



# 2022 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

Florida Conservation Voters

We believe that building healthy communities and protecting our natural world are inseparable and interdependent.

Climate change is the single biggest environmental threat facing Florida's communities and our living planet. Fueled by a reliance on dirty fossil fuels, the harmful impacts of this human-made problem are worsening across the state. Of particular importance to Florida:

- Rising sea levels coupled with more frequent flooding;
- Severe damages to wastewater treatment infrastructure that worsen pollution of our waterways and drinking water;
- Harm to public health and quality of life due to dangerously higher temperatures and extreme weather; and
- Economic disruption cascading from the loss of buildings and homes, labor disruptions, compromised food systems, and sudden population changes.

With more extreme weather, including temperatures hotter than 100 degrees, torrential downpours, droughts, and disruption of food systems, Florida also faces an increasing likelihood of massive human migrations as people are displaced from their homes following natural disasters. These climate-related pressures will also damage Florida's last remaining natural areas, vital to sustaining healthy communities. A steady and just transition to **clean, renewable energy** is crucial to the future of Florida and the world.

FCV continues to advocate for strong conservation policies and consistent and robust funding for water and land protection. When we protect land, we protect water while providing opportunities for generations of Florida residents and visitors to connect with nature. We advocate for Florida's premier **land and water conservation** programs, including Florida Forever, Florida Communities Trust, and the Rural and Family Lands Protection Program. We expect the Legislature to respect its constitutional duty 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 (through 2035) and beyond.

We believe that clean, abundant **water** is critical for Florida's future. Water conservation is needed to accommodate future growth and maintain healthy ecosystems. FCV continues to advance strong water policies at the state level to prevent pollution from all sources before it enters our precious waters. We support programs to upgrade failing wastewater infrastructure and transition from septic to sewer. We will also fight against policies that would roll back protections for our dwindling 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 the bedrock of a healthy republic.

Policies adopted by the Florida Legislature must ensure that low-wealth, Black, Latino, and Indigenous communities do not continue to unjustly bear the harm caused by pollution and rampant development. They must also base Florida's transition to clean energy on racial and economic justice and an equitable distribution of benefits across communities.

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

## CLIMATE CHANGE & CLEAN ENERGY

*Promote reductions in carbon emissions and increase funding for resiliency with a focus on climate justice and green infrastructure.*

### **SUPPORT: DECREASING FLORIDA'S RELIANCE ON DIRTY FOSSIL FUELS BY ADVANCING A JUST 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 experiencing profound impacts from a warming climate. Sea level rise, saltwater intrusion in our aquifers, increased episodes of extreme weather, rapidly intensifying hurricanes, climate gentrification, and more are devastating local communities and our economy. Resiliency planning and funding are crucial to understanding how Florida can reduce 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, understanding that Black and Latino populations will suffer disproportionately as climate change-related impacts increase. All coastal towns and cities should develop community-based resilience plans that identify appropriate adaptation and mitigation strategies, including areas for planned relocation. Hardening infrastructure, elevating roads and bridges, and other gray infrastructure techniques are a response to sea level rise, not a solution. That is why resilience planning should prioritize the protection and restoration of natural coastal habitats, incorporate living shorelines like oyster bars, and integrate other green infrastructure techniques.

### **SUPPORT: MORE EQUITABLE AND ENVIRONMENTALLY CONSCIOUS DEPLOYMENT OF SOLAR INFRASTRUCTURE**

Florida utilities have committed to significant expansions of solar infrastructure. Still, the deployment of this infrastructure could negatively impact our communities and ecosystems if the utilities do not give proper consideration to environmental justice concerns. We will support policies that encourage the deployment of solar infrastructure primarily on rooftops, brownfields, or other areas with minimal community or environmental impacts.

## SUPPORT: WORKER HEAT PROTECTIONS

“Global warming” was once the term used to refer to the ongoing climate crisis and its many impacts for a good reason. The planet is warming, and in Florida residents throughout the state have already begun to experience increased temperatures and increased incidences of dangerous high-heat days. Climate change mitigation doesn’t just mean developing new infrastructure to accommodate rising seas; it also means updating protections for workers who work in increasingly stressful conditions. Protections for outdoor laborers will be necessary for a just adaptation and transition to a climate-conscious economy.

## SUPPORT: INCREASING CARBON CAPTURE POTENTIAL

Carbon sequestration is an essential mechanism for mitigating the scope and impacts of climate change. Florida has a natural resource base that governments can leverage to sequester carbon through better understanding, better management, and robust incentive systems. FCV will continue to support efforts to investigate and expand the potential for natural carbon capture and storage through timber, aquaculture, living shorelines, grasslands, and soil sequestration.

## OPPOSE: ATTEMPTS TO WEAKEN NET METERING

The Florida Legislature established our state’s net metering and solar interconnection policies in 2008 to encourage the expansion of solar infrastructure on rooftops throughout the state. Utilities have sought to undermine these policies for years to reduce the amount of compensation they must provide to individuals and small businesses that install clean energy systems. FCV opposes the weakening of Florida’s existing net metering laws, when in fact, policies to expand solar access and incentives for going solar should be supported.

# WATER

*Ensure that all Floridians have clean drinking water and protect our natural environments 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 the pollution of 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 Florida Legislature 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. 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.

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## **SUPPORT: PROTECTING NATIVE SEAGRASSES FROM FURTHER DESTRUCTION**

Florida's native seagrasses are undergoing a dramatic and steady decline, with as much as 58% loss in places like the Indian River Lagoon over the past ten years. Decades of poor water quality (from weak water laws and enforcement) have led to an increase in blue-green algae, red tide, and other organisms that make water cloudy, preventing sunlight from reaching the seafloor. Seagrasses require ample sunlight to thrive. Florida's seagrasses face extreme danger when coupled with damage from boats, construction machinery, and sea level rise. Many of Florida's most iconic wildlife species rely on seagrass meadows for survival, including the beloved Florida manatee. Manatees have been the most visible victim of the ongoing seagrass die-off event, with more than 1,000 manatees dying in 2021 alone (over 10% of their entire population in Florida). Without the dramatic improvement of Florida's coastal water quality and increased protections to stop the physical destruction of seagrasses, our coastal ecosystems will collapse.

## **SUPPORT: ADOPTING EFFECTIVE STATEWIDE STORMWATER REGULATIONS**

Stormwater carries pollutants from roadways, residential and urban areas, and agricultural lands into receiving water bodies like rivers, springs, and estuaries. The state has begun the rulemaking process to address this "non-point" source of pollution, which is the most significant contributor of phosphorus and nitrogen pollution ("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 human and industrial waste treatment and disposal. Florida must establish a timeline by which all wastewater treatment plants upgrade to advanced wastewater treatment standards, regardless of the disposal method. The state should incentivize wastewater facilities to utilize backup solar power and battery storage to prevent toxic discharges resulting from loss of power. The state should create a regulatory system for septic tanks that prohibits the 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 sewers. These projects should be funded cooperatively with the state, federal, and local governments and industry and public/private partnerships--not from dedicated conservation funds from the Land Acquisition Trust Fund or the Federal Land and Water Conservation 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 our water use, often benefiting corporations over people. 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. 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.

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## **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 more protective standards that consider those most vulnerable to polluted water, including children, the elderly, and communities of color harmed by disparities in exposure to pollution.

# **LAND & WATER CONSERVATION**

*Acquire, restore, and manage 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 Florida residents. In 2014, 75% of voters approved the Water and Land Conservation Amendment (Amendment 1) to stabilize state-level funding. As a result, our Constitution requires 33% of all revenue generated through documentary stamp taxes to be deposited into the State Land Acquisition Trust Fund (LATF) and used for explicit conservation purposes. Despite the economic downturn and unemployment crisis facing Florida, the housing market has stayed relatively stable thanks to low federal interest rates. Florida’s population continues to grow, along with documentary stamp revenues and the LATF. 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 critical 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 helpful 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 before 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: RESTORING THE GREAT FLORIDA RIVERWAY**

The Rodman/Kirkpatrick Dam, near Palatka, was completed in 1968, closing off the flow of the Ocklawaha River from a vast system stretching from the Green Swamp and Lake Apopka in Central Florida to the Atlantic Ocean. This act resulted in flooding of more than 7,500 acres of forested wetlands, 16 miles of river, at least 20 springs, and damaged fish and wildlife habitat along the 217-mile Great Florida Riverway. The dam has exceeded its safe and useful life and could be a safety hazard to people and property. The Legislature and Governor should approve and fund the partial restoration of the dam. Doing so will reunite the Ocklawaha, St. Johns Rivers, and Silver Springs, open up additional critical habitat for manatees, and offer new recreation and economic opportunities.

# OUR DEMOCRACY

*Promote 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. These maps will be based on the 2020 Census population information supplied by the U.S. 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 free of complicated barriers. Yet, millions of Florida residents eligible to vote remain unregistered, leading to elected bodies that do not adequately reflect or represent the people. 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 and associated drop-boxes.

## 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 further 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, advocate for more affordability, and seek the proper implementation of amendments.



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