



2021 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

Florida Conservation Voters

Our environmental values: We believe healthy communities and environmental protections are inextricably linked.

Climate change is the single biggest environmental threat facing Florida and our living planet. The negative impacts of this human-made problem are increasingly apparent across the state. Of particular importance to Florida: more extreme hot weather; severe damages to our drinking water and wastewater treatment infrastructure; rising sea levels coupled with more frequent flooding; and the increasing likelihood of massive human migrations from within the state and beyond. These climate-related pressures worsen the destruction of Florida's last remaining natural areas, undermining our environment and its ability to sustain healthy communities. A steady and just transition to **clean, renewable energy** is vital to the future of Florida and the world.

We will advocate for Florida's premier **land and water conservation** program, Florida Forever. Our goal is to dedicate a portion of the Water and Land Conservation Amendment exclusively for funding these programs in a stable, consistent manner for the remaining life of the amendment. FCV continues to advocate for strong land conservation policies and appropriations because protecting land protects our waters and provides generations of Floridians with opportunities to connect with nature.

We believe that clean, abundant **water** is necessary for Florida's future. At the state level, FCV continues to support strong water policies to meet the needs of our failing wastewater infrastructure and address pollution at the source. Water conservation is needed to accommodate future growth and maintain healthy ecosystems. We will also fight against policies that would roll back protections for what remains of our wetlands, which provide critical water storage functions and filter out pollution.

Our **democracy** depends on transparency, fairness, and increased civic engagement in the public policy process and elections. We will advocate for laws that will expand access to the ballot box and protect our fundamental rights, like the citizen initiative process. Fair and truly representative political districts are vital to the health of our republic.

We believe that communities of color and low-income Floridians should not unjustly bear the burden of environmental pollution and unbridled development or the cost associated with transitioning to a more environmentally responsible economic model.

When our environment suffers, so do people. But all people do not suffer equally. Air pollution, flooding, and sea level rise are just a few of the environmental challenges that have disproportionate consequences for communities of color and low-income communities, which is why racial and economic justice must be at the center of our work and the work of our elected officials. Making equity and inclusion a core value is the right thing to do for our people and our environment.

CLIMATE & CLEAN ENERGY

Promoting a reduction in carbon emissions and increased funding for resiliency with a focus on climate justice

SUPPORT: DECREASING FLORIDA'S RELIANCE ON DIRTY FOSSIL FUELS BY ADVANCING A JUST A TRANSITION TO 100% CLEAN, RENEWABLE ENERGY

Carbon emissions from the burning of fossil fuels for energy are the leading cause of climate change. Florida is the third largest state by population and is a significant contributor of greenhouse gasses entering our atmosphere. To prevent the worst impacts of climate change, Florida must do its part to reduce our reliance on fossil fuel-based energy and complete a just transition to clean renewable energy. The Legislature can accomplish this transition through various statutory changes, including an enforceable Renewable Portfolio Standard (RPS), community solar, electrifying our transportation sector, increasing solar power in schools, and more.

SUPPORT: INCREASING RESILIENCY PLANNING AND FUNDING

Florida is due to experience profound impacts from a warming climate. Sea level rise, saltwater intrusion in our aquifers, increased episodes of extreme weather and rapidly intensifying hurricanes, climate gentrification, and more are already devastating local communities and our economy. Like most environmental problems, Latinx and Black populations will suffer disproportionately as climate change-related impacts increase. Resiliency planning and funding is key to understanding how Florida can reduce our greenhouse gas emissions, better prepare communities for the future, and ensure public health and safety. All resiliency planning must be grounded in the goal of an equitable and just transition to 100% clean, renewable energy. An equitable and just transition considers workers and economic effects, redresses historical injustices, and nurtures community relationships.

SUPPORT: ABSOLVING DEBT AND SECURING PROTECTIONS FOR UTILITY CUSTOMERS AFFECTED BY THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in Florida has dramatically impacted families who work in our tourism and service industries. Without a steady paycheck, many Florida families are being forced to choose between essential living needs, like rent, food, medical costs, and utility payments. Along with our partners in the Connected in Crisis Coalition, we ask the Legislature to fund an initial \$100 million debt-relief package alongside additional measures to help Florida's families keep the lights on until the pandemic and associated economic downturn are over.

WATER

Ensuring that all Floridians have clean drinking water and our natural environments are protected with precision and care

SUPPORT: SETTING MORE AGGRESSIVE POLLUTION REDUCTION GOALS AND ACCELERATING TIMELINES FOR REACHING WATER QUALITY TARGETS

Florida uses numerous strategies for reducing pollution in impaired waterbodies. Examples include Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs), which set numeric limits for pollution in a specific waterbody, and Basin Management Action Plans (BMAPs), which provide a roadmap for reducing pollution within a watershed. The state should strive to set more protective water quality standards and accelerate

the timeline for reaching pollution reduction goals, including developing BMAPs that exceed the reductions needed to meet TMDLs. Strategies should consider population growth, include protection for downstream water bodies, adequately address the disposal of biosolids (dried human waste), account for legacy pollution sources, and address the impacts of global climate change.

SUPPORT: ADOPTING EFFECTIVE STATEWIDE STORMWATER REGULATIONS

Stormwater carries pollutants from roadways, residential and urban areas, and agricultural lands into receiving water bodies like rivers, streams, and estuaries. The state has begun the rulemaking process to address this “non-point” source of pollution, which is the largest contributor of nutrients in many parts of the state. New stormwater regulations must reduce environmental harm by incorporating new science-based technologies; eliminating the statutory presumption of compliance; and utilizing periodic, quantifiable water quality testing to determine compliance.

SUPPORT: INVESTING IN AND UPGRADING WASTEWATER TREATMENT

Investments in water quality infrastructure, such as septic to sewer conversion and wastewater treatment plant upgrades, are needed to improve the treatment and disposal of human and industrial waste. The state should incentivize wastewater facilities to utilize backup solar power and battery storage to prevent toxic discharges resulting from loss of power. Florida must establish a timeline by which all wastewater treatment plants upgrade to advanced wastewater treatment standards, regardless of the disposal method. To address the proliferation of septic systems, the state should create a regulatory system for septic tanks that prohibits installation of new septic systems in environmentally sensitive areas, including coastal high hazard areas. Traditional septic tanks should be replaced with nitrogen-removing systems or connected to central sewer. These projects should be funded cooperatively with the state, federal, and local governments as well as industry and public/private partnerships--not from dedicated conservation funds from the Land Acquisition Trust Fund.

SUPPORT: REQUIRING STRONG WATER CONSERVATION PRACTICES AND A STRICTER REVIEW OF CONSUMPTIVE WATER USE PERMITS

Florida’s water supply is not endless, yet regulatory agencies continue to issue water use permits and drastically undercharge for the use of our water, often benefiting corporations over people. Water withdrawal limits that are protective of ecological function and provide sufficient flow for users and habitats downstream should be developed through the Minimum Flows and Levels (MFLs) program. The state’s five Water Management Districts should implement a water withdrawal fee on consumptive use permits and enforce measurable, goal-based water conservation plans based on sound science.

SUPPORT: ESTABLISHING STRONGER DRINKING WATER STANDARDS THAT PROTECT THE HEALTH OF CHILDREN, THE ELDERLY, AND VULNERABLE POPULATIONS

The Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) enforces baseline drinking water quality standards established by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Some states, however, have established more stringent drinking water standards than required by the Federal Clean Drinking Water Act. Beyond addressing traditional pollutants such as lead, Florida must establish standards for emerging contaminants of concern such as “PFAS” (per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances). The Legislature should direct FDEP and the Florida Department of Health to adopt new and/or more protective standards that take into account those persons most vulnerable to polluted water, including children, the elderly, and people of color due to widespread racial disparities in exposure to pollution.

LAND & WATER CONSERVATION

Acquiring, restoring, and managing Florida's remaining natural areas

SUPPORT: RESTORING FULL FUNDING OF THE FLORIDA FOREVER CONSERVATION PROGRAMS

Conservation of land and water is an investment in our future and a top priority for Floridians. In 2014, 75% of voters approved the Water and Land Conservation Amendment (Amendment 1) to protect funding at the state level. Per our Constitution, 33% of all revenue generated through documentary stamp taxes is automatically deposited into the State Land Acquisition Trust Fund (LATF) for explicit conservation purposes, including land acquisition, restoration, and management. Despite the economic downturn and unemployment crisis facing Florida, the housing market has stayed relatively stable thanks to low federal interest rates, and doc stamp revenues continue to grow. The Amendment was designed to set a floor for conservation funding in Florida that was directly tied to revenues generated by growth and development. Land acquisition, restoration, and management are the key metrics for measuring conservation work in Florida. FCV will advocate for the Legislature to restore funding for the Florida Forever land conservation programs to pre-2009 levels (\$300 million/year) and maintain funding levels for other conservation programs like Everglades and springs restoration.

SUPPORT: RESTORING BONDING AUTHORITY FOR THE FLORIDA FOREVER CONSERVATION PROGRAMS

Bonding is a useful tool that can leverage the time value of money to purchase lands that provide valuable ecological functions and are in imminent threat from development. The Legislature used bonding to provide stable funding of \$300 million annually for the Florida Forever program prior to the 2008 recession. This bonding authority, as granted in statute, expired in 2020. The Legislature should restore this authority to improve flexibility and consistency in conservation funding.

SUPPORT: REPEALING THE M-CORES TOLL ROADS PROGRAM AND REDIRECTING FUNDING TO CRITICAL STATE PRIORITIES

The Multi-use Corridors of Regional and Economic Significance (M-CORES) program (SB 7068 from 2019) allows for the construction of up to 330 miles of new toll roads through some of Florida's best remaining natural and agricultural areas. If built, the roads and induced development will threaten Florida's water supply, wildlife species, and rural communities. Of the 10,000 public comments submitted to toll road task forces regarding this project, 93% expressed disapproval of the roads to ruin. The three appointed task forces could not demonstrate a need for the roads. With an estimated price tag between \$10-25 billion, it is a program that Floridians not only don't want but can't afford.

DEMOCRACY

Promoting transparency, fairness, and increased civic engagement in the public policy process

SUPPORT: CREATING FAIR AND REPRESENTATIVE POLITICAL DISTRICTS THAT AVOID PARTISAN GERRYMANDERING

As constitutionally mandated, the Florida Legislature will redraw Florida's legislative and congressional political district maps during the 2021-2022 legislative sessions based on population information supplied by the United States Census Bureau. FCV will participate in this process by advocating for

transparency and fair, representative, and pragmatic districts that avoid partisan gerrymandering.

SUPPORT: INCREASING VOTER ACCESS TO THE BALLOT

Voting should be easy and without complicated barriers. Yet millions of Floridians who are eligible to vote remain unregistered, leading to elected bodies that do not adequately reflect or represent the electorate. FCV will advocate for pro-voter policies that increase participation like automatic voter registration, same day registration, and protections for increasingly popular voting methods like mail-in ballots.

SUPPORT: PROTECTING AND ENHANCING THE CITIZEN INITIATIVE PROCESS

The citizen initiative process is a right that belongs to the people of Florida and is enshrined in our State Constitution. Grassroots citizen groups from all political persuasions have used this process to advance policies when the Legislature was unable or unwilling to act. In recent years, the Legislature has attacked this right by adding unnecessary bureaucratic rules, timelines, and costs to weaken this section of the state constitution. The Legislature's changes have only pushed this process more into the hands of millionaires and billionaires. But getting an initiative on the ballot is not the only challenge; the Legislature has repeatedly refused to implement amendments as intended by voters. We will defend the citizen initiative process and will advocate for the proper implementation of amendments.

OPPOSE: ATTACKING THE RIGHT TO PEACEFULLY PROTEST

The right to assemble and petition our government is intrinsic to the American experience and is a right guaranteed to the people by the United States Constitution. Like the right to vote, the right to assemble and protest are essential tools Americans have always used to create positive change in our country. Protests for civil rights, social justice, and environmental protection laid the foundation for the passage of some of our most important laws. Florida Conservation Voters will always stand in solidarity with peaceful protestors who strive to create a more perfect union and healthy communities for everyone. We oppose legislation that silences and punishes protesters, and especially when targeted against Black, Latinx, Indigenous, and other people and organizations who have historically been and continue to be harmed by racist structures and systems. Along with our partners and allied organizations across the state, FCV opposes efforts to extend protection of the law to those who would perpetuate violence against peaceful protestors exercising their rights under the U.S. Constitution.



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