



2011 Conservation Action Agenda

Audubon of Florida organizes its state policy and regional conservation plans to express both our policy agenda and to give members, chapter leaders, board members, staff and the public summary statements of our policy priorities and conservation goals in the form of short resolutions that are approved at the fall Audubon Assembly and subsequently by the Audubon Board.

Regional Conservation and Statewide Policy Priorities

Audubon of Florida is organized into six broad geographic and ecological regions. Regional Conservation Committees (RCCs) made up of chapter leaders and supported by policy staff are responsible for recommended conservation plans for their regions. State policy priorities help us to focus on issues and campaigns and to leverage our resources to the greatest effect.

Engaging People in Conservation

Audubon is an organization built on volunteers backed by professional staff that connects people with nature. In Florida we can do more, and we can evolve with our shifting and diverse population and changing civic and social participation. Engaging people is a fundamental part of our conservation strategy.

Building Field Capacity

There are now 44 chapters in Florida with about 600 identified chapter leaders. The chapter network is strong enjoys staff support along with annual training and leadership programs. Chapters and chapter leaders are the heart and soul of the Audubon movement. Our plans and programs emphasize including and empowering chapter leaders and promoting strong and healthy chapters.

State and Regional Conservation Priorities

The 2011 Conservation Action Agenda includes four policy priority campaign resolutions and six regional resolutions:

State Policy Priorities

- Coastal Conservation
- Florida's Special Places
- Greater Everglades Ecosystem
- Energy and Climate Change

Regional Conservation Priorities

- Central Florida Ecosystems
- Everglades Ecosystem
- Florida Gulf Coast Ecosystems
- Northeast Florida Coastal Ecosystems
- Northwest – Protect Florida's Beaches
- Southwest Florida Ecosystems



State Policy Priority: Coastal Conservation

Florida's coasts are home to a remarkable diversity of habitats, birds and other wildlife. Coastal areas are shared with a growing human presence that is using and altering shorelines and waterways in ways that are often incompatible with the health and functioning of coastal ecosystems and the survival of birds and wildlife.

Marshes, beaches, shoals, seagrass meadows, maritime hammocks, scrub and mangroves constitute a complex and rich mosaic of living systems that have evolved in response to climate and geophysical events. Florida's shorebirds and seabirds depend on our coastal habitats for breeding, wintering and as a migratory habitat. A majority of these birds are state or federally listed, designated species of greatest conservation need, or appear on Audubon's Watch List.

Florida's beaches and other coastal habitats are major sources of the state's economic vitality and quality of life. A range of human activities, including beach management, construction, coastal armoring, dredging and filling, beach grooming, recreational disturbance, coastal energy exploration and climate change, jeopardize our coastal habitats and wildlife.

The 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill disaster brought the imperilment of these resources into sharp focus for Florida's citizens, providing a teachable moment as well as an opportunity to engage more individuals in meaningful coastal conservation. It also made available financial and material resources which, when combined with Audubon's existing coastal capacity and expertise, provide a remarkable opportunity for Audubon to step up leadership on coastal issues.

Audubon's coastal programs are built on lessons learned and practices developed by individual Audubon chapters' conservation, science and education projects and the 75 years of research, management and stewardship on the Gulf Coast by the Florida Coastal Islands Sanctuaries, centered in Tampa Bay. Audubon is investing in coastal bird conservation strategies with the Coastal Policy Center, working with chapters in Northeast Florida, and shorebird stewardship work along the Gulf, funded by Florida Audubon Society and have proposed an expansion in the Panhandle.

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Audubon is uniquely positioned to lead science, education, public involvement and policy efforts to meet the conservation challenges facing Florida's coastal resources and to mobilize our members to be coastal habitat stewards.

Therefore be it resolved:

Audubon of Florida, deploying professional staff and expertise and using information derived from sound science, will call on the volunteer leadership of local Audubon societies (chapters), members and grassroots networks, and work with conservation allies, business and community leaders, public officials and agencies to:

- Use coastal birdlife as a way to connect people to nature and get them excited about and involved with protection of Florida's natural coastal systems;
- Organize citizen science to collect observations and data and support understanding of status and trends of coastal birds and coastal habitats;
- Push for improved management of coastal bird habitat and insist that recreational uses not compromise the viability of imperiled species;
- Raise public awareness and increase advocacy on behalf of Florida's coastal resources and encourage people to use coastal areas in ways that are compatible with abundant wildlife;
- Advocate for acquisition of coastal conservation lands;
- Improve management of coastal Important Bird Areas either directly with Florida Coastal Islands Sanctuaries or in advisory, consulting and volunteer capacities through bird stewardship programs and chapter partnerships;
- Focus growth and transportation plans and decisions away from conversion of native coastal habitats;
- Promote appropriate shoreline retreat, rather than armoring, in the face of climate change. Insist on sound permitting rules that protect coastal habitats from attempts to protect structures with coastal armoring;
- Promote habitat conservation planning and strategies to provide routes for coastal habitats and wildlife to migrate upslope ahead of sea level rise;
- Understand and educate others about the value of coastal habitats for natural protection from the effects of climate change (e.g.: carbon sequestration and wave attenuation value of marshes and shoals);

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- Advocate for water quality standards and for freshwater management plans that maintain healthy estuarine habitats;
- Oppose proposals to open Florida waters to oil and gas exploration;
- Harness the Deepwater Horizon restoration efforts to further the conservation of Florida's coastal habitats and birds.



State Policy Priority: Florida's Special Places

Florida is made a special place by its unique and diverse ecological communities and habitats. The state's distinctive lands and waters deserve extraordinary protection and stewardship. Federal, state, local, private and non-profit land conservation efforts have placed a protective overlay over nearly one-third of Florida. Our waters are held in public trust for the benefit of people and wildlife.

Florida's land and water conservation efforts are unique among states by our focus on designating, protecting and restoring habitat and natural communities. State and local plans, policies and programs emphasize the importance of taking care of and minimizing impacts on wildlife habitats. Florida's citizens and visitors are generally proud of the state's unique natural heritage and supportive of conservation.

Florida's conservation lands and water allow unique recreational experiences, including outdoor environmental education, bird watching and other wildlife observation and study.

Audubon members and staff are among the many Floridians who help steward the state's public lands and waters and who play an important role as monitors of wildlife and ecological conditions. It is our experience that the stewards of these special places are among the best advocates for conservation action and improved management.

Florida has been recognized internationally for its special places, including Important Bird Areas (IBAs). The state's IBAs are essential habitats for migratory and resident birds.

Audubon manages a Florida sanctuary network of lands and waters for the benefit of wildlife and people.

Millions of acres of unprotected land are listed for public acquisition by state and federal conservation programs, however, continued funding for land conservation depends on declining federal, state and local budgets.

Florida's public lands, privately owned conservation lands, and lands and water held in trust for the people require ongoing stewardship to maintain and restore their ecological integrity.

While much has been done to conserve and manage Florida's special places, our conservation lands and water resources continue to face old and new threats and challenges. These include:

- Conversion to development, mining and intensive agriculture
- Freshwater withdrawals and drainage
- Water pollution
- Human disturbance of wildlife
- Coastal erosion exacerbated by climate change
- Invasive non-native species
- Fragmentation and suppression of natural fire
- Inadequate management and lack of management funds.

Whether a major ecosystem, or a revered fragment of natural Florida that has escaped urban encroachment, Florida's special places require active constituencies of stewards and advocates if they are to remain sustainable and survive into the future. By organizing constituencies around Florida's special places, Audubon and others can help renew public support for land and water conservation.

Therefore be it resolved:

Audubon of Florida, deploying professional staff and expertise and using information derived from sound science in alignment with the volunteer leadership of local Audubon Societies (chapters) will call on our members and grassroots networks, and work with conservation allies, business and community leaders and public officials to:

Identify, list and communicate to improve public awareness of and interest in specific places with emphasis on birds and other ecological indicators including:

- Signature ecosystems and charismatic protected places;
- Important Bird Areas and Audubon Sanctuaries;
- Private lands managed for water and wildlife benefits;
- Proposed conservation and restoration projects;
- Places that Audubon members and others consider special based on their own observations, experiences and narratives of ecological attributes.

Encourage people to care about specific places through direct experience and to share their knowledge of and passion for those places with others by:

- Collecting and sharing site-based data and descriptions and sense of place;
- Involving Audubon members, private landowners and the public in stewardship of wildlife habitats;
- Understanding and expressing management and stewardship needs for specific sites;
- Encouraging volunteer stewardship and provide training and coordination;
- Enlisting habitat stewards as advocates for conservation lands.

Recognize landowners for good stewardship and support Payment for Environmental Services.

Advocate for protection projects, policies and programs and seek stewardship funding:

Promote projects and programs including Florida Forever, Everglades restoration, National Wildlife Refuge expansion, conservation easements, and local land acquisition programs;

- Encourage appropriate alternate approaches to conservation and restoration such as mitigation banks, density transfers and tax incentives;
- Promote dedicated funding for public land acquisition and management;
- Encourage programs for control of invasive exotic species and for prescribed fire as a management tool;
- Reserve freshwater resources for fish and wildlife (water reserves) and oppose harmful withdrawal of water from rivers and springs;

Involve people to report, collect, study and make use of data and other information to improve our understanding of habitats, and better connect actions to ecological results:

- Sponsor and support citizen science and monitoring activities to conduct scientifically sound field research to understand wildlife trends;
- Evaluate stewardship and management efforts and make recommendations for improvements.



State Policy Priority: Greater Everglades Ecosystem

The Greater Everglades Ecosystem encompasses three million acres of land and includes some of Florida's most productive wildlife habitat. The Everglades' slow-moving freshwater once flowed continuously from the upper Kissimmee River south to Lake Okeechobee, through sawgrass marshes and tree islands to the coastal wetlands and seagrasses of Florida, Biscayne, and Rookery Bays. The Everglades was famously known as the River of Grass and was recognized for the abundance of life it fostered.

The Everglades is regarded as North America's most significant breeding ground for wading birds. It is host to more than 350 avian species and provides critical habitat for imperiled birds, including the Cape Sable Seaside Sparrow and the Snail Kite, along with other threatened and endangered wildlife species such as the Florida Panther, the West Indian Manatee, and the American Crocodile.

For decades, this magnificent ecosystem has been ditched, drained, polluted, invaded by exotic species, and paved over for buildings and roads. As a result, many species are jeopardized, and the wading bird super-colonies that once symbolized the ecosystem have seriously declined. The best measure of success for Everglades restoration is the return of abundant bird populations, which will serve as an indication of the health of the ecosystem as a whole.

Now, due in part to Audubon's advocacy, a number of restoration and protection projects are underway. These include the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP), Modified Water Deliveries to Everglades National Park, the Everglades Construction Project, the Northern Everglades Project, Kissimmee River Restoration, the Northern Everglades Protection Plan and others.

In addition to benefits for wildlife, Everglades restoration provides important economic and human benefits. These include a clean, beneficial and reliable water supply for millions of residents and visitors and irrigation water for food crops. Restoring freshwater flows will buffer the impacts of climate change on South Florida's coastal areas, as healthy marshes and mangroves absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.

Tourism is Florida's largest industry. Protecting and improving the natural conditions that make Florida a world-class tourism destination will help the state's economy. Many people who live and work in South Florida take advantage of recreational opportunities provided by the Everglades ecosystem.

Restoration is hindered by inadequate funding, faltering government commitment to full restoration, and growth-related competition for land and water. Restoration takes place acre by acre, project by project, and place by place. It involves many individual projects, and Audubon is focusing on those that have the greatest promise to improve ecological conditions.

Therefore be it resolved:

Audubon of Florida, deploying professional staff and expertise and using information derived from sound science in alignment with the volunteer leadership of local Audubon Societies (chapters) will call on our members and grassroots networks, and work with conservation allies, business and community leaders and public officials to focus on the following outcomes:

Improved Freshwater Flow in the Southern Everglades

- Planning and construction of six and one-half miles of Tamiami Trail bridges;
- Completion of the C-111 Spreader Canal Phase One, advocate for Biscayne Bay Phase 1 and approval by Congress of Phase Two planning;
- Operation of Tamiami Trail initial one-mile bridge and C-111 projects to achieve ecological benefits;
- Decomp planned, approved by Congress and under construction;
- Return of ecologically significant wading bird colonies to the southern Everglades.

Water Quality in the Everglades Protection Area

- Achieve the 10ppb phosphorous standard;
- Planning and implementation of the next phase of the Long Term Plan for Everglades water quality goals;
- Completion of Site 1 CERP project to improve water quality in Loxahatchee NWR;
- Achieve legal requirements for mitigation of wetlands impacts from non-farming activities in the EAA;

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- Acquisition complete of 27,000 acres in the EAA and C-139 basin;
- Plans and construction underway for new storage/treatment in C-139 and for new STA near STA 1W;
- A-1 reservoir site converted to STAs.

Northern Everglades and Estuaries

- Implementation of a new improved Lake Okeechobee Protection Plan;
- Approval and use of new nutrient sources controls;
- Approval and implementation of a new statewide stormwater rule;
- Development of new Best Management Practices for onsite treatment;
- Funds and land are assembled for regional treatment projects proposed and funded;
- Programs and funding in place for distributed water storage;
- Funds and program in place for Environmental Service Payments;
- Construction of the C-43 and C-44 reservoirs;
- Reduced water releases from Lake Okeechobee in the wet season and increased releases in dry season;
- New National Wildlife Refuges are established for the Northern Everglades.

Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary and Ecosystem

- Complete Panther Island Mitigation Bank (PIMB);
- Secure agency partnership in protecting habitat through CREW reflected in additional lands protected (at least one section);
- Healthy populations of Wood Storks nesting at Corkscrew using adjacent wetlands for successful nesting season foraging;
- Agency rules on wetlands mitigation evaluation and requirements are improved to reflect requirements for higher scores for short-hydroperiod wetlands;
- Picayune Strand project restores 55,000 acres in the watershed and wildlife begins to return to the area.

Florida Panther

- Expand Florida Panther range and quality of habitat and reduce mortality;
- Habitat Conservation Plan is approved and implemented;
- Habitat conserved with variety of land conservation tools;
- Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge is expanded to include target essential habitat in Collier and Hendry, with plans in place for expansion to Glades County.

Water Policy

- Increase by law, rule, policy and practice agency, decisions in favor of water for environment over water supply;
- Wetland protection and mitigation is enhanced under federal and state rules.

Keys Environmental Restoration Fund (KERF)

- Environmental losses in Florida Keys habitats are compensated and mitigated for in ways that help recover lost ecological functions and values.

Support for America's Everglades

- Audubon's Everglades Conservation Network will increase participating members to include constituencies throughout the nation and in politically important states and congressional districts.



State Policy Priority: Energy and Climate Change

Increased atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases (GHGs) - carbon dioxide, methane and others – are the direct result of human activities. Emissions from fossil fuel use and extraction, primarily for power generation and transportation, are a major source of increased GHGs. There is scientific consensus that increased GHGs in the atmosphere over the last century are contributing to climate change, including increased air and ocean temperatures leading to altered weather patterns and rising seas. Florida is especially vulnerable to climate change impacts including sea level rise, coastal erosion and flooding, severe storms and droughts with corresponding storm surges and seawater intrusion.

Climate change brings a host of negative impacts for birds, other wildlife and habitats. Impacts are expected to increase rapidly over the next century and may lead to widespread changes that will make adaptation by most species impossible. Many bird species, because of long-evolved strategies for migration and specialized habitat and nesting and foraging needs, will be significantly affected by climate change and shifting seasons. These impacts, along with other stresses on natural environments, place birds and wildlife at greater risk of extinction. The world's oceans are absorbing increased amounts of CO₂ contributing to ocean acidification. This is expected to interfere with complex systems of marine life.

Florida residents are threatened with property loss and expenses related to storms and coastal erosion, loss of fresh water supplies and declining agricultural production. State and local government will be adversely affected by revenue losses associated with reduced economic activity and the costs of mitigating and adapting to climate change. Public lands, including beaches and coastal habitats will be greatly affected.

Policies and programs to mitigate the impacts of climate change can reduce GHG emissions. Actions at the personal to the global level are possible and needed to slow the rate and reduce the impacts of climate change. Every act counts.

The United States is now the second largest GHG emitter, and Florida is one of the largest sources of GHGs.

Because greenhouse gas concentrations have a long lifetime in the atmosphere and heat build up in the oceans will be released over time, mitigation will not be sufficient to address climate impacts on birds, other wildlife and habitats. Simultaneous adaptation to climate change impacts and efforts to conserve and restore the resiliency of natural habitats will be necessary to reduce vulnerability and protect Florida's rich biological and ecological diversity.

Therefore be it resolved:

Audubon of Florida, deploying professional staff and expertise and using information derived from sound science in alignment with the volunteer leadership of local Audubon Societies (chapters) will call on our members and grassroots networks, and work with conservation allies, business and community leaders and public officials to:

Mitigate the causes of climate change

- Promote local, state and federal laws, policies and actions to set specific, enforceable greenhouse gas emission reduction goals and targets at levels that stabilize the climate and avoid the most severe impacts of climate change, including sea level rise;
- Promote conservation, energy efficiency, green building standards, compact development and other energy efficient technologies, programs and policies;
- Encourage the implementation of state renewable electricity policies so that electric power utilities and their customers can harness sustainable solar, biomass and other energy generation technologies;
- Influence and support adoption of strong vehicle emissions standards and fuel efficiency standards to significantly reduce the greenhouse gas emissions from the transportation sector;
- Oppose transportation projects, such as new roads, that increase Florida's dependence on single passenger vehicles, and support alternative transportation strategies;
- Oppose drilling for oil and gas in nearshore and offshore Florida waters, which would extend our nation's dependence on fossil fuels that contribute to climate change;

- Encourage policies that support Florida's conversion to a clean energy economy.

Promote ecologically sound climate change adaptation strategies

- Identify, propose, and support ecologically sound adaptation strategies and policies to minimize risks to coastal areas posed by rising sea levels and other impacts of climate change;
- Block ecologically harmful and expensive adaptation strategies, including opposing beach armoring, sea walls and other practices that marginalize coastal habitat.

Educate and encourage our members and the public

- Encourage the practice of energy conservation and more sustainable lifestyles in order to reduce or offset personal contributions of greenhouse gases, including solar production;
- Help Floridians with personal practices, strategies and choices to reduce water.

Promote ecologically sound climate change adaptation strategies

- Identify, propose, and support ecologically sound adaptation strategies and policies to minimize risks to coastal areas posed by rising sea levels and other impacts of climate change;
- Block ecologically harmful and expensive adaptation strategies, including opposing beach armoring, sea walls and other practices that marginalize coastal habitat.



Regional Conservation Priority: Central Florida Ecosystems

Audubon is engaged in a program for the protection and restoration of the major aquatic ecosystems of Central Florida, which harbor the largest concentration of nesting Bald Eagles in the United States. Eagles are an indicator of the health of these systems and are emblematic of Audubon's efforts to preserve them.

While more eagles nest in Central Florida today than in the entire lower 48 states during the 1960s, growth sprawling out from Orlando and other urban areas along with water management decisions threaten to reverse this success story.

The Lake Wales Ridge is an ancient geological formation that harbors a unique upland "Scrub" community, which provides critical habitat to the Florida Scrub-jay and a number of other important species.

The Indian River is an important Florida estuary that has been seriously compromised by overdevelopment, the alteration of freshwater flows and an inflow of nutrient laden water.

Other important avian indicators of ecosystem health in Central Florida include the Sandhill Crane, Whooping Crane, Limpkin, Wood Stork, Snail Kite, Swallow-tailed Kite, Burrowing Owl and Crested Caracara.

Central Florida, with its auto-dependent transportation systems and sprawling land use, is a major contributor of greenhouse gases.

High per-capita use of potable water, over-drainage of freshwater resources and a reduction in groundwater recharge have put Central Florida on a path to water shortages.

Therefore be it resolved:

Florida Audubon Society, deploying professional staff and expertise and using information derived from sound science in alignment with the volunteer leadership of local Audubon Societies (chapters) will call on our members and grassroots networks, and work with conservation allies, business and community leaders and public officials to:

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- Build regional community consensus on the adoption of a “greenprint” or similar mapped database of habitats and natural lands that must be conserved;
- Advocate for the adoption of Local Government Comprehensive Plans that provide strong conservation requirements for remaining natural areas in identified ecosystems and work to adopt conservation requirements in adopted plans;
- Encourage the protection of land with new land use tools such as transferable development rights, density/conservation land tradeoffs, “rural land stewardship,” sector plans and other mechanisms that can permanently protect natural lands without public purchase;
- Influence decisions on land development projects by state, regional, and local government agencies that result in substantial permanent commitments to preserve natural areas;
- Increase the effectiveness and funding of existing land acquisition programs and facilitate the creation of new programs to acquire targeted sites;
- Monitor proposals by Florida DEP, Water Management Districts, and local agencies to declare previously purchased conservation lands as “surplus”;
- Oppose decisions to dispose of or trade conservation lands when such proposals result in reduced protection of important habitat or ecosystems;
- Foster better management of habitat on public lands through the establishment of effective priorities, funding and staffing, and work to increase the frequency of prescribed fire and removal of exotic species as primary management tools;
- Urge decision-makers to enact and enforce meaningful water conservation requirements that eliminate excessive use and avoid consumptive use withdrawals from rivers, lakes and wetlands;
- Promote state and local protection for springs and springsheds;
- Support the implementation of “Distributed Storage” to hold back and cleanse water in the Kissimmee watershed through the restoration of more natural groundwater levels and restoration of historic wetlands;

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- Advocate for the elimination of sewage sludge (“residuals”) spreading in the Kissimmee/Okeechobee watershed through enforcement of 2007 law, which was intended to ban this practice;
- Advocate for federal, state and local funding for high speed rail and other projects to implement urban transit, commuter rail, light rail, and other public transportation as well as bicycle and pedestrian-friendly infrastructure that will reduce dependence on automobiles;
- Seek changes in Local Comprehensive Plans that favor compact urban development forms associated with public transportation systems and which minimize the need for automobile-based travel;
- Oppose highway projects that facilitate “sprawl” development patterns;
- Recommend improvements to development proposals to minimize the need for automobile use and to increase “internal capture” of traffic patterns;
- Oppose mining proposals that threaten important ecosystem components;
- Support and strengthen regulations and conservation programs that protect existing Bald Eagle nest sites and propose protection of areas with high nesting potential;
- Support regulations, land conservation programs, and intensified land management using prescribed fire and removal of invasive species to preserve critical habitat for the Florida Scrub-jay, gopher tortoise and other species.



Regional Conservation Priority: Everglades Ecosystem

The lower east coast of Florida is known for its beautiful beaches, productive estuaries, unique wildlife, and proximity to the Everglades. These natural wonders have attracted many people, and of all National parks, Everglades and Biscayne National Parks have the highest population density adjacent to their borders. These unique conditions create a distinct set of conservation challenges characterized by the need to accommodate human needs while protecting and restoring the Everglades and other wildlife habitat in Southeast Florida.

It is therefore important to recognize the interrelated benefits of conservation for people and wildlife. Restoring the Everglades and other regional conservation issues provides benefits to people such as recharging and conserving water supplies, absorbing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, providing world-class tourism crucial to the South Florida economy, and preserving areas of wilderness for current and future generations.

The lower east coast of Florida and the Everglades is home to more than 350 species of birds including the Wood Stork, Snail Kite and Roseate Spoonbill. The greater ecosystem also provides refuge for other important wildlife, including the Florida Panther and Key Deer. The St. Lucie estuary and Indian River Lagoon, Lake Worth Lagoon, Biscayne Bay, the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, and countless other natural areas are productive for wildlife.

Development, draining of wetlands for flood control and agriculture, and mismanagement of water resources have reduced habitat and jeopardized many plant and animal species. Preserving current populations and enabling the return of wading bird super-colonies that once symbolized the Everglades is the best measure of success of conservation efforts.

Therefore be it resolved:

The Everglades Regional Conservation Committee, in alignment with the professional staff of Audubon of Florida, will call on our members and grassroots networks, and work with conservation allies, business and community leaders and public officials to further the following initiatives:

Bird Conservation Programs

- Work with local governments to support and further develop local wildlife management or protection policies. If no such policies are being considered, propose new programs;
- Further efforts to prevent degradation and fragmentation of bird migration stop-over habitat;
- Participate in bird monitoring programs, such as Jay Watch and the Backyard and Christmas Bird Counts, to provide baseline information about the health of bird populations in Southeast Florida;
- Work with Florida Atlantic University to protect populations of burrowing owls as their campus grows;
- Work to support the Miami-Dade County Park's Master Plan to ensure urban greening and the connection of fragmented ecosystems to support bird conservation.

Protecting and Restoring the Indian River Lagoon and St. Lucie Estuary

- Advocate for the reduction of flow from Lake Okeechobee to re-create the natural delivery of water to the St. Lucie estuary with regard to volume, timing and water quality;
- Advocate for public land acquisition for watershed and wetland protection;
- Advocate for funding and implementation of the Indian River Lagoon South Everglades restoration project, including the C-44 Reservoir and marshes;
- Seek to improve water quality to restore populations of oysters, seagrasses and other marine life while reducing the potential for algae blooms that adversely affect human health and the health of the environment;
- Influence local government land use plans within the Lake Okeechobee watershed, including projects for water storage and treatment and restoring wetlands;
- Advocate for enforcement of water quality standards for discharges into and from the Lake;

- Push to implement or improve residential fertilizer rules to prevent water quality impacts to the St. Lucie estuary.

Ensuring a Sustainable Everglades Agricultural Area (EAA)

- Educate the public and local government decision-makers about water management, water treatment, habitat restoration (including corridor and flows) in the EAA that are essential to improving ecological functions of the greater Everglades;
- Assure that land use planning and decisions in the EAA is consistent with Everglades restoration;
- Protect the integrity of the Arthur R. Marshall Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge and provide education on its importance for native species;
- Advocate for best use of lands purchased from U.S. Sugar Corp. and for purchase of additional lands;
- Oppose Inland Port proposals that would compromise restoration;
- Ensure that the proposed new West County landfill in Palm Beach County is sited so as not to impact the Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge, Everglades restoration efforts, or stormwater treatment areas.

Restoring the Southern Everglades and Estuaries

- Educate the public and policy makers about Everglades restoration's ecological benefits to Florida Bay and Biscayne Bay;
- Advocate for local government and SFWMD sponsorship of Everglades land acquisition and wetlands protections;
- Make progress in achieving water reservations for Biscayne Bay and Everglades restoration projects;
- Promote alternatives to the annual drawdown of canals;
- Ensure that the planning efforts for the Biscayne Bay Coastal Wetlands and C-111 Spreader Canal Phase 1 projects are completed;
- Advocate for immediate planning on BBCW Phase 2 and C-111 Spreader Canal Phase 2 to achieve maximum ecological benefits;

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- Work with local interest groups to gain widespread support for the Tamiami Trail “next steps” project to provide greater conveyance of water into Everglades National Park;
- Support moving forward with planning on all components of Decompartmentalization;
- Advocate for strong seepage management design and implementation;
- Advocate to prevent negative impacts to Biscayne Bay and Everglades restoration from the proposed expansion of the Turkey Point nuclear power plant;
- Oppose plans to add new developments west of the Sawgrass Expressway, bordering Water Conservation Area 2 in Broward County.

Sustainability

- Advocate for and shape smart-growth regional development limits and participate in revisions to development master plans;
- Continue to work to ensure Virginia Key’s natural areas are protected and restored through the implementation of the Virginia Key master plan;
- Maintain Miami-Dade’s Urban Development Boundary;
- Prevent development that compromises greater Everglades restoration;
- Promote understanding of the inseparable link between South Florida’s economy and the environment;
- Manage Audubon Chapter-owned land to benefit local communities and provide refuge for wildlife populations;
- Work with public agencies and other organizations on efforts to eradicate and prevent the spread of invasive species.

Climate Change

- Support the Southeast Florida Regional Climate Change Compact;
- Educate the public and decision makers about the importance of retention and restoration of natural lands and agricultural lands to reduce GHG emissions, because these areas, including wetlands and forests, are important carbon sinks and buffer zones for climate change impacts;

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- Advocate for restoration methods that can serve as a defense against salt water intrusion;
- Advocate for the dedication of funds related to federal and international climate change policy to natural systems for adaptation measures, including Everglades restoration.



Regional Conservation Priority: Florida Gulf Coast Ecosystems

Audubon of Florida's Gulf Coast Region stretches from northern Charlotte County to Citrus County and includes 10 Audubon Chapters: Venice Area, Sarasota, Manatee, Eagle, St. Petersburg, Clearwater, Tampa, West Pasco, Hernando and Citrus County. Since the founding of St. Petersburg Audubon in 1909 and continuing with other chapters and the Florida Coastal Islands Sanctuary, Audubon has more than 100 years of history in the Gulf Coast.

Florida's Gulf coastal areas include a rich assemblage of essential habitats that are used by diverse species of birds, fish and other wildlife and plants. However, much of Florida's Central Gulf Coast is now altered, fragmented, and dominated by human use. Population growth and development have diminished habitats that once supported abundant populations of birds and other wildlife.

Many coastal bird species are at immediate risk. Many species of colonial waterbirds, beach-nesting birds, and shorebirds, have declined in their historic ranges. Some are listed by Federal and state agencies and require significant intervention and management efforts to prevent local extirpation or extinction. Audubon of Florida has identified more than twenty-five coastal Important Bird Areas (IBAs) in Florida, sites where birds gather in numbers to nest, forage, rest during migration, and over-winter.

At the same time, seasonal freshwater flows from springs, streams, and rivers in adjacent uplands and wetlands are vital to the area's diverse and productive estuaries. Water flows entering estuary systems have been significantly altered by upstream drainage, flood control, development, and water use projects. Water quality in many coastal waters is declining as a result of sediments, eutrophication, and pollution.

In the Tampa Bay area, the primary focus has been on the protection of colonial waterbird nesting islands along Florida's Central Gulf Coast. Audubon Staff and chapter volunteers have worked regionally to protect shorebird and wading bird nesting habitats. The Suncoast Shorebird Partnership now ranges from the Tampa Bay Area into Collier County and is part of the larger multi-partner Florida Shorebird Alliance. Least Tern rooftop nesting monitors continue to garner statewide recognition and engage new people. Banding of rooftop-raised chicks

over the past two years is providing additional data critical to the understanding of the needs of this species.

The northernmost counties of this region face a different set of challenges: with large landscapes under public ownership, their challenge is the management of conservation lands for habitat and species, while planning for smart growth.

The Deepwater Horizon oil spill disaster in the Gulf of Mexico brought new awareness to the vulnerability of the region. While galvanizing existing programs and partnerships, the event served as a catalyst for new programs, and increased volunteerism and capacity building for the Audubon programs along the Gulf Coast.

Therefore be it resolved:

Audubon of Florida, deploying professional staff and expertise and using information derived from sound science in partnership with the volunteer leadership of local Audubon Societies (chapters) will engage in the following actions in support of the Resilient Coast Campaign and the Florida Special Places Campaign. We will call on our members and grassroots networks, and work with conservation allies, business and community leaders and public officials to:

- Promote water conservation and the protection of aquifers, springs, lakes and rivers from water pollution;
- Promote regional visioning to apply principals of green planning;
- Advocate for wildlife corridors and against fragmentation of eco-systems such as the Green Swamp, the Withlacoochee Watershed, etc;
- Advance coastal habitat protection, strengthen programs of beach nesting bird stewardship, and the monitoring and conservation of shore birds;
- Engage our members and volunteers in wildlife research and management programs for protection and diversity of Florida wildlife;
- Support energy and water conservation and renewable energy;
- Provide outreach, education and leadership on climate change; and oppose offshore drilling.



Regional Conservation Priority: Northeast Florida Coastal Ecosystems

Prior to 2008, Audubon's Tallahassee or Orlando staff worked with chapter leaders in Jacksonville to protect shoals and inlet beaches used by nesting and migrating shorebirds.

In August 2008, with support from the Batchelor Foundation, Audubon launched our new Northeast Florida program by hiring a biologist to lead a new office in Marineland. Considering that Northeast Florida offers critically needed habitat on Florida's Atlantic Coast for beach dependent birds, the program's main focus has been to establish a comprehensive shorebird and seabird conservation program for the region by training and coordinating citizen scientists to survey bird populations and act as stewards to protect fragile coastal nesting and foraging grounds.

Audubon's citizen scientists are recruited through hands-on science and management activities and quickly become highly educated on regional conservation issues and engage for longer tenures, thereby creating institutional memory and contributing to a conservation culture in the community. From actively volunteering in surveying and protecting beaches, volunteers are more likely to move to advocacy. A major focus of Audubon's work in Northeast Florida is to train and guide citizen scientists, assuring the data they collect is consistent, scientifically sound and useful to government agencies and land managers. With its unique network of chapters, its depth of knowledge on collection of scientifically sound data collection, and its hands-on experience in habitat protection and stewardship, Audubon is well equipped to accomplish its conservation mission.

Below is a list of selected accomplishments achieved since the program began one year ago:

- Helped the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service expand its mid-winter shorebirds survey. In 2009, the survey was conducted by volunteers from chapters, government agency and parks on beaches from the Florida-Georgia border to Cape Canaveral and the southwest beaches from West Pasco to Sarasota;

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- Audubon helped organize and implement migrating red knot stewarding efforts on the shoals of Huguenot Memorial Park in Jacksonville – the first time stewards have been used in Florida to protect foraging migrating birds from disturbance. Beach stewards protected migrating red knots from disturbance for 31 days, allowing the birds undisturbed feeding time, crucial for them to accumulate enough fat reserves to complete their migration and to start their reproductive process;
- Coordinated shore/seabirds surveys at four ground-nesting sites; surveyed 18 historical least terns rooftop nesting sites; and rescued and returned more than 20 fallen least tern chicks to their rooftop colony;
- Improved wintering shorebirds surveys at four sites;
- Organized a visit of a nesting site with Florida Fish and Wildlife Research Institute's and Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Society biologists and volunteer citizen scientists to improve and coordinate bird survey methodology and procedures;
- Secured a year-round ban of beach driving at Fort Matanzas National Monument to protect nesting Least Terns and other inlet dependent birds;
- Audubon expanded the protected area for the flightless chicks of Royal Terns and Laughing Gulls at Huguenot Memorial Park and provided the first ever nesting bird stewards efforts at the park. It is crucial for these chicks to cool down at the water's edge or on the wet sand during hot days. The stewards educated the public about the presence of the chicks and directed pedestrians around the birds.

Northeast Florida's coastal strand is comprised of a variety of habitats for wildlife. Beaches and dunes are crucial habitats for shorebirds and seabirds in every season. Extensive coastal marshes are essential nurseries for fish and invertebrates, while coastal maritime hammocks are home to resident bird species as well as providing essential stopover places for migrating birds. Imperiled coastal bird species of the Northeast Florida region include the Least Tern, American Oystercatcher, Gull-billed Tern, Piping Plover, Red Knot, Macgillivray's Seaside Sparrow, Clapper Rail and Painted Bunting.

In addition to the Northeast Florida coastal strand, the region's special places include abundant water resources from large river systems as well as the greatest number of large-magnitude springs in the world. The Ocala and Osceola National Forests, as well as many state forests and state parks, harbor imperiled wildlife species. Inland bird species of great concern in the Northeast

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Florida region include the Red-cockaded Woodpecker, Florida Scrub-jay, Southeastern Kestrel, Bachman's Sparrow, and Bobwhite Quail.

The region's habitats support a total of 42 Important Bird Areas (IBA). Changes in these habitats due to human population growth, increased recreation, global climate change and sea level rise are likely. Measures to address the needs of wildlife due to these factors will require study and appropriate management.

Therefore be it resolved:

Audubon of Florida, deploying professional staff and expertise and using information derived from sound science in alignment with the volunteer leadership of local Audubon chapters, will engage in the following actions in support of the Resilient Coast Campaign and Florida's Special Places Campaign. We will call on our members and grassroots networks, and work with conservation allies, business and community leaders and public officials to:

- Support land acquisition programs and the prioritization of projects that secure Northeast Florida habitats;
- Participate in local and regional development planning processes with the goal of preserving environmentally sensitive lands and habitats for wildlife;
- Define, encourage, and support wildlife Best Management Practices on IBAs and other existing or potential habitats through monitoring, volunteer activities, and outcomes analysis;
- Utilize Audubon expertise and volunteer energy to assist land managers and agencies with focal species monitoring;
- Engage the public through educational programs, field trips, birding classes, and festivals to foster wildlife conservation;
- Advocate for effective actions by water management districts and regional water utilities that conserve water resources for natural systems;
- Oppose destructive activities such as unnecessary shoreline modification and mining exploitation;
- Collaborate with regulatory agencies to strengthen and enforce existing laws and policies to protect wildlife habitat;
- Participate in public outreach and education on climate change challenges and promote actions and policies to reduce greenhouse gases.

In addition, the Northeast Florida Regional Conservation Committee (RCC) will:

- Collaborate with the Audubon of Florida Northeast Policy Office in the development of goals, processes and actions for Regional Conservation Committee strategies in accordance with Audubon's national, state, and regional mission;
- Encourage and assist chapters in reporting their activities related to regional goals, RCC meeting attendance, and communication with their chapter boards;
- Encourage chapter participation in the annual Audubon Academy to grow leadership and enhance chapter vitality, and offer financial support from the chapters to the Audubon Academy;
- Encourage and assist chapters in growing Audubon membership to include non-traditional audiences;
- Attain financial stability through joint fundraising efforts and grant opportunities.



Regional Conservation Priority: Northwest – Protect Florida’s Beaches

Florida’s Panhandle and the Big Bend coastal areas are among the most beautiful, least developed and ecologically productive regions of the state. This region includes spectacular beaches, estuaries, marshes and floodplains that are home to diverse wildlife including resident and migratory birds. Beaches also provide habitat for endangered beach mice and nesting areas for a variety of sea turtles. Northwest Florida’s coastal economy is largely based on being a destination for beach- and water-based recreation and tourism. State and local parks and Gulf Islands National Seashore are routinely listed among the world’s finest beaches.

The region also has a rich fishery that supports both recreational and commercial fishing. Oysters, shrimp and other fisheries are historic and important parts of local economies.

Oil and natural gas exploration and recovery have long been banned in state waters, although allowed in some federal waters in the Gulf of Mexico and other gulf states’ nearshore waters. However, this did not protect us from the effects of the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill disaster. Of all the regions of the state, Northwest Florida was the region most impacted by the spill and the on and off-shore spill related cleanup response.

In the wake of this event, remaining coastal wildlife and habitat are more important than ever. Long term effects of the spill are uncertain. Yet other pressures on vulnerable species could exacerbate the lasting impacts of the Deepwater Horizon event.

Therefore be it resolved:

Audubon of Florida, deploying professional staff and expertise and using information derived from sound science in alignment with the volunteer leadership of local Audubon Societies (chapters) will call on our members and grassroots networks, and work with conservation allies, business and community leaders and public officials to:

- Defend Florida’s existing ban on oil and natural gas drilling in state waters as well as federal waters in the eastern Gulf.
- Work with other conservation groups and coastal communities to mobilize

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public opinion and the positions of public officials against drilling close to Florida's coast.

- Advocate for a formal policy to encourage energy conservation, the production of energy and fuels from renewable sources, as Florida are among the world's largest per capita consumers of energy.
- Improve the conservation literacy of Panhandle residents through outreach, volunteer opportunities and events.
- Monitor coastal bird populations for effects of the Deepwater Horizon spill and other adverse ecological situations.
- Work with national wildlife refuges to improve habitat for species impacted by the spill.
- Engage on water quality issues that affect the health of our signature bays.



Regional Conservation Priority: Southwest Florida Ecosystems

Southwest Florida is one of the fastest growing areas of the nation. Audubon of Florida and its five southwest Florida chapters are engaged in a plan for protection and restoration of its ecosystems. Audubon has a long history in the region beginning with hiring wardens to protect wading bird colonies from plume hunters, later creating the Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary, and helping to secure federal and state public lands.

The area has six signature species that help the public identify with the need to protect and restore land and waters: Florida panthers, which require large unrestricted territories, nesting Wood Storks, which depend on seasonal wetlands for forage, Snail Kites, which depend on good water management for lakes and wetlands, endemic Scrub Jays and Gopher Tortoises, which require protection and management of scrub and uplands, and juvenile Snook, which require healthy estuarine environments. These six species serve vital roles as indicator species, helping gauge the effectiveness of ecosystem-wide protection and restoration efforts.

Working from the science and policy base of the Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary and advocacy resources statewide, Audubon's strategy is to minimize the impact of this growth on specific components of the region, while proactively leveraging it for broad conservation achievements:

- Protect the Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed (CREW), including the greater Corkscrew Swamp, in order to assure the abundance of birds and other wildlife and to provide a model ecosystem for people to visit and learn about nature.
- Restore the health of the Caloosahatchee River, its estuaries, and the near shore of the Gulf of Mexico, which all require increasing water storage and treatment all around Lake Okeechobee and upstream watersheds. Seek funding and support for necessary land acquisition, payment for services, and projects to achieve this restoration, including the US Sugar purchase, C-43 West (Berry Grove) Reservoir, and water quality treatment and storage projects.

- Defend the Charlotte Harbor and Peace River watershed from mining and other land use impacts.
- Assure implementation of appropriate management plans for Babcock Ranch Preserve (exploring an Audubon leadership role), Big Cypress National Preserve, and conservation easements and other conservation lands to maintain and improve wildlife habitat while allowing compatible human use of public lands.
- Promote Everglades restoration by working with local communities to direct development away from needed conservation lands and important resources to achieve both economic and ecological sustainability.
- Protect and manage the Southwest Florida coast and inland habitats for the benefit of birds and other wildlife, as they are used as migratory flyways and provide critical shorebird nesting areas.

Conserve Birds and Other Wildlife (Indicators of Conservation Success):

- Advocate regionally-based and proactive wildlife protection policies, to complement land acquisition and planning efforts, at every level of government, but focused particularly on local policies and comprehensive plans.

Reduce Greenhouse Gas Emissions, and Adapt to Coming Changes:

- Advocate and facilitate aggressive greenhouse gas pollution reduction commitments and actions at all levels of government and community, focusing on renewable energy, conservation and efficiency. Due to sea level rise and other unavoidable climate change impacts, advocate community and conservation adaptation strategies.

Engage People, Build Field Capacity (including Science) and Build Financial Capacity:

- Encourage, foster and support appropriate research and science, including accurate resource and land use mapping, to advance good policy and planning outcomes for Southwest Florida.
- Increase the human and financial resources of Audubon in southwest Florida in a realistic effort to accomplish these vital and daunting conservation priorities.

- Work to retain ranching and other low impact agricultural uses in Southwest Florida by using innovative tools, incentives and regulations, while working with landowners to reduce drainage and nutrient impacts to watersheds and retain or increase habitat values.

Therefore be it resolved:

Southwest Florida Audubon Chapters and their volunteer and professional leadership, will align their efforts with Audubon of Florida and its professional staff and expertise, all working with conservation allies, business and community leaders and public officials, in order to:

Conserve Special Places and Landscapes, Including Coastal Environments

- Develop public and political support to acquire, protect, restore and manage critical components of the Big Cypress, Corkscrew, Caloosahatchee, Fisheating Creek, Gulf Coast, and Charlotte Harbor ecosystems.
- Initiate and support innovative approaches to land use planning, complementing land acquisition, that take advantage of transfer of development rights, conservation easements, and other land use-based approaches to setting aside conservation areas and direct incompatible land uses away from conservation areas. Be involved directly in the land use planning, infrastructure development, and regulatory decisions that will shape the future of the region.
- Support stronger policies and more effective actions to protect water resources including strict interpretation and enforcement of wetland and water quality laws, and proactively amending the exotics/seasonal wetland biases in permitting.

Conserve Birds and Other Wildlife (Indicators of Conservation Success)

- Advocate regionally-based and proactive wildlife protection policies, to complement land acquisition and planning efforts, at every level of government, but focused particularly on local policies and comprehensive plans.

Reduce Greenhouse Gas Emissions, and Adapt to Coming Changes

- Advocate and facilitate aggressive greenhouse gas pollution reduction commitments and actions at all levels of government and community, focusing on renewable energy, conservation and efficiency. Due to sea level rise and other unavoidable climate change impacts, advocate community and conservation adaptation strategies.

Engage People, Build Field Capacity (including Science) and Build Financial Capacity

- Encourage, foster and support appropriate research and science, including accurate resource and land use mapping, to advance good policy and planning outcomes for Southwest Florida.
- Increase Audubon's human and financial resources in southwest Florida in a realistic effort to accomplish these vital and daunting conservation priorities.