters) in Tampa, the Gulf Coast Regional Conservation Committee made it a priority to train advocates about the dire threats to birds from a changing climate and sea level rise.

Several years ago Audubon Florida launched efforts to engage our volunteer network to educate decision-makers about the threats climate change poses to our coastal birds. Building on this work, the Gulf Coast Regional Conservation Committee designed “Sea Level Rise - How to Become a Climate Messenger”. Audubon members had been expressing the need for help sorting through the overwhelming amount of climate information available.

The idea for the Academy was to review the basics, hone the message and determine the best places to deliver it. The Academy was a huge success, attracting 45 attendees from 12 chapters, from Citrus to Charlotte counties and as far away as Duval, Volusia, and Palm Beach counties. Several chapters offered scholarships for students from nearby colleges to hear fact-filled presentations by experts from USF and Eckerd College. The day culminated in a lively panel discussion and a commitment to become Audubon Climate Messengers.

Learn more at <http://www.FloridaClimateMessenger.com>.

South Florida Audubon Partners with FPL in Dune Restoration Effort



South Florida is ground zero for sea level rise, and South Florida Audubon is doing something about it.

In an ongoing effort to restore beach areas hard hit by erosion due to sea level rise, the chapter has partnered with multiple organizations and corporations over the past five years to plant acres of sea oats that will stabilize coastal dunes. With financial support from National Audubon’s various grant programs and gifts from several local corporations, the chapter has partnered with non-profits such as the Youth Environmental Alliance to plant thousands of tiny sea oat plugs along beach dunes in Broward County.

Most recently, South Florida Audubon held a planting event with Florida Power and Light’s volunteer initiative.

The event provided a public opportunity for community conservation, a platform that responds to the challenges of the rising sea. The joint volunteer planting event has become the signature project for South Florida Audubon and one that will continue to grow.



Audubon Assembly 2016

“One Gulf”

October 28-29, 2016 – Sirata Beach Resort, St. Petersburg, Florida

The Audubon Assembly is Florida’s premier conservation event and conference. This year’s gathering will be held on October 28-29, 2016 at the Sirata Beach Resort in St. Petersburg and you are invited to attend!

The theme for the Assembly is “One Gulf.” If you have visited Florida’s Gulf Coast, then you know first-hand the importance of this remarkable ecosystem. Florida’s Gulf Coast is vital to the survival of many wildlife species, including many nesting and migratory birds. From the remote mangrove islands teeming with life in Florida Bay to the wide, windswept beaches of southern Texas, the Gulf Coast plays a vital role for our birds, our citizens, and our economy.

Sadly, the challenges to Florida’s Gulf Coast couldn’t be greater. Increased development, disturbance, dwindling resources, predation and sea-level rise threaten birds and other animals at every stage of their lives.

Gulf Restoration opportunities made possible by the financial settlements resulting from the Deepwater Horizon disaster present a landmark opportunity for Florida and our Gulf. Birds are one of the most important measures of Gulf recovery, and connect Gulf restoration to the rest of Florida, the country, and the hemisphere.

That’s why we will focus this year’s Assembly on celebrating what we have already accomplished and discussing how we can best protect and enhance Florida’s coastline for future generations. Our goal is for you to leave inspired and prepared to take the lead locally as coastal conservation programs continue to evolve.

Friday Awards Banquet Dinner

The Friday Awards Banquet is always the “can’t miss” event of Assembly. Join fellow Audubon members, staff, other attendees, special guests, and public officials for our highly-anticipated conservation awards presentation and keynote speaker.



Featured Keynotes Speaker

Friday Banquet Keynote Speaker:

Julie Wraithmell - Audubon Florida Deputy Executive Director



Audubon Florida Deputy Executive Director Julie Wraithmell will take us on a photographic tour of the power of the Audubon network. Our organization’s partnership with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission in 2016 stands to establish 10 new Critical Wildlife Areas for nesting and resting birds and other

wildlife, and expand an additional five existing CWAs. This bold initiative, championed by Commission Chairman Brian Yablonski, would create more of these important protected areas in 2016 than have been established in the last 30 years. Hear how Audubon is helping redefine coastal bird conservation in Florida, how Audubon’s network came together to advance these ambitious proposals, and learn how you can help support final passage of these historic protections in November!

Friday Welcome Lunch

Break bread with old friends and new as we ring the opening bell of the 2016 Audubon Assembly. Eric Draper, Audubon Florida Executive Director, will review the year in conservation and take a look at the challenges our communities face in the future.



Featured Speaker:

John Hankinson

Former Chair of the Gulf Ecosystem Restoration Task Force and Past Audubon Florida Board Chair John Hankinson will welcome us to the Gulf Coast as only he can.

Saturday: Celebrating Chapters Breakfast

Audubon Chapter members are certainly early-risers. That’s why we will meet bright and early Saturday morning for a robust breakfast and networking hour to share ideas about issues facing chapters. We will then launch into our traditional chapter awards celebration. Help us celebrate the heart and soul of the Audubon network and their successes in engaging with both traditional and new partners.



Friday Workshops and Learning Sessions

The Friday learning sessions and workshops at this year's gathering will all focus on our Assembly theme: One Gulf. After our kick-off lunch, you will have the opportunity to participate in three different breakout sessions. Sessions will repeat so attendees will have the opportunity to see two sessions in full. *Session topics subject to change.

Session A

Advocates Needed: How To Lend Your Voice to Florida's Coasts and Wildlife – In the early 1900s, the advocates of the formative Audubon Society ended the devastation of the plume trade with a deluge of telegrams to decision-makers. Today's threats are no less real—but a new century's threats also warrant new advocacy tools. Join us to learn about some of the most important coastal policy opportunities—including Critical Wildlife Areas, Gulf Restoration, and public land management plans, how Audubon has engaged our renowned citizen scientists as effective advocates and storytellers and take home how-to strategies to engage successfully on these and other conservation opportunities near you!

Session B

Restoring Florida's Springs and Wetlands to Support a Healthy Gulf Ecosystem – It's no secret that Florida's waters are all connected – from the blue springs in Central Florida to our amazing beaches and shores. Preserving and restoring freshwater wetlands and springs is an important strategy for protecting coastal waters. But decades of development and human activity make this task difficult and costly. In this session, you will learn from professionals and backyard conservationists from across the state about how we can all help clean, store, and move freshwater through the Florida peninsula.

Session C

Climate Change and Sea Level Rise: The Greatest Threat to Florida's Coastal Habitats – Another hot summer reminds us of the urgent need to do our part reduce the impacts of climate change. This learning session will link Audubon's approach of joining personal action with aggressive public policy changes. Topics include defending climate strongholds, water and energy efficiency and solar power, and climate solutions messengers.

Conservation Leadership Initiative

Audubon's Conservation Leadership Initiative brings the best and brightest college students together with Audubon leaders to network, share, and learn from each other. Through CLI, students immerse themselves with Audubon, attend leadership training, and gain an understanding of future opportunities in conservation careers. Held on the Friday of Audubon's Assembly, students are paired with Audubon leaders for a day of walking workshops, leadership training, and conservation programs to better develop the next generation of conservation leaders. Contact Audubon's Katie Warner at kwarners@audubon.org for more information.

Saturday Session: Solving Florida's Coastal Water Crisis

Toxic algae, fish kills, dead seagrass. Over the past year, the ecological impacts of excess nutrients and poor water management on coastal waterways have been more visible than ever across Florida. While each ecologically devastating event has different contributing factors, overarching issues connect them. Experts on water quality, water management and ecosystem restoration efforts will discuss the changes needed to prevent these events from recurring, and leave you inspired to help implement solutions.

Field Trips

There is no doubt that the Assembly Field Trips put birds (and fun!) in the Audubon Assembly! This year Clearwater Audubon and St. Petersburg Audubon are your host chapters and will provide local expertise and guidance to some of Tampa Bay's most special places -- including the amazing Ft. De Soto Park. Most Assembly field trips leave from the hotel early in the morning on Friday, October 28. Please make your travel plans accordingly. There are space limitations on certain field trips; please email Jacqui Sulek to learn more and to reserve your space - jsulek@audubon.org.

Field Trips List:

- Ft. De Soto Park (Round Robin)
- Sawgrass Lake County Park
- Boyd Hill Nature Preserve

Ticket and Hotel Information

Assembly officially begins Friday, October 28 and runs until just before lunch on October 29. You can purchase tickets online at fl.audubon.org or call Vicky Johnston at 305-371-6396. A limited amount of early-bird tickets are on sale for \$129 and include lunch and dinner on Friday and breakfast on Saturday. Reserve your ticket today.

Please note, you must book your hotel room separately. Please call the Sirata at 800-344-5999 (mention you are with Florida Audubon) and book by October 1, 2016, to reserve your room. The group rate is \$139 a night. Workshops, learning sessions, and field trips are subject to change. Please visit the official Assembly website at fl.audubon.org for the latest information.



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Please contact our Miami office at 305-371-6396 for estate planning or to make an end of year gift of stock. For other gifts go to www.GivetoAudubonFlorida.org. Gifts specified for Audubon Florida or Florida Audubon Society will be used exclusively to support conservation in Florida.



Join us for the **ONE GULF** Audubon FLORIDA Assembly 2016

October 28-29, 2016 – Sirata Beach Resort – St. Petersburg, Florida

The Audubon Assembly is Florida's premier conservation event and conference. Don't miss this opportunity to reconnect with natural Florida.

- Field trips to local parks and conservation areas
- Workshops with Florida conservation professionals
- Exciting guest speakers
- Review and vote on Audubon Florida's annual Conservation Action Agenda
- Networking opportunities with Audubon members, staff, and other passionate Florida conservationists
- Located right on the beach!

Pursuant to the Articles of Incorporation and bylaws, notice is hereby given that the annual meeting of the Florida Audubon Society will be held at the Sirata Beach Resort in St. Petersburg, Florida at 1:00pm on Saturday, October 29, 2016.



Photo by R. J. Wiley