

 **Audubon** FLORIDA  
**Draft 2016 Conservation Action Agenda**



**Parks: The Heart of Natural Florida**  
**Maitland, Florida • October 2015**



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## **GUIDANCE ON THE DRAFT 2016 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 is ratified by the Audubon Florida Board of Directors.

### **Regional Conservation and Statewide Policy Priorities**

Audubon's Florida chapters are organized into seven geographic and ecological regions and meet together as Regional Conservation Committees (RCCs). Chapter leaders, supported by policy staff, recommend conservation priorities that reflect a commitment to work together and prioritize regional efforts.

State policy priorities are recommended by Audubon Florida's Board Public Policy Committee and staff to frame our approach to important issues and campaigns and to leverage our resources to the greatest effect.

### **Approving the Resolutions**

A presenter will summarize key points of each resolution at the Friday afternoon Assembly session and ask for a motion to approve. Approval is by voice vote. Questions can be posed, but recommended changes are not encouraged as the resolutions are the product of the committees that advanced them. Additional and new policy recommendations can be directed to the Public Policy Committee. Recommendations about regional conservation work should be taken to the appropriate Regional Conservation Committee.

Thank you for participating.



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**STATE POLICY PRIORITY: IMPORTANT BIRD AREAS AND WATERWAYS CONSERVATION**

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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, many of Florida's native birds face greater threats.

Audubon and partner organizations have designated a network of Important Bird Areas (IBAs) throughout the hemisphere. Audubon Florida is responsible for developing and pushing IBA conservation strategies within the state.

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

Although humans have altered much of natural Florida, federal, state, county, and local governments have protected considerable acreage as parks and other conservation lands. Of Florida's 35 million acres, 28% has been designated as conservation land.

Most of Florida's waterways are managed in the public trust for the benefit of all citizens and to protect natural systems. However,

- Reduced groundwater recharge and drainage of swamps and floodplains has depleted nature's storage systems;
- Diversion and discharge of wet season stormwater to coastal estuaries contributes contaminants and robs those same estuaries of freshwater during dry seasons and droughts;
- Pollution from fertilizers and human and animal waste impairs springs and rivers, leaving a legacy of human-caused nutrients in soil, lakes, and groundwater;
- Overuse of water for farm and landscape irrigation depletes aquifers and surface waters and reduces flow of springs and rivers; and

State and local budget cuts have slowed efforts to protect conservation lands and agencies are under pressure to surplus public lands for budget reasons, while the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) is reviewing proposals to increase development and agricultural uses on conservation lands.

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

Florida's waterways and Important Bird Areas benefit from active constituencies of habitat stewards whose observations and advocacy are essential to good management of public lands and to building public support for acquisition to complete Florida's system of protected areas.

*Therefore be it resolved:*

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

- Actively support state and local laws and programs that protect conservation lands and provide for managing those lands to restore and maintain water, wildlife, and habitat;
- Support the use of funds from Amendment 1 to fulfill voter intent for land acquisition, management, and restoration;
- Support programs such as Florida Forever, Everglades restoration, springs, and other water sustainability programs and oppose efforts to weaken Florida's water laws;
- Seek consensus from chapters and allies on high priority areas and focus on sites and projects that yield the greatest benefits for native and at-risk birds, including:
  - **Florida Scrub-Jay Habitats** that harbor or can harbor successful populations of Florida's only endemic bird. Their habitat is threatened by development and conversion to agriculture and some lands in public ownership are not adequately managed. Audubon will promote sound management and stewardship of Florida scrub habitats and push for scrubland acquisition that will promote overall growth of the state's Scrub-Jay population.
  - **The Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed (CREW)** is a decades-old plan to protect and restore 130,000 acres of habitat around Corkscrew Swamp in southwestern Florida. Although ranked on the Florida Forever list, only half the CREW acreage has been protected and development is encroaching. Audubon will push for accelerated land acquisition spending and focus on CREW.
  - **Lake Okeechobee** is legendary for fishing and bird life that are periodically devastated by extreme water levels. The lake is harmed by pollution and over-drainage of its watershed as well as excessive water supply demands by the sugar industry. Audubon will advocate for pollution control and water management decisions that prioritize the lake's health.
  - **The Northern Everglades** is characterized by ranchlands, which provide, and have the potential to provide, habitat and water storage. Conservation easements and

- wetland restoration projects can increase the benefits these lands provide while retaining historic uses. Audubon will urge the direction of state conservation easement funds and federal wetland restoration funds toward private ranchlands in the Northern Everglades.
- **The Lake Apopka Restoration Marsh** allows people access to experience an amazing diversity of birdlife – 360 bird species use the lake and marsh. Audubon will work with local agencies to plan an Audubon Center and work with local governments toward management of the public lands for the benefit of birdlife.
  - **The Springs Coast and Big Bend Coast** are home to the world’s largest seagrass meadows. The health of those habitats depends on the flow of clean freshwater from the aquifer, springs, creeks and rivers. Audubon will work with the water management district to support projects that reduce nutrient pollution and restore freshwater flows to historic levels.
  - **The Green Swamp**, covering 560,000 acres in Polk, Lake, and Sumter counties, serves as the headwaters of the Peace, Hillsborough, Withlacoochee and Ocklawaha Rivers. The Green Swamp is designated as an Important Bird Area due to its high diversity of avian populations. Only 110,000 acres of the Green Swamp are protected as conservation lands although significant areas have lingered on the Florida Forever list. Audubon will promote “finishing the job” of acquiring public lands and easements in the Green Swamp, speak out against harmful land uses and intrusions, and seek to continue the enforcement of the Area of Critical Concern requirements.
- Seek guidance from chapters and partners to focus resources on the most appropriate places such as high-value waterways and IBAs, proposed conservation and restoration projects, and places that Audubon members and others consider special based on their own observations, experiences, and observed ecological attributes; and
  - Engage Audubon Chapters and other user groups to take action to protect specific natural places, such as working with private landowners to achieve good stewardship by supporting incentives for landowners to commit property to conservation, including government purchase of conservation easements and “Payment for Environmental Services” programs to compensate for improved water management, water storage, and pollution cleanup.



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**STATE POLICY PRIORITY: COASTAL CONSERVATION AND STEWARDSHIP**

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Florida's coasts are home to a remarkable diversity of habitats, birds, and other wildlife. Coastal ecosystems also contribute to Florida's economic vitality and quality of life; yet, coastal habitats are jeopardized by a range of human activities including beach management and grooming, development, coastal armoring, dredging and filling, human disturbance, and rising sea levels.

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

Florida's significance as part of the Atlantic Flyway is most evident in our coastal areas. Shorebirds and seabirds stop over during hemispheric migrations and raptors follow the dune lines as they work their way southward. Neotropical songbird migrants, facing the daunting odds of long overwater flights, use coastal habitats as last southbound jumping off points and first northbound landfall. In short, the geology of Florida's coasts is always in flux and Florida's birdlife is too.

Because of both the extraordinary value and tremendous vulnerability of these resources, Audubon Florida has long ranked coastal conservation among its highest priorities. Through management of waterbird colonies on coastal islands and encouragement of local Audubon efforts to steward rooftop nesting and beach nesting birds, Audubon Florida has demonstrated increased shorebird productivity. National Audubon has also elevated coastal habitats as a national priority under the auspices of its Atlantic Flyway Initiative and "Share the Seas and Shores" program.

Additionally, Audubon Florida has developed a Climate Messengers campaign to advocate for natural resources in sea level rise adaptation and mitigation strategies, especially for coastal habitats like saltmarsh, the beach-dune system, and maritime hammock. And we have been leaders in Florida on the restoration of the Gulf of Mexico after the Deepwater Horizon oil spill disaster.

Florida's West Coast forms the eastern boundary of the Gulf of Mexico, a vibrant ecosystem that supports much of the state's economic well-being. Our ecological connection to the other Gulf States was underscored by the shared adversity of the Deepwater Horizon disaster.

Audubon's Gulf of Mexico network helped pass the federal RESTORE Act to commit penalty funds from the spill to Gulf restoration. Audubon works with our partners throughout the Gulf

to leverage these financial resources toward a cross-Gulf ecological strategy to benefit water, wildlife, and people.

Audubon is well positioned to lead science, education, public involvement, and policy efforts by engaging staff, chapters, partners, and volunteers in the restoration and conservation of Florida's coastal habitats and their waterbird populations.

Audubon brings to bear a coordinated effort of geographically distributed staff expertise, volunteer leadership, and local Audubon organizations to accomplish this mission. Site-based habitat and species management throughout Florida produces tangible results. In addition to on-the-ground improvements, the resulting data inform our policy work by identifying the immediate needs of Important Bird Areas and imperiled species.

Deep and diverse expertise in these issues makes it possible to provide leadership to the Florida Shorebird Alliance - a partnership of Audubon Florida, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Our broad grassroots base positions us well to advocate at local levels for sea level rise mitigation strategies to benefit vulnerable coastal habitats. These areas of expertise also provide us with the perspective to guide penalty money from the Deepwater Horizon disaster to meaningful restoration projects and, in fact, implement some of those projects as an agent of the Natural Resource Damage Assessment (NRDA) trustees, Restoration Council, or National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. Monitoring of habitat changes helps inform sea level rise strategies. Long-term coastal resource conservation and management work provides a foundation of data and perspective that gives a long view to our recommendations.

*Therefore be it resolved:*

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

### **Employ Sound Science to Guide Conservation**

- Use coastal birdlife as a way to connect people to nature and get them excited about and involved with protection of Florida's special coastal places through partnerships such as Audubon's Atlantic Flyway Initiative's 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 and as a way to understand impacts related to sea level rise;

- Improve the management of coastal Important Bird Areas and other special places either with direct responsibility or in advisory or volunteer capacities through bird stewarding programs and partnering with Audubon chapters; and
- Study and understand the effects of sea level rise and other threats to saltmarsh and propose strategies to reduce those threats.

### **Steward Habitat for Birds and Other Wildlife**

- Advocate for wise land and recreation management and the acquisition of coastal conservation lands for habitat now, as well as in a future of higher sea levels;
- Focus growth and transportation plans to avoid conversion of coastal habitats or to facilitate habitat migration ahead of sea level rise;
- Promote proper shoreline retreat, rather than armoring, in the face of climate change;
- Encourage the planning authorities of coastal local governments to consider sea level rise in decisions about zoning and future infrastructure;
- Advocate for water quality standards and for freshwater management plans that maintain healthy estuarine habitats;
- Advocate for the value of coastal habitats for protection from the effects of climate change (e.g., carbon sequestration and wave attenuation value of marshes and shoals);
- Promote habitat protection strategies to provide routes for coastal habitats and wildlife to migrate upslope ahead of sea level rise;
- Oppose and organize opposition to oil and gas exploration, drilling, and production in Florida's nearshore waters and promote clean energy alternatives;
- Encourage use of RESTORE Act and other oil spill penalty monies for ecosystem restoration rather than harmful development schemes; and
- Push for Gulf restoration projects that benefit birds and their habitats.



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**STATE POLICY PRIORITY: GREATER EVERGLADES ECOSYSTEM**

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Super-colonies of wading birds and abundance of other wildlife once defined the Greater Everglades Ecosystem. Now shrinking numbers of Roseate Spoonbills, Wood Storks, Everglade Snail Kites, and Southern Bald Eagles are indicative of the harm that has occurred to the natural system. More than half of the Everglades has been lost to development and agriculture.

The State of Florida and the federal government launched Everglades restoration as a partnership to get the quality, quantity, and timing of water right and to increase the spatial extent of wetlands habitats. Success is measured by significant increases in populations of native birds and the forage fish on which they depend. That, in turn, depends on reducing pollution and improved water management.

The Greater Everglades Ecosystem is also an essential stopover habitat for many species of migratory birds. Songbirds and shorebirds stop in parts of the Everglades for food and rest before continuing to winter habitats in the Caribbean, Central and South America, and summer nesting habitats in the north.

Everglades restoration projects will increase the water available for natural systems and push against rising seas and salt water intrusion that are already occurring as a result of climate change.

The Lake Okeechobee watershed is overly drained and water flushes quickly through tributaries into the lake carrying nutrients from upstream agriculture and development. The lake fills too fast, sometimes leading to heavy releases of polluted water to the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee estuaries. Huge amounts of lake water are used to irrigate sugarcane and other crops in the Everglades Agricultural Area (EAA). Agricultural water use during dry years has contributed to unnaturally low lake levels and caused serious harm to marshes, littoral habitats, birdlife, and fisheries.

In parts of the Greater Everglades, wetlands are drained and filled or otherwise converted for commercial and residential development, agricultural use, and mining. This has led to additional losses of habitat and as much as a 90% reduction of historic populations of wading birds.

Audubon's history is closely aligned with Everglades conservation. Starting with wildlife wardens and continuing with field research, sanctuaries, and advocacy, Audubon's presence in

all parts of the Everglades gives our organization a special role and responsibility. Working with allies, staff, and volunteer leaders, we use science to shape the best conservation and restoration decisions and then policy, communications, and advocacy to advance specific conservation results.

*Therefore be it resolved:*

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

### **Restore Wetland Flows for the Everglades**

- Prioritize projects based on potential benefits to wildlife and work with project planning teams to design projects to obtain the greatest ecological results;
- Advocate for funds to complete restoration projects; and
- Establish policies or plans that direct beneficial projects for restoration of wetland flows and natural conditions within marshes, ridge and slough landscapes, and other characteristic ecosystems that were historically used by wading birds.

### **Protect Habitat from Nutrient Pollution**

- Reduce phosphorus sources in the Lake Okeechobee, St. Lucie, and Caloosahatchee watersheds and the Everglades Agricultural Area;
- Reduce urban sources of pollution and strengthen water quality laws and rules; and
- Support improvement to and implementation of Restoration Strategies for water entering the Everglades and the Lake Okeechobee Basin Management Action Plan for water impacting the lake and estuaries.

### **Improve Habitat and Watershed Connectivity**

- Work with landowners in the Northern Everglades to support better water management using payment for environmental services, wetland restoration, and conservation easements; and
- Focus land conservation programs on projects that protect wildlife corridors including Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed (CREW) and Everglades Headwaters.

### **Prevent Loss of and Restore Wetlands**

- Engage and influence permitting agencies to do a better job of assessing wetlands and giving appropriate values to short-hydroperiod wetlands;

- Promote restoration projects that expand the spatial extent of wetlands, such as the Broward County Water Preserve Areas and the C-139 Annex project; and
- Recover nesting colonies of Wood Storks and other wading birds throughout the Everglades by protecting and restoring the wetlands essential for nesting season foraging.

### **Make and Keep Water Available for the Environment**

- Promote meaningful and measurable water conservation within water supply plans and water use permits; and
- Reserve water made available from restoration projects for the environment, including water from the Kissimmee River Restoration project.

### **Track and Define Wildlife and Other Ecological Responses to Water Management and Other Activities**

- Obtain data on the historic and current population and habitat status of Roseate Spoonbills, Southern Bald Eagles, and Everglade Snail Kites;
- Interpret data and trends to identify actions that will benefit these species and analyze restoration projects and operations to assure intended benefits; and
- Advocate for restoring funding to the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) science programs so that decisions are based on science.

### **Educate People about the Ecological Benefits of Everglades Restoration**

- Use the Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary experience to educate visitors and the public about the values of the watershed, the Western Everglades, and the Greater Everglades;
- Deploy the EagleWatch program to educate people in the Northern Everglades; and
- Conduct a program of outreach to communicate with, educate, and engage people, with an emphasis on diverse audiences, about the ecological benefits of restoration.



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## STATE POLICY PRIORITY: WATER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

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Water defines Florida’s natural ecosystems. Seasonally abundant rainfall seeps into vast aquifers and floodplains, releasing billions of gallons of freshwater through springs and rivers to nourish productive seagrass and marshes along the coasts.

While Florida public policy has long aspired to manage water resources to balance benefits for natural systems, economic uses, and population growth, today wetlands, springs, rivers, lakes and estuaries suffer from decades of over-drainage, pollution, overuse and poor management.

Reduced groundwater recharge and drainage of swamps and floodplains has depleted nature’s storage systems. Diversion and discharge of wet season stormwater to coastal estuaries contributes contaminants and robs those same estuaries of freshwater during dry seasons and droughts.

Pollution from farm and urban fertilizers and human and animal waste has impaired springs and rivers and has left a legacy of phosphorus and nitrogen in soils, lakes, and groundwater.

Overuse of water for farm and landscape irrigation and industrial and public supply has depleted aquifers and surface waters and reduced the flow of springs and rivers.

Policymakers have weakened Florida’s water laws, reduced citizen participation in permitting decisions, and cut funding for science, water conservation programs, and alternative water supply projects.

The combined effect of drainage, pollution, and overuse of water harms ecosystems, reduces the functionality of habitat, and has resulted in permanent loss or expensive restoration.

*Therefore be it resolved:*

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

### **Protect Water at the Source – Aquifers, Wetlands, Lakes, and Springs**

- Urge water management districts to identify and reserve water needed for the health of natural systems, set protective limits on other uses, and implement recovery strategies for natural systems;

- Support springs protection legislation and rules to control water pollution and restrict uses that reduce flow;
- Base water resource decisions on sound science and budget adequate funds to monitor the health of natural systems;
- Expand and improve floodplain, springshed, and water recharge area protection with public land acquisition and management and conservation easements; and
- Enforce wetlands protection laws and rules to achieve “no net loss.”

### **Advocate Sustainable Water Supply**

- Require mandatory water conservation programs with defined savings goals as a condition for issuance of consumptive use permits;
- Enact stronger state efficiency standards for water fixtures and appliances;
- Fund and promote water conservation education and incentive programs for agricultural water users;
- Urge water management districts to set tax rates at levels adequate to fund water conservation, ecosystem restoration, alternative water supply, water storage, and land conservation;
- Promote sustainable alternative water supply projects that use reclaimed and storm water to recharge wetlands and aquifers, and discourage water supply projects that take water away from natural systems; and
- Prioritize reclaimed water for industrial and agricultural uses rather than wasteful landscape irrigation.

### **Advocate for Water Quality**

- Strengthen state and local stormwater treatment requirements to meet water quality standards;
- Require developments to connect to central sewer where feasible and beneficial;
- Limit fertilizer use to the standard of “no harm” to water resources;
- Require that reclaimed water used for landscape irrigation be treated to a “no harm” standard for ground and surface water quality; and
- Eliminate land disposal of septage and sewage biosolids.



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**STATE POLICY PRIORITY: CLIMATE CHANGE**

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Scientific consensus, documented by the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), is that atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases (GHG) are increasing and causing climate change. The primary GHG is carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>).

Greater concentrations of GHGs lead to increased average annual global temperatures, which lead to altered weather patterns and warmer seas. Effects of warming include sea level rise, severe droughts and storms, and shifting seasonal temperatures. The current rate of change is unprecedented. Its effects on humans, wildlife, and natural systems are predicted to be swift and severe and include disruptions to water supply, global food production, and coastal seawater flooding.

Florida is especially vulnerable to climate change and sea level rise. Excessive droughts and intense storms will reduce nesting season productivity for many bird species. Wildlife and natural systems face significant challenges adapting to rapid changes in temperatures, seasons, and rainfall patterns.

Carbon dioxide is the most prevalent GHG, accounting for nearly three-quarters of global greenhouse gas emissions and 82% of U.S. greenhouse gas emissions. Fossil fuel-fired power plants are the largest source of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in the United States, comprising 31% of total GHGs. The hottest year in recorded history was 2014. Fourteen of the fifteen warmest years on record occurred since the year 2000.

To respond to international pressure to address climate change, the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) recently issued their Clean Power Plan with final emission guidelines for states (including Florida) to develop plans to reduce GHG emissions from existing fossil fuel-fired electric generating units (EGUs). When it is fully in place in 2030, carbon pollution from the power sector will be 32% below 2005 levels.

Previously, the EPA determined that greenhouse gas pollution threatens the welfare of Americans by leading to long-lasting changes in our climate and a range of negative effects on human health and the environment. EPA rules require Florida to submit a final plan by September 2016 to ensure that power plants individually, together, or in combination with other measures achieve interim CO<sub>2</sub> emissions performance rates from 2022 to 2029 and final CO<sub>2</sub> emission performance rates, rate-based goals or mass-based goals by 2030.

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

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

Florida businesses, residents, and visitors are significant consumers of fossil fuel energy. Our activities cause significant release of CO<sub>2</sub>. Because the state is so vulnerable to the effects of climate change, Florida should be a leader in policies and actions to reduce GHG emissions and help prevent the effects of climate change from reaching catastrophic levels.

*Therefore be it resolved:*

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

### **Advocate for the Reduction of Green House Gases from Energy Production**

- Advocate that Florida submit a state plan to the EPA by September 2016, or no later than September 2018, that produces:
  - Results in target reductions that help meet a nationwide 32% reduction goal for CO<sub>2</sub> by 2030 and interim goals that significantly reduce carbon dioxide pollution;
  - Results in early investments in solar and energy efficiency; and
  - Rewards for investments in energy efficiency in low income communities;
- Promote policies that encourage, and do not discourage, electricity production from renewable sources;
- Support building standards and efficient consumer energy use to reduce electric power demand;
- Oppose transportation projects that increase Florida's dependence on single passenger vehicle use and support alternatives, including public transportation and safe and expanded bicycle and pedestrian use;
- Push for conservation and efficient use of water supply, landscape irrigation, and wastewater to lower use of energy to transport and process water;
- Oppose drilling for oil and gas off Florida's coasts and on public lands in the Everglades; and

- Oppose or restrict hydraulic fracturing that may harm water supplies.

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

- Encourage people to improve energy efficiency of homes and workplaces including weatherization, equipment maintenance and turning off unused appliances
- Encourage use of energy-efficient appliances, lighting and fuel sources in homes and workplaces, with new purchases being ENERGY STAR labeled products.
- Publicize the DSIRE database for rebates <http://programs.dsireusa.org>; Encourage local governments to require ENERGY STAR qualified appliances for all new construction.
- Encourage use of online meetings, ride sharing, bicycling, walking, and public transportation and support the transition to hybrid and electric vehicles;
- Encourage waste recycling and zero-food waste streams to reduce methane emissions from landfills and emissions from waste-to-energy plants.

### **Promote Ecologically Sound Sea Level Rise Adaptation Strategies**

- Conduct research and monitoring to document and report on coastal habitats, birds and other wildlife to inform coastal resiliency programs;
- Educate people and policymakers about impacts of the rising waters on habitats and water resources;
- Oppose ecologically harmful and expensive adaptation strategies, including beach armoring, sea walls, and other practices that marginalize or eliminate habitat;
- Support adaptation strategies like Everglades restoration that aim to make habitat more resilient; and
- Support coastal retreat policies that help relocate residents and businesses away from dynamic coastal areas rather than help rebuild severely storm damaged properties.



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## REGIONAL CONSERVATION PRIORITY: CENTRAL FLORIDA

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Audubon is engaged in programs for the protection and restoration of the major ecosystems of Central Florida and their native biodiversity. These systems are home to many important species that already are, or may become, endangered or threatened. This includes Audubon’s Crested Caracara, Bald Eagle, Eastern indigo snake, Everglade Snail Kite, Florida black bear, Florida bonamia, Florida panther, Florida Scrub-Jay, Florida ziziphus, gopher tortoise, Red-cockaded Woodpecker, scrub lupine, West Indian manatee, Whooping Crane, and Wood Stork—to name just a few.

Additionally, the proper management of these lands (and all our lands), are critical to combating the declining quality and quantity of Florida’s waters, which are vital to humans as well as wildlife. Some of these ecosystems include the Indian River estuary, Lake Wales and Mount Dora ridge areas, the Kissimmee, St. Johns and Wekiva River Basins, and the Green Swamp and its associated rivers (Hillsborough, Ocklawaha, Peace and Withlacoochee).

*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:*

### **Protect, Enhance, and Acquire Conservation Lands**

- Chapters will work together to build campaigns around protecting, enhancing and acquiring regional special places whether or not they are currently in public ownership (National, State, County and City parks, preserves, reserves, wildlife refuges, etc.). Top priority projects will be determined using resources with regional perspectives (e.g., “Naturally Central Florida: Fitting the Pieces Together” [myregion.org], “Wildlife Habitat Conservation Needs in Florida” [www.myfwc.com], Florida Natural Areas Inventory [fnai.org]). Conservation easements as well as fee simple protection of conservation lands will be pursued. Chapters will identify people and institutions that can help politically, financially, and publicity-wise. Chapters will work with property managers to enhance conservation lands.

## **Protect Water Quality and Water Resources**

- Chapters will actively work to protect surface and groundwater quality from degradation due to activities such as nutrient runoff, phosphate mining, fracking, aquifer recharge with inadequately-treated reclaimed water, etc. Chapters will also urge decision-makers to adopt/enact and enforce meaningful water conservation requirements (enhanced water-conserving plumbing codes, adopt ordinances that require water fixture upgrades and also make gray-water use easier and more economical to implement; restrict high water use landscapes and limit landscape irrigation). These efforts can reduce excessive groundwater use and avoid consumptive use withdrawals that harm springs, rivers, lakes and wetlands. Chapters will share educational resources (handouts, presentations, etc.) and engage in outreach efforts to promote a “water ethic” in central Florida.



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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. 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 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 increase Audubon’s influence on conservation decisions in Northeast Florida using the following strategies:*

- Strengthen Audubon’s status as a stakeholder in lands that support birds and other wildlife by:
  - Communicating with resource managers about Audubon’s use of their properties for recreation and educational activities;
  - Assisting in surveying and stewardship activities throughout the region; and
  - Educating resource managers about bird-related data and tools available to them through citizen science efforts like eBird;
- Improve our advocacy on conservation issues through actionable communications shared among chapters that can generate a timely and widespread response; and
- Coordinate with Audubon’s northeast Florida program to identify areas where combined efforts can achieve greater conservation outcomes.



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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.

*Therefore be it resolved:*

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

- Advocate for the implementation of Amendment 1 and the sound management of public conservation lands, defending them from incompatible use proposals ranging from oil and gas exploration to recreational over-development; and
- Support meaningful Gulf restoration by advocating for conservation uses of RESTORE Act funds and engaging in coastal bird citizen science and stewardship.



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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 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 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 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. Least Tern rooftop-nesting monitors and banding garner statewide and national recognition.

Additionally, the effects of climate change and sea level rise threaten the coastal ecosystems (beaches, saltmarshes, estuaries, and bays) and the birds that depend upon them throughout the region.

*Therefore be it resolved:*

*The Audubon chapters in the Gulf Coast Region of Florida, in alignment with Audubon Florida and the Atlantic Flyway program, and using information derived from sound science, will work together to increase Audubon's influence on conservation decisions in this region using the following strategies:*

- Promote messaging, education, conversation, and action around climate change, sea level rise, and opportunities for environmental restoration of coastal communities by:
  - Using Audubon Florida's Climate Messenger videos as a basis for drafting simple messages for contacts with individuals, groups, and decision-makers;
  - Inserting climate messaging into existing education and outreach programs such as Bird Stewards, Teacher Ecology Camp sessions, tabling events, and chapter programs and fieldtrips;
  - Attending and speaking at public meetings in support of environmentally sound RESTORE funded projects that benefit coastal habitat restoration and protection;
  - Engaging in partnerships with organizations working on climate and coastal changes due to sea level rise; and
  - Engaging with local college and university campus climate and sustainability programs as a way to connect students and Audubon leaders to talk about climate issues with the goal of bringing young climate messengers into the Audubon network.



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## **REGIONAL CONSERVATION PRIORITY: INDIAN RIVER LAGOON**

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The Indian River Lagoon (IRL) extends 156 miles along the Atlantic coast of Florida. It encompasses six counties: Volusia, Brevard, Indian River, St. Lucie, Martin and the most northern part of Palm Beach County. These coastal counties share a number of environmental challenges including: coastal zone development pressure, natural habitat loss, protection of coastal wetland habitat for wetland-dependent resident and migratory birds, meeting water resource demands, and degradation of water quality in the IRL estuary and watershed.

The Indian River Lagoon is in crisis. For decades scientists have tracked sea grass coverage as an indicator of the health of the Lagoon. From 2009 - 2011 the Lagoon suffered a catastrophic loss of 47,000 acres of sea grass (60% of its total), and recovery has been spotty and slow. Since 2013, over 570 manatees and hundreds of brown pelicans have died in the Lagoon. Scientists are reporting widespread Lagoon impacts including massive phytoplankton blooms, lesions on fishes and sea turtles, flesh-eating fungus on dolphins and frequent fish kills. In some areas, the Lagoon has become a threat to human health. High nutrient inputs to the Indian River Lagoon's waters result from storm water releases, runoff, leaking septic systems, sewage treatment plant overflow events and Lake Okeechobee water releases. These conditions require urgent solutions.

*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:*

### **Land, Water and Habitat Conservation**

- Fulfill the promise of the Florida Forever Indian River Lagoon Blueway project by advocating for acquisition of listed sites, like the Winter Beach Marsh and the Hoffmann sites in Indian River County;
- Coordinate local and regional efforts to compel the Florida Legislature to appropriate Amendment 1 funds for the acquisition and improvement of conservation and recreation lands;

- Monitor proposed developments and sales of state owned lands, especially state parks, and oppose inappropriate projects or actions that will degrade or diminish the ecological value of these lands;
- Encourage protection of natural habitats, water conservation, and restoration of historic wetlands; and
- Encourage cooperative projects involving private landowners, federal and state agencies, state and local water management districts, and counties and municipalities to enhance marsh and wetland areas for improved water retention, aquifer recharge, wildlife habitat, water quality, and to provide alternative water supplies for growing populations.

### **Indian River Lagoon**

- Educate local governments and communities about climate change impacts to at-risk bird species and to the Indian River Lagoon ecosystem as a whole;
- Educate local governments about threats to the Indian River Lagoon and encourage a leadership role by local governments toward recovery and cooperation to secure state and federal funds for projects to improve water quality;
- Continue to promote enforcement of strong fertilizer ordinances and push for well-funded Lagoon-wide public education and marketing programs to encourage compliance with fertilizer ordinances;
- Support regulations and projects that will reduce pollution from septic tanks, sewer overflows, reclaimed water, and storm water runoff into the Indian River Lagoon and other water bodies;
- Continue encouraging federal and state officials to reduce harmful releases of water from Lake Okeechobee to the IRL through sending more water south through the Stormwater Treatment Areas (STAs), building more system-wide storage, and urging decision-makers to further reduce pollution entering and leaving the lake;
- Support reduction of agriculture and golf course pollution to the Indian River Lagoon and other waterways through education, regulation, and improved Best Management Practices; and
- Develop a Lagoon-wide web-based report card of sustainability measures that will provide a transparent, timely, and geographically detailed annual assessment of the condition of the Lagoon and encourage state water management districts to support this initiative.

## **Community Outreach**

- Promote the concept of the economic importance of a quality environment and the fact that environmental protection is good for growing businesses; and
- Strive for community outreach partnerships with schools, teachers, municipalities, health departments, service organizations, community foundations, and other like-minded non-governmental organizations.



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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 hiring wardens to protect wading bird colonies from plume hunters and later creating the Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary and helping to secure federal and state public lands. Audubon Florida and its five southwest Florida chapters are committed to working together to protect and restore the region's ecosystems.

The region has seven 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 and Everglade Snail Kites, which depend on wetlands and lakes, Least Terns, which demand wise coastal habitat management, endemic Florida Scrub-Jays and Gopher Tortoises, which require protection and management of scrub and uplands, and juvenile snook, which require healthy estuarine environments. These seven species serve vital roles as indicator species, helping gauge the effectiveness of ecosystem-wide protection and restoration efforts.

The southwest Florida Audubon chapters work from the science and policy base of the Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary and their own intimate local knowledge.

*Therefore be it resolved: The Audubon chapters in the Southwest Florida Region, using information derived from sound science, will mobilize volunteer leadership, members, allies, community leaders, public officials, and governmental agencies to advance two priorities and their corresponding specific actions:*

### **Protect and Restore the Western Everglades, Including Lake Okeechobee**

- Protect the Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed (CREW), including the greater Corkscrew Swamp, in order to assure the abundance of birds and other wildlife and to provide a model ecosystem for people to visit and learn about nature;
- Support funding and construction of the Big Cypress Swamp Hydrologic Restoration Plan and the U.S. Army Corps' study of western Everglades flow-way restoration options;
- Restore and protect scarce shallow, seasonal wetlands through proactively amending permitting rules, leveraging funding and mitigation for actual wetland and habitat restoration, and supporting sustainable water use and management policies;

- Restore the health of the Caloosahatchee River, its estuaries, and the near shore of the Gulf of Mexico, requiring increased water storage and treatment all around Lake Okeechobee. Seek funding and support, including RESTORE Act funds, for land acquisition, dispersed water management on ranches and farms, the multi-phase Central Everglades Planning Project, C-43 West Reservoir, and other water quality, conveyance and storage projects. Using current comprehensive water budget, manage Lake Okeechobee as an ecosystem, not a reservoir, and complete projects underway;
- Ensure local comprehensive plans continue to support good land and water management practices for habitat and wildlife, public involvement, and the actions necessary to achieve the other listed priorities for SW Florida;
- Urge appropriate siting, permitting, and mitigation for phosphate mining to prevent or reduce harmful impacts to Charlotte Harbor, the Peace River, and other waters;
- Support science-based rules and policies on oil/gas exploration and drilling, including fracking and acidification processes;
- Oppose rock and sand mines in areas with sensitive habitats and water resources;
- Assure funding, monitoring and implementation of appropriate management plans for Babcock Ranch Preserve, Big Cypress National Preserve, conservation easements and other conservation lands to maintain and improve wildlife habitat while allowing compatible human use for public lands;
- Work collaboratively with ranchers, farmers, and rural communities to advance mutual conservation interests, using incentives, easements, and other innovative tools;
- Advocate for public conservation land acquisition through any programs, including local tax referenda, expanding the Panther Refuge, and creating the Fisheating Creek Refuge;
- Protect and recover endemic and imperiled Florida Scrub-Jays in Charlotte County and other viable areas of southwest Florida – likewise burrowing owls and red-cockaded woodpeckers; and
- Work for recovery of Florida panthers and Wood Storks as umbrella species in the Western Everglades, using the full suite of innovative and collaborative planning and regulatory tools available;

### **Conserve Coastal Resources**

- Expand beach nesting bird stewardship to include coastal migration and wintering flocks, and increase outreach and volunteer participation;
- Advocate sea level rise adaptation strategies for our communities and conservation;

- Require our chapters to promote energy and water conservation and support policies for renewable and efficient energy sources to mitigate the effects of climate change; and
- Assure estuaries on the southwest coast are the targeted beneficiaries of both coastal conservation efforts and restoration projects in the Western Everglades.



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**REGIONAL CONSERVATION PRIORITY: EVERGLADES**

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

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

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

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

*Therefore be it resolved:*

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

## Climate Change

- Educate chapter members, community members, and decision-makers on the influences of climate change including impacts to water supply, ecosystems, shorelines, Everglades restoration, birds, and other impacts on human and natural systems.

## 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 and 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:** Improve performance of Everglades restoration projects to increase populations of wading birds, Everglade Snail Kites, and other wildlife. 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 improve habitat quality, protect low-lying and coastal areas from rising sea level, and contribute to efforts to reduce emissions causing climate change; and
  - **Funding:** Advocate for increased funding for the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) by reaching out to elected officials and members of the SFWMD Governing Board.

## 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; and 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.