



Investing in Land and Water Conservation for Resources, Recreation and Quality Communities

Florida Forever

Investment in land and water conservation continues to be a critical method of ensuring water quality and quantity, preserving working lands, protecting the state's wildlife heritage and providing recreation opportunities that enhance the quality of life of Floridians. The economic recovery of Florida is tied to preserving and enhancing water and land resources at the same time Florida grows to become the third largest state in the nation. The plight of the Indian River Lagoon, Caloosahatchee Estuary, Florida's springs, the Apalachicola basin and protecting a statewide Florida Wildlife Corridor underscore the need for increased state investment in conserving and restoring Florida's water and land resources. Ecological and economic benefits include:

- Protecting clean and plentiful water resources for natural systems and people.
- Supporting stewardship of working lands, ranches and farms that provide essential products as well as natural resource benefits.
- Supporting the business sector by enhancing communities' quality of life for people and private enterprise that provide, in addition to an educated workforce and transportation infrastructure, clean water and recreational access to waterfronts, natural areas and trails.
- Providing conservation areas for protected species, wetlands and unique ecological, cultural and historical resources that help avoid conflicts over development sites and meet existing local land use requirements.
- Serving as the backbone of the state's tourism industry, including the world renowned coastline, beaches and estuaries. Florida is proud to claim itself Fishing Capital of the World, conservation lands provide important public hunting

opportunities and wildlife observation also represents an economic activity that attracts international tourists and generates spending throughout the state. The Florida Park System generated \$1.2 billion dollars in economic impact during FY2012-13. Recreational fishing by residents and visitors generated a whopping \$8.7 billion. Tourism welcomed 91.5 million visitors in 2012 spending \$71.8+ billion, generating 23 % in sales tax revenue and employing over one million Floridians.

Accordingly, the Florida Forever Coalition requests that the 2014 Legislative Session state budget include the financial resources necessary to 1) secure the ecological and economic future of our state and 2) prevent and address resource degradation that resulted in major ecosystem collapses in multiple regions of Florida over the past several years.

- **\$100 million for the Florida Forever Program** (F.S. 259.105) to address the state's objectives for protecting conservation and recreation areas that form the basis of our environmental and economic health. The program funds acquisitions and easements with willing sellers of lands that are placed on a priority list through a science, need based process. These properties are chosen for a variety of benefits such as water resource protection, including Florida's First magnitude springs and gives statutory authority for water management districts to use 30% of the funds for components of water restoration projects. The program protects a network of wildlife habitat and trails, and provides matching grants to local governments through the Florida Communities Trust to acquire parks and waterfronts that enhance the quality of our communities.
- **\$25 million for the Rural and Family Lands Program**—investment in our agricultural economy through paid conservation easements over working lands protects water and land resources while the landowner continues to manage for land and water protection values.
- **\$55 million for Springs Protection**—The Coalition supports increased funding for important springs protection projects that address water quality and/or water quantity.