



Florida Forever Coalition Statement: For Immediate Release 5/5/14

Contacts:

Laurie Macdonald 727-580-9585

Will Abberger 850-294-2006

Janet Bowman 850-251-9496

Manley Fuller 850-567-7129

Eric Draper 850-251-1301

Charles Pattison 850-322-3144

Legislature Gets Stingy With Florida Forever

Citizen Initiative Will Support Water and Land Stewardship

Tallahassee, FL (May 6, 2014) - The 2014 Florida Legislative Session ended last week with another low budget amount for the popular Florida Forever land conservation program. Despite a budget surplus and the need to keep pace with development, funds for land conservation dropped to \$17.5 million.

Since 2009, money committed to land conservation has declined by 96 percent. Even as the economy turns around, the state's commitment to protecting our natural areas, water resources, coastline and wildlife habitat continues to fall far short of what's truly needed.

"While Everglades restoration and South Florida estuary recovery were winners in the state budget, the Florida Forever land conservation program was short changed once again," said Laurie Macdonald, Florida Program Director of Defenders of Wildlife and Chair of the Florida Forever Coalition. "Water and land conservation in Florida deserves a stable, dedicated source of funding. This year's budget is another perfect example of why it is so important for voters to say yes on Amendment 1, the Water and Land Conservation Amendment, this November."

The legislature limited Florida Forever funds this year to selected purposes that reflect water resource and military base buffering priorities, rather than keeping these among the broader priorities as determined through the Florida Forever statute. New money accounts for \$10 million; \$7.5 million is from trust fund reallocation or interest on existing Florida Forever funds. The legislature did allow for an additional \$40 million from the sale of surplus non-conservation land, if such sales materialize.

Of the \$17.5 million, \$5 million goes to the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services for the Rural and Family Lands program through which easement agreements are worked out with private landowners who will continue ranching and farming operations while stewarding resources for conservation.

The remaining \$12.5 million is limited to less-than-fee interest or for partnership purchases where the state's portion of the acquisition cost is no more than 50 percent. These easements and acquisitions must be used for springs, water resource protection, or for military land buffering. While important, they leave little opportunity for meeting other Florida Forever purposes, such as, providing urban parks and trails and wildlife management areas.

While the 2014 legislative session resulted in a disappointingly low appropriation of funds for statewide land conservation, the results underscore the need and commitment of the Florida Forever Coalition and its hundreds of affiliates for assuring all Florida's citizens are fully informed of their opportunity to support resource protection and save Florida's special places through Amendment 1 in November.

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FLORIDA FOREVER COALITION • STEERING COMMITTEE



**Florida Forever Coalition Press Release
Attachment**

HB 5001 FY15 State Budget Florida Forever Appropriations and Reversions

Item 1583 - <i>New funding</i> from General Revenue	\$10,000,000
- <i>Existing state funds</i> from trust fund transfers and interest on current Florida Forever Funds	\$ 7,500,000
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	\$17,500,000
- <i>Potential funding</i> from sale of non-conservation lands	\$40,000,000
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Land acquisition potential total	\$57,500,000

Section 56 of the bill reappropriates \$10 million of existing Florida Forever funds from FY13 and FY08 that were to be used by the DEP's Conservation and Recreation Lands program and moves the money to the water management districts for land acquisitions, including less-than-fee that provide water resource protection or ecosystem restoration.

Amendment 1, Florida's Water and Land Conservation Constitutional Amendment

Amendment 1 will protect Florida's water quality, woodlands, wetlands, and wildlife, from lakes to rivers to estuaries to beaches for our children and grandchildren -- all without increasing taxes. It sets aside one-third of money the state collects on real estate sales and dedicates it to protecting our waters and conserving our natural lands.

Florida has strong bi-partisan support for conservation and has had public land acquisition programs since the 1960s. For almost 20 years, beginning with Gov. Martinez, Florida Governors and Legislatures provided major funding for land conservation through Preservation 2000 and Florida Forever. Unfortunately, since 2009, money committed to land conservation has declined by 96 percent. The percentage of the real estate tax dedicated to conservation and recreation lands was diverted. Even as the economy turns around, the state's commitment to protecting our natural areas, water resources, coastline and wildlife habitat continues to fall far short of what's truly needed.

Amendment 1 is the common sense, no-new-tax solution to renewing Florida's commitment to protecting our water and land. The initiative makes keeping pollution out of our rivers, lakes, streams, and coastal waters a priority, avoiding the costly restoration, clean up and recovery efforts we have to undertake today.

Amendment 1 will be on Florida's November 2014 ballot.

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