

 **Audubon** FLORIDA
2013 Conservation Action Agenda



Conserve Water to Sustain Life | Sarasota, Florida
October 2012



Audubon FLORIDA

2013 CONSERVATION ACTION AGENDA

Audubon Florida organizes its state policy and regional conservation plans to express both our policy agenda and to give members, chapter leaders, board members, staff, and the public summary statements of our policy priorities and conservation goals in the form of short resolutions that are approved at the fall Audubon Assembly and subsequently by the Audubon Board.

Regional Conservation and Statewide Policy Priorities

Audubon Florida is organized into six broad geographic and ecological regions. Regional Conservation Committees (RCCs) made up of chapter leaders and supported by policy staff are responsible for recommended conservation plans for their regions. State policy priorities help us to focus on issues and campaigns and to leverage our resources to the greatest effect.

Engaging People in Conservation

Audubon is an organization built on volunteers backed by professional staff that connects people with nature. In Florida we can do more, and we can evolve with our shifting and diverse population and changing civic and social participation. Engaging people is a fundamental part of our conservation strategy.

Building Field Capacity

There are now 44 chapters in Florida with about 600 identified chapter leaders. The chapter network is strong and enjoys staff support along with annual training and leadership programs. Chapters and chapter leaders are the heart and soul of the Audubon movement. Our plans and programs emphasize including and empowering chapter leaders and promoting strong and healthy chapters.

Table of Contents

| | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| STATE POLICY PRIORITY: FLORIDA’S SPECIAL PLACES | 4 |
| STATE POLICY PRIORITY: COASTAL CONSERVATION AND STEWARDSHIP | 7 |
| STATE POLICY PRIORITY: GREATER EVERGLADES ECOSYSTEM | 10 |
| STATE POLICY PRIORITY: CLIMATE CHANGE | 14 |
| REGIONAL CONSERVATION PRIORITY: CENTRAL FLORIDA..... | 16 |
| REGIONAL CONSERVATION PRIORITY: NORTHEAST FLORIDA..... | 18 |
| REGIONAL CONSERVATION PRIORITY: NORTHWEST FLORIDA..... | 20 |
| REGIONAL CONSERVATION PRIORITY: FLORIDA GULF COAST..... | 22 |
| REGIONAL CONSERVATION PRIORITY: SOUTHWEST FLORIDA | 24 |
| REGIONAL CONSERVATION PRIORITY: EVERGLADES | 26 |



Audubon FLORIDA

STATE POLICY PRIORITY: FLORIDA'S SPECIAL PLACES

Florida's location, climate, and natural history make it a biologically diverse place. Sixty-nine distinct ecosystems have evolved with thousands of plant and animal species including many endemic to the state and many rare. Among Florida's diverse wildlife are hundreds of species of native migratory and resident birds.

While much of natural Florida has been greatly altered by human activity, considerable amounts of habitat have been protected as public lands, and almost all waters are managed in the public trust. Most people recognize that Florida's distinctive lands and waters deserve extraordinary legal protection along with active management. Therefore, federal, state, local, private, and non-profit land conservation efforts have placed a protective overlay over nearly one-third of the state.

Florida is recognized internationally for its special places, including the Everglades and Important Bird Areas (IBAs), which are essential habitats for migratory and resident birds. Audubon Florida's sanctuary network includes nearly 100,000 acres, including Corkscrew Swamp, a Ramsar designated wetland of global importance.

Florida's conservation lands and water allow for unique recreational experiences, including outdoor environmental education, bird watching, and other wildlife observation and study. When people use conservation lands, it fosters a sense of personal investment and they become constituents for protection and management of the natural environment.

In addition to current public lands, more than one million acres of land have been proposed for protection through state and federal programs. However, funding for Florida Forever, the state's popular land acquisition program, and for federal land conservation programs have been curtailed by recent political and budgetary events. There is also pressure to declare some public lands "surplus" to allow them to be sold. Also, state and local budget cuts have reduced management funds for conservation lands.

Conservation lands require active constituencies of stewards to maintain and restore their ecological integrity as well as advocates to maintain public support. People with a passion for protecting natural Florida can make a difference by voicing support for specific special places.

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:

Identify, list, and communicate to improve public awareness of and interest in specific places with emphasis on birds and other ecological indicators including:

- Signature ecosystems and charismatic protected places;
- Important Bird Areas and Audubon Sanctuaries;
- Private lands managed for water and wildlife benefits;
- Proposed conservation and restoration projects; and
- Places that Audubon members and others consider special based on their own observations, experiences, and narratives of ecological attributes.

Encourage people to care about specific places through direct experience and to share their knowledge of and passion for those places with others by:

- Encouraging supporters to “nominate” their special places by utilizing the Florida’s Special Places online network, including social media outlets;
- Involving Audubon members, private landowners, and the public in stewardship of wildlife habitats;
- Understanding and expressing management and stewardship needs for specific sites;
- Encouraging volunteer stewardship and providing training, coordination, and leadership;
- Enlisting habitat stewards as grassroots advocates for conservation lands; and
- Facilitating outdoors events and environmental educational opportunities.

Work with private landowners to achieve good stewardship by:

- Helping private landowners with conservation plans for their properties;
- Supporting innovative financial incentives for landowners to commit their property to conservation;
- Encouraging the purchase of conservation easements by government agencies; and

- Advocating for “Payment for Environmental Services” to compensate landowners for such services as water management, water storage, and pollution cleanup.

Advocate for land conservation policies and programs, adequately funded public land management, and protection of public waters by:

- Promoting Florida Forever, Everglades restoration, National Wildlife Refuge expansion, conservation easements, and local land acquisition programs;
- Circulating petitions to put the Water and Land Legacy Amendment on the 2014 ballot;
- Encouraging appropriate alternate approaches to conservation and restoration such as mitigation banks, density transfers, and tax incentives;
- Promoting dedicated funding for public land acquisition and management;
- Encouraging programs for control of invasive exotic species and for prescribed fire as a management tool;
- Supporting water conservation and protective water management practices and opposing harmful withdrawal of water from rivers and springs; and
- Opposing harmful use of Florida’s sovereignty submerged lands.

Involve people to report, collect, study, and make use of data and other information to improve our understanding of habitats and to better connect actions to ecological results by:

- Sponsoring and supporting citizen science and monitoring activities to conduct scientifically sound field research to understand wildlife trends; and
- Evaluating stewardship and management efforts and making recommendations for improvements.



Audubon FLORIDA

STATE POLICY PRIORITY: COASTAL CONSERVATION AND STEWARDSHIP

Florida's coasts are home to a remarkable diversity of special habitats, birds and other wildlife. They are also major sources of the state's economic vitality and quality of life; yet, these vital areas are jeopardized by a range of human activities including beach management, construction, coastal armoring, dredging and filling, beach grooming, recreational disturbance, coastal energy exploration and climate change.

Marshes, beaches and shoals, seagrass meadows, maritime hammocks, scrub, and mangroves constitute a complex and rich mosaic of living coastal systems that have evolved in response to climate and geophysical events. Myriad species which are state or federally listed, designated species of greatest conservation need, species that appear on Audubon's Watch List have evolved to rely on these specific resources.

Additionally, Florida's significance in the Atlantic Flyway is most evident in our coastal areas. Shorebirds and seabirds stop over in these areas on their hemispheric migrations; raptors follow the dunelines as they systematically work their way southward. Coastal habitat is often the last southbound jumping off point, and first northbound landfall, for neotropical songbird migrants facing the daunting odds of long overwater flights. In short, the geology of Florida's coasts are always in flux and its birdlife is too.

Because of both the extraordinary value and tremendous vulnerability of these resources, Audubon Florida has long ranked coastal conservation among its highest priorities. National Audubon has also elevated these habitats as a national priority under the auspices of the coastal element of its Atlantic Flyway Initiative and "Share the Seas and Shores" campaign. Common species priorities for Florida and the Atlantic Flyway include American Oystercatcher, Red Knot, Piping Plover, Least Tern, and Black Skimmer. Additional species of particular relevance to Florida include Snowy Plover, Reddish Egret, and Roseate Spoonbill.

Audubon is well positioned to lead science, education, public involvement, and policy efforts to meet the conservation challenges facing Florida's coastal wildlife and to mobilize our members to steward coastal habitat - "to continue Audubon's legacy in Florida by engaging staff, chapters, partners, and volunteers to restore and conserve Florida's coastal habitats and their waterbird populations."

Audubon brings to bear a coordinated effort of geographically distributed staff and chapters to accomplish this mission. Site-based habitat and species management work throughout Florida

allows on-the-ground work to produce tangible results and credibility while informing our policy work by identifying the immediate needs of Important Bird Areas and imperiled species. Deep and diverse expertise in these issues makes it possible to provide leadership to the Florida Shorebird Alliance - a partnership of Audubon Florida, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, and the US Fish and Wildlife Service. It also provides us with the perspective to work to guide penalties from the Deepwater Horizon disaster to meaningful restoration projects. Finally, long-term coastal resource conservation and management work provides a foundation of data and perspective gives a long view to our recommendations.

Therefore be it resolved:

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

- Use coastal birdlife as a way to connect people to nature and get them excited about and involved with protection of Florida's special coastal places through partnerships such as the Atlantic Flyway Initiative's Share the Shore program and the Florida Shorebird Alliance;
- Monitor and use coastal bird population trends as a biological indicator of coastal health and resiliency;
- Improve the management of coastal Important Bird Areas and other special places either with direct responsibility or in advisory or volunteer capacities through bird stewarding programs, partnering with our chapters;
- Advocate for the acquisition of coastal conservation lands, as well as wise land and recreation management on those properties;
- Focus growth and transportation plans away from conversion of coastal habitats;
- Promote proper shoreline retreat, rather than armoring, in the face of climate change;
- Advocate for water quality standards and for freshwater management plans that maintain healthy estuarine habitats;
- Advocate for the value of coastal habitats for protection from the effects of climate change (e.g.: carbon sequestration and wave attenuation value of marshes and shoals);
- Promote habitat protection strategies to provide routes for coastal habitats and wildlife to migrate upslope ahead of sea level rise;

- Oppose and organize opposition to oil and gas exploration, drilling, and production in Florida's nearshore waters and promote clean energy alternatives; and
- Encourage use of RESTORE Act and other oil spill penalties for ecosystem restoration rather than harmful development schemes.



Audubon FLORIDA

STATE POLICY PRIORITY: GREATER EVERGLADES ECOSYSTEM

Everglades restoration success is defined as restoring freshwater flows to bring back wildlife and the historic super-colonies of wading birds that once defined a healthy ecosystem. Audubon uses Roseate Spoonbills, Wood Storks, Everglade Snail Kites, and Southern Bald Eagles as indicators and messengers of ecological results.

Healthy habitat in the Greater Everglades Ecosystem is an essential component of a successful habitat corridor in the Atlantic Flyway. While local wading birds are the main focus of Everglades restoration efforts, migratory birds rely on the Everglades as a major stop over before continuing their journey. If habitat in the Everglades is not available, or not able to provide a food source, these migratory birds may not reach destinations in the Caribbean, Central and South America, or the northern Atlantic coast of the U.S. When the wading bird super-colonies of the unaltered Everglades are restored, migratory birds are ensured to have the food sources and resting areas they need to survive.

The challenges faced in the Everglades are numerous:

- The Central and Southern Florida Project created a divided ecosystem that primarily works to remove Everglades' water for flood control;
- Vegetation changes are caused by high nutrient concentrations, altering the ecosystem and bird habitat; Fragmented and diminishing wildlife habitat causes wading birds and other wildlife to perish and prevents successful reproduction;
- Wetlands are drained and filled or otherwise converted to provide land for commercial and residential development, for agricultural use or for mining;
- Consumptive uses of water are given priority, contributing to the environmental degradation caused by lack of freshwater;
- Managing water with a focus on flood control and water supply for consumptive users has caused the loss of over 50% of the spatial extent of the Everglades; and
- Harmful impacts to wildlife occur without sound science to inform decisions and without an understanding of the impact of specific actions.

Audubon's history in South Florida involving field research, sanctuaries, and policy work, puts our organization in a unique leadership role, advocating for all parts of the Greater Everglades Ecosystem. Working with our allies, our staff, and volunteer leaders deploy to use science to

shape the best conservation and restoration decisions and to use policy, communications, and advocacy to advance specific conservation results.

Therefore be it resolved:

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

Strategy 1: Restore wetland flows for the Everglades

- Prioritize projects based on potential lift for wildlife habitat and work with project planning teams to design projects to obtain the greatest ecological benefits;
- Advocate for funds to complete construction of restoration projects; and
- Operate completed projects so that they restore wetland flow and natural conditions within marshes, ridge and slough landscape, and other characteristic ecosystems that were historically used by wading birds.

Strategy 2: Protect habitat from altering effects of nutrient pollution

- Reduce the amount of phosphorus leaving farms north of Lake Okeechobee and leaving farms in the Everglades Agricultural Area through outreach with farmers and ranchers. Participate in legal actions if necessary;
- Reduce urban sources of pollution and identify needed changes to water quality laws or rules; and
- Construct and use expanded Stormwater Treatment Areas to remove phosphorus so that water meets the water quality based effluent limitation (WQBEL) standard before it enters the Southern Everglades.

Strategy 3: Improve habitat connectivity

- Support establishment and funding for acquisition and land conservation programs, including the Greater Everglades Partnership Initiative (includes Everglades Headwaters Refuge, expansion of Florida Panther Refuge, Fisheating Creek Refuge), Florida Panther Protection Program (FPPP), Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP), Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), Florida Forever, etc...; and
- Focus land conservation or acquisition programs on land that helps create habitat corridors and land that is or could be productive habitat for threatened or endangered species.

Strategy 4: Prevent loss of wetlands

- Identify failures of the impacts of specific functions of wetlands to include cumulative impacts to short hydroperiod wetlands;
- Engage and influence agencies to implement tools to better track impacts of specific functions of wetlands and minimize harmful cumulative impacts to short hydroperiod wetlands; and
- Recover nesting of endangered Wood Storks in Southwest Florida and other wetland-dependent species by making it more difficult to alter wetland habitat.

Strategy 5: Make and keep water available for the environment

- Implement more stringent landscape irrigation restrictions and encourage other water conservation measures;
- Build restoration projects that store water on private land or through the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP);
- Advocate for water management that allows or requires this conserved water to be used to meet the water needs of the environment; and
- Advocate to legally reserve water made available from restoration projects for the environment.

Strategy 6: Manage water within the Everglades ecosystem to benefit habitat

- Change current water management regulations or practices to benefit wildlife habitat – (e.g.: end agricultural drawdown practice in Miami-Dade county; change water restriction trigger lines for Lake Okeechobee);
- Find flexibility within current water management schemes to benefit habitat before restoration projects are completed – (e.g.: Everglades Restoration Transition Plan to benefit Everglade Snail Kite; Lake Okeechobee operations); and
- Implement Distributed Water Management projects to manage land working with individual landowners.

Strategy 7: Track and define ecological responses to water management and other activities

- Obtain data on the historic and current population and habitat status of Roseate Spoonbills in Florida Bay, Wood Storks in Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary, Southern Bald Eagles, Florida Grasshopper Sparrows, and Everglade Snail Kites;

- Interpret data collected and trends to identify actions that will benefit these species and other wildlife;
- Analyze whether proposed actions including construction of restoration projects will achieve intended benefits; and
- Advocate for restoring funding to science programs and against further cuts so that wildlife can benefit from decisions based on science.

Strategy 8: Educate people about the ecological benefits of Everglades conservation and restoration

- Use the Corkscrew Swamp experience to educate visitors and the public about the values of the watershed and the Western Everglades;
- Deploy the EagleWatch program to educate people about Northern Everglades;
- Use social media and conservation goals to educate people about Florida Bay, the Everglades, and Lake Okeechobee; and
- Work with allies, chapters, and others to communicate about ecological results to build support for conservation and restoration decisions.



STATE POLICY PRIORITY: CLIMATE CHANGE

Scientific consensus documented by the International Panel on Climate Change finds that increasing rates of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions over the last century are causing and accelerating climate change. GHGs include carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide, and other chemicals primarily released to the atmosphere through extraction and burning of fossil fuels for energy generation and transportation.

Climate change is likely to lead to increased average air and ocean temperatures and subsequently to accelerated sea level rise. Climate change will likely lead to altered weather patterns including more severe storms and droughts. Additionally, oceans are becoming more acidic as a result of absorbing carbon dioxide.

Florida is especially vulnerable to the effects of climate change. Florida's environment will be affected directly and indirectly as a result of economic and structural losses and efforts to mitigate the impacts of change. Direct impacts to the environment include seawater intrusion, erosion, droughts and storms. Wildlife will be harmed by changes in ecosystem functions and degradation and loss of specialized habitat and diversity. Most birds, and many other plants and animal species, will have difficulty adapting to and evolving with the anticipated changes. Florida will also be harmed by ocean acidification, which will interfere with productivity of complex marine ecosystems including coral, crustaceans, and mollusks.

Florida businesses, residents and visitors are significant consumers of fossil fuel energy and therefore major contributors of greenhouse gases. Because the state is vulnerable to the effects of climate change, Florida should be a leader in reducing emissions. Prompt action and global cooperation can still prevent temperature rises from reaching catastrophic levels.

Some of the impacts of climate change on Florida's wildlife can be mitigated through planning for, maintaining, and restoring the resiliency of natural habitats.

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:

Reduce emission of greenhouse gases

- Promote local, state, and federal laws, policies, and actions to set specific and enforceable greenhouse gas emission targets and reduction goals at levels that will reduce overall risks and the most severe impacts of climate change;
- Encourage state renewable energy policies including a Renewable Portfolio Standard (RPS) that requires utilities to supply a percentage of electricity from renewable sources;
- Promote energy efficiency, conservation and demand-side management programs to reduce consumption of electric power;
- Promote mandatory water conservation policies and efficient wastewater and stormwater practices to reduce excessive demand for electricity;
- Encourage green building standards and landscape practices to reduce irrigation;
- Support adoption of strong federal vehicle emissions and fuel-efficiency standards to significantly reduce GHG emissions from transportation uses;
- Oppose transportation projects that increase Florida's dependence on single passenger vehicles, and support alternatives such as public transportation, bicycles, and electric vehicle; and
- Oppose drilling for oil and gas off Florida's coasts and in other areas of the nation at risk from the impacts of fossil fuel extraction.

Educate the public to support policies and engage in personal actions

- Teach and encourage home and business energy efficiency and transportation practices to reduce personal contributions of greenhouse gases;
- Encourage recycling and composting to reduce greenhouse gases from landfills and waste-to-energy plants;
- Encourage water conservation to reduce energy consumption; and
- Teach homeowners to minimize turf grass lawns and use native plant landscaping.

Promote ecologically sound climate change adaptation strategies

- Block ecologically harmful and expensive adaptation strategies, including beach armoring, sea walls, and other practices that marginalize or eliminate habitat; and
- Support coastal retreat policies that are designed to relocate homes and businesses away from dynamic coastal areas when such properties are severely damaged as a result of storms.



REGIONAL CONSERVATION PRIORITY: CENTRAL FLORIDA

Audubon is engaged in a program for the protection and restoration of the major ecosystems of Central Florida, home to many important indicator species. Many endangered and threatened and important protected animals depend on these habitats – Audubon’s Crested Caracara, Bald Eagle, Eastern indigo snake, Everglade Snail Kite, Florida black bear, Florida panther, Florida Scrub-jay, Gopher tortoise, Red-cockaded Woodpecker, West Indian manatee, Whooping Crane, and Wood Stork – to name just a few. Some of these ecosystems include the Indian River Estuary, Lake Wales and Mount Dora ridge areas, and the Wekiva and Kissimmee River Basins.

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 support:

The Florida Water and Land Legacy Campaign

- All chapters in the CFRCC will actively support and work to ensure that the amendment is placed on the ballot and is successful.
- All chapters will monitor proposals by Florida DEP, Water Management Districts, and local agencies to declare previously purchased conservation lands as “surplus” and oppose decisions to dispose of or trade conservation lands when such proposals result in reduced protection of important habitat or ecosystems.

Water Resources Protection Campaign

- All chapters will urge decision-makers to enact and enforce meaningful water conservation requirements that eliminate excessive use and avoid consumptive use withdrawals from springs, rivers, lakes, and wetlands.
- Chapters will support the implementation of “Distributed Storage” to hold back and cleanse water in the Kissimmee and Indian River Lagoon watersheds through the restoration of more natural groundwater levels and restoration of historic wetlands.
- Inland chapters will promote state and local protection for all of Central Florida’s springsheds and other watersheds and advocate for the elimination of sewage sludge

("residuals") spreading in the Kissimmee/ Okeechobee and other watersheds through enforcement of 2007 law.

Indian River Lagoon Campaign

- Coastal chapters will continue political action and projects focused on: improving the water quality of the Indian River Lagoon, i.e., encouraging strong local fertilizer ordinances, reducing the release of "dirty water" into the Lagoon; education of the public in fertilizer use practices; elimination of remaining septic tank systems along the river, etc.

National Wildlife Refuges (NWR) Campaign

- Inland chapters will promote (1) expansion of the Everglades Headwaters National Wildlife Refuge and Conservation Area and (2) establishment of the Lake Apopka National Wildlife Refuge; and (3) all chapters will support protection of the ecological integrity of the Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge.



REGIONAL CONSERVATION PRIORITY: NORTHEAST FLORIDA

From Nassau to Flagler along the coast, to Marion and Hamilton counties inland, the Northeast region covers sixteen counties and is served by seven Audubon chapters, and two Audubon staff – one based on the coast and one inland. This relatively undeveloped region harbors unique water resources and a variety of landscapes providing needed habitats to resident wildlife and the birds of the Atlantic Flyway.

The beaches and dunes of the region’s coastal strand are the last significant sites for shorebirds and seabirds on the east coast of Florida and are important in every season. 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 stopover places for migrating birds. Birds of conservation concern include the Least Tern, American Oystercatcher, Gull-billed Tern, Piping Plover, Red Knot, Worthington’s Marsh Wren, Clapper Rail, 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, Silver, and Suwannee. Large sandhill lakes provide for recharge of the Floridan aquifer. These systems are being severely impacted by drought, excessive nutrients, and over-pumping of the aquifer. Local communities dependent on recreation and tourism are suffering economic impacts 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 imperiled wildlife species and bird species of conservation concern such as the Red-cockaded Woodpecker, Florida Scrub-jay, Southeastern Kestrel, Bachman’s Sparrow, Swallow-tailed Kites, and Northern Bobwhite. Adequate monitoring and management measures are critical for long term protection of wildlife in these areas as pressures from human activity continues to increase.

Therefore be it resolved:

The Audubon chapters in the Northeast 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:

- Actively participate in decision-making that increases protection of water resources and restores lakes, rivers, springs, and the Floridan aquifer. Advocate for more effective conservation measures to the region's water utilities;
- Support Audubon's northeast coastal program by supporting bird steward projects and census efforts, and advocating for protection of beach and dune habitats. Utilize the Northeast Audubon coastal partnership model to develop partnerships to assist Special Places land managers with resource management needs by providing volunteers for wildlife surveys and other activities; and
- Support the Water & Lands Legacy Campaign for the 2014 ballot.



REGIONAL CONSERVATION PRIORITY: NORTHWEST FLORIDA

Florida's Panhandle and the Big Bend coastal areas are among the most beautiful, least developed, and ecologically productive regions of the state. This region includes spectacular beaches, four major bay/estuary systems, marshes, and floodplains that are home to some of the most diverse wildlife in North America, including resident and migratory birds. Beaches also provide habitat for endangered beach mice and nesting areas for up to five species of sea turtles. Northwest Florida's coastal economy is largely based on being a destination for beach- and water-based recreation and tourism. State and local parks and Gulf Islands National Seashore are routinely listed among the world's finest beaches. The region also has a rich fishery that supports both recreational and commercial fishing. Oysters, shrimp and other fisheries are historic and important parts of local economies.

The Panhandle is also home to several important military bases, which are not only important economically, but also harbor thousands of acres of wildlife and forests. Several of the bases rely on extensive areas over 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 disaster. Of all the regions the state, Northwest Florida was the most impacted by this disaster – be it from oil physically reaching the shore, the effect of human relief preparations on habitat, or the eventual cleanup process.

In the wake of this event, our remaining coastal wildlife and habitat are more important than ever. Long term effects of the spill are uncertain. While helping to monitor these effects, we also pledge to address the known pressures on these species in an attempt to offset what could be lasting impacts of the Deepwater Horizon event.

Therefore be it resolved:

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

- Defend Florida's existing ban on oil and natural gas drilling in state waters, federal waters in the eastern Gulf, and on our upland conservation lands. We will work with other conservation groups and coastal communities to mobilize public opinion and the positions of public officials against drilling in these special places;
- Monitor coastal bird populations for effects of the Deepwater Horizon spill and other adverse ecological situations and enlist volunteers to assist coastal land managers with resource management needs including nesting area posting, bird stewarding and more;
- Advocate on behalf of our region's special places for the benefit of wildlife and people;
- Support the proposed constitutional amendment for Florida's Water and Land Legacy to fund conservation land acquisition; and
- Advocate for use of Restore Act funds for conservation and environmental restoration of our coastal habitats and adjacent Gulf of Mexico waters.



REGIONAL CONSERVATION PRIORITY: FLORIDA GULF COAST

Audubon Florida's Gulf Coast Region stretches from northern Charlotte County to Citrus County and includes 10 Audubon Chapters: Venice Area Audubon, Sarasota Audubon, Manatee Audubon, Eagle Audubon, St. Petersburg Audubon, Clearwater Audubon, Tampa Audubon, West Pasco Audubon, Hernando Audubon and Citrus County Audubon. Florida's Gulf Coast includes a rich assemblage of habitats that support great diversity of birds, fish, and plant species. Many essential wildlife habitats are being degraded, altered and fragmented, and rural landscapes are suffering from increased development pressures. Populations of many species of colonial waterbirds, beach-nesting birds, and migratory shorebirds 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, development, and consumptive water use projects. Audubon staff and chapter volunteers have worked to protect shorebird 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.

Therefore be it resolved:

The Audubon chapters in the Florida Gulf Coast 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:

- Conserve Gulf Coastal systems through collaboration with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, the Department of Environmental Protection, and other partners in order to: advance coastal habitat protection; strengthen programs of beach-nesting bird stewardship and monitoring; oppose offshore petroleum exploration; provide oversight to ensure that Gulf of Mexico restoration (RESTORE Act) funds achieve their intended ecosystem restoration objectives; continue outreach, education and leadership programs dealing with the effects of climate change on coastal ecosystems; and

- Build Audubon’s capacity through Florida’s Special Places campaign which supports sound water policy for the protection of aquifers, springs, lakes, rivers, and wetlands; expand the role of citizen science that provides data to support wildlife corridors and wise management of Florida wildlife and habitats; focus on adoption of Special Places and Important Bird Areas to build advocacy for land and water conservation through regional partnerships; engage in the process of determining the future of “surplus” water management district lands; actively engage in the Florida Water & Land Legacy campaign for the 2014 ballot.



REGIONAL CONSERVATION PRIORITY: SOUTHWEST FLORIDA

Southwest Florida is one of the fastest growing areas of the nation. Audubon Florida and its five Southwest Florida chapters are engaged in a plan for protection and restoration of Western Everglades ecosystems. Audubon has a long history in the region beginning with hiring wardens to protect wading bird colonies from plume hunters, later creating the Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary, and helping to secure federal and state public lands.

The area has six signature species that help the public identify with the need to protect and restore land and waters: Florida panthers, which require large connected territories; nesting Wood Storks, which depend on seasonal wetlands for forage; Everglade Snail Kites, which depend on good water management for lakes and wetlands; endemic Scrub Jays and Gopher Tortoises, which require protection and management of scrub and uplands, and juvenile Snook, which require healthy estuarine environments. These six species serve vital roles as indicator species, helping gauge the effectiveness of ecosystem-wide protection and restoration efforts.

Working from the science and policy base of the Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary and advocacy resources statewide, Audubon's strategy is to minimize the impact of this growth on specific components of the region, while proactively leveraging it for broad conservation achievements.

Therefore be it resolved:

The Audubon chapters in the Southwest 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:

- Restore and protect the Western Everglades, including especially the regionally scarce habitat types of upland scrub and shallow, seasonal wetlands. Specific objectives include indicator species responses, progress on specific regional restoration projects identified in local, state and federal plans, reform of regulations, and restoration of scarce habitat acreage;
- Restore and protect Southwest Florida estuaries, focusing on the Peace and Caloosahatchee Rivers. Specific objectives include progress toward watershed storage and quality treatment project implementation, like the C-43 West Reservoir. Also

targeted is maximizing estuary-compatible land uses in these watersheds through regulatory and land use policy advocacy;

- Support conservation land acquisition, both traditional and non-traditional, including through local, state, federal programs. Specific objectives include strengthened or extended county programs, funding for Florida Forever, support for the Water/Land Legacy Amendment, and collaborative programs that protect habitats such as National Wildlife Refuge expansion, easements, and innovative tools for use with private landowners;
- Create resilient coastal habitats in combating sea level rise and climate change. Specific objectives include vigorous stewardship programs for shore and sea-birds, and advocacy of resilient coastal habitat adaptation strategies concerning beach renourishment and inland migration of habitats; and
- Work to recover the Florida Panther as a Western Everglades umbrella species using a suite of traditional and innovative tools like land acquisition, outreach to rural communities on “living with panthers,” and collaborative land use strategies with large ranches.



REGIONAL CONSERVATION PRIORITY: EVERGLADES

The lower east coast of Florida is known for its beautiful beaches, productive estuaries, unique wildlife, and proximity to the Everglades. These natural wonders have attracted many people, and of all the National Parks, Everglades and Biscayne National Parks have the highest population density adjacent to their borders. These unique conditions create a distinct set of conservation challenges in order to accommodate human needs while protecting and restoring the Everglades and other wildlife habitat in Southeast Florida.

It is important therefore to recognize the interrelated benefits of conservation for people and wildlife. Restoring the Everglades and other regional wetlands and landscapes provides critical life support and services for our population such as recharging and conserving water supplies, absorbing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, providing world-class tourism crucial to the South Florida economy, and preserving areas of wilderness for current and future generations to enjoy.

The lower east coast of Florida and the Everglades is home to more than 350 species of birds including the iconic Roseate Spoonbill, and the endangered Wood Stork and Everglade Snail Kite. As a result of draining of wetlands for flood control, agriculture, and residential development in addition to misuse of water resources, many species are jeopardized. Preserving current populations and enabling the return of wading bird super-colonies and other indicator species that once symbolized the Everglades are the best measures of conservation success.

While individual chapters work on various issues and activities in their specific regions, the following goals reflect a shared commitment across the six chapters encompassed within the Everglades Regional Conservation Committee (RCC). Together the RCC will work toward these collective goals, while additional chapter activities are reflected in a supplemental list.

Therefore be it resolved:

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

Everglades Restoration

- Identify opportunities to advocate for, advance and improve Everglades restoration efforts throughout the entire ecosystem, including the Northern Everglades, Lake Okeechobee, St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee Estuaries, Indian River Lagoon, Lake Worth Lagoon, the Central Everglades including the Water Conservation Areas, Everglades National Park, Biscayne National Park, Biscayne Bay, Arthur R. Marshall Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge, and Florida Bay:
 - Water: Enhance water conservation efforts at an individual, local, municipal, and state level to provide more water for the Everglades and reduce demand on and damage to the natural system during dry periods.
 - Wildlife: Regionally, look to improve performance of Everglades restoration projects to increase populations of wading birds, Everglade Snail Kites and other species. Locally, contribute to the improvement of wildlife habitat so pockets of quality habitat exist within the built urban environment.
 - Ecosystem Protection: Promote the prompt return of more historical freshwater flows in order to protect low-lying coastal areas from intruding salt water, and contribute to efforts to reduce emissions causing climate change.

Bird Conservation

- Continue participation in bird monitoring programs, working to increase and enhance the information and knowledge base available about birds in the Everglades and Southeast Florida. Increase the utilization and coordination of this knowledge to prevent further degradation and fragmentation of bird migration habitat, and contribute to the connection of habitats to increase survival of year-round and migratory species. In participating in the above activities, chapters will continue to educate member bases and beyond about the role birds play as an indicator of ecosystem health.