



30x30: CONSERVATION FOR ALL

Conservation is about protecting people and our living planet. It is an investment in our future and improves our quality of life in Florida. Conserved waters and lands support wildlife and biodiversity while providing people with clean air and water, food, and recreational opportunities. Strategically increasing land and water conservation—in conjunction with a transition to clean, renewable energy—is also one of our best ways to address our climate crisis.

The 30x30 Campaign is a global movement to conserve at least 30% of our land and water by 2030. This bold but attainable goal recognizes the importance of wide-open landscapes, as well as racial justice and the need to increase parks in urban and underserved communities. The federal government and states across our nation have made their commitment. With a long history of conservation, it only makes sense for Floridians to embrace this inclusive vision for conservation.

URBAN PARKS AND PUBLIC LANDS

Natural Florida isn't just found in the sprawling Everglades or remote forests, but in our cities and suburbs, too. Just as we continue to protect large, rural conservation lands, we need equal resources for parks and greenspaces close to where people live, providing safe and accessible natural areas for our kids to play and families to gather.

Luckily, Florida has programs that do just that: the Florida Communities Trust (FCT) and Florida Forever Priority List. Managed by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, these programs create parks and preserves that benefit people and wildlife. The Florida Forever Priority List is a scientific-based land conservation program that prioritizes potential land acquisition or easements based on specific criteria, like critical wildlife linkages and aquifer recharge.

FCT is a matching grant program that leverages our state dollars and helps cities and counties build and maintain parks that serve our communities. Since the projects are led by municipalities, those cities, counties or local non-profits commit to the ownership and long-term maintenance. But the bad news: in the last few years, FCT has received little to no funds, with the Legislature failing to fund FCT in the 2021-22 Florida budget.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Prioritize the creation of parks in nature-deprived areas, particularly in Black and Latinx communities.
- Fully fund the Florida Forever conservation programs, including the Priority List and Florida Communities Trust each year.
- Leverage the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund to enhance state and local parks programs.
- Support local conservation amendments and land-buying programs.



CLIMATE RESILIENCE

Conserving and restoring natural habitats is one of our best defenses against the global climate crisis. Upland plants like pine forests and saltwater wetlands like mangroves store carbon, reducing the amount in the atmosphere. The term “blue carbon” refers to the ability of underwater plants like seagrasses to hold carbon, a main contributor to global climate change. Florida’s seagrasses hold more carbon than tropical rainforests, making them climate superstars. Coral reefs, coastal wetlands, and living shorelines like oyster reefs, provide other benefits, including serving as a natural buffer against storms and hurricanes. Wetlands store and treat water, reducing flooding in nearby communities and helping to recharge our drinking water sources.

The newly created Resilient Florida grant program is an opportunity to invest in green infrastructure, including conserving and restoring coastal wetlands. These funds should be prioritized for natural solutions, rather than merely building higher seawalls or bridges that do not mitigate the damaging effects of climate change.



RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Prioritize investments in green infrastructure through the Resilient Florida grant program.
- Protect and restore coastal wetlands and living shorelines.
- Improve water quality through stronger pollution control to support seagrass and other aquatic plants.

The Florida Keys Tortugas Ecological Reserve protects coral reefs and other critical marine habitats.

(Photo by Carlton Ward, Jr.)

WORKING LANDSCAPES

Agriculture is one of the top industries in our state and can be an important contributor to meeting conservation goals. Working landscapes like cattle ranches and timber plantations provide habitat for many native Florida wildlife. Often these landscapes connect to publicly owned parks and preserves, linking together travel corridors for highly mobile species like the Florida panther and the Florida black bear.

Conservation programs, like Florida Forever and the Rural and Family Lands Protection Program, should focus on protecting high-quality working lands, especially those within the Florida Wildlife Corridor, a network of lands and waters spanning nearly 18 million acres statewide. Opportunities for public access and recreation should be incorporated whenever possible.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Leverage opportunities to connect and protect conservation areas within the Florida Wildlife Corridor.
- Fund the Rural and Family Lands Protection Program to provide conservation easements on working landscapes.

