



Audubon | FLORIDA

# 2019 Conservation Action Agenda

*Proposed at the 2018 Audubon Assembly in West Palm Beach, Florida.*



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## GUIDANCE ON THE 2019 CONSERVATION ACTION AGENDA

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Each year, according to tradition and practice, Audubon Florida leaders gather at the Audubon Assembly to express our annual conservation action agenda through a group of state and regional resolutions that address our public policy priorities. The agenda provides members, chapter leaders, directors, staff, and the public summary statements of our policy and conservation positions. We believe we are the only statewide conservation organization that uses such an open process for setting a policy agenda.

Conservation priorities are broadly framed problem/solution statements in the form of resolutions. They do not express every nuance of an issue and instead provide guidance through the year for state and regional work. The conservation action agenda is approved by vote at the annual Audubon Assembly and subsequently ratified by the Audubon Florida Board of Directors.

### **Regional Conservation and Statewide Policy Priorities**

Audubon's Florida chapters are organized into seven geographic and ecological regions and meet together as Regional Conservation Committees (RCCs). Chapter leaders, supported by policy staff, recommend conservation priorities that reflect a commitment to work together and prioritize regional efforts. State policy priorities are recommended by Audubon Florida's Board Public Policy Committee and staff to frame our approach to important issues and campaigns and to leverage our resources to the greatest effect.

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STATE CONSERVATION PRIORITY: COASTAL CONSERVATION

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Florida's significance as part of the Atlantic Flyway is most evident in our coastal areas. Shorebirds and seabirds stop over during hemispheric migrations, and raptors follow the dune lines as they work their way southward. Neotropical songbird migrants, facing the daunting odds of long overwater flights, use coastal habitats as last southbound jumping off points and first northbound landfall. In short, the geology of Florida's coasts is always in flux and Florida's birdlife is too.

Florida's coasts are home to a remarkable diversity of habitats, birds, and other wildlife. Marshes, beaches and shoals, seagrass meadows, maritime hammocks, coastal scrub, and mangroves constitute a complex and rich mosaic of living coastal systems that have evolved in response to climate and geophysical events. Many coastal bird species are now state or federally listed, designated species of greatest conservation need, or considered priority species by National Audubon Society.

Coastal ecosystems also contribute to Florida's economic vitality and quality of life; yet coastal habitats are jeopardized by a range of human activities including beach management and grooming, continued development, coastal armoring, dredging and filling, human disturbance, and rising sea levels.

Gulf Coast marine environments supporting shorebirds, seabirds, wading birds, and waterfowl are threatened by high nutrient loads in surface water runoff from urban fertilizer applications, biosolids disposal sites, septic tank drainage, and agricultural operations that discharge to Lake Okeechobee and to riparian systems that drain to both the Gulf and Atlantic coasts. These high nutrient loads contribute to cyanobacteria blooms in coastal estuaries and to the persistence and spread of red tide outbreaks in Gulf waters for which there are no short-term corrections.

Because of the extraordinary value and tremendous vulnerability of these resources, Audubon Florida has long ranked coastal conservation among its highest priorities. National Audubon Society has also elevated coastal habitats as a national priority under the auspices of its Atlantic Flyway Initiative and Coasts program.

Additionally, Audubon Florida advocates for natural resources in sea level rise adaptation and mitigation strategies, especially for coastal habitats like saltmarsh, the beach-dune system, and maritime hammock. And we have been leaders in Florida on the restoration of the Gulf of Mexico after the Deepwater Horizon oil spill disaster.

Florida's ecological connection to the other Gulf States was underscored by the shared adversity of the Deepwater Horizon disaster. Audubon's Gulf of Mexico network helped pass the federal RESTORE Act to commit penalty funds from the spill to Gulf restoration. Audubon continues to work with our Gulf Coast partners to leverage these financial resources toward a cross-Gulf ecological strategy that benefits water, wildlife, and people.

Audubon is well positioned to lead science, education, public involvement, and policy efforts by engaging staff, chapters, partners, and volunteers in the restoration and conservation of Florida's coastal habitats and their waterbird populations. Audubon engages in coastal conservation through our geographically distributed staff expertise, volunteer leadership, and local Audubon organizations. Site-based habitat and species management throughout Florida produce tangible results. In addition to on-the-ground improvements, the resulting data inform our policy work by identifying the immediate needs of Important Bird Areas and imperiled species.

Deep and diverse expertise in these issues makes it possible to provide leadership to the Florida Shorebird Alliance—a partnership of Audubon Florida, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Our broad grassroots base positions us well to advocate at local levels for sea level rise mitigation strategies to benefit vulnerable coastal habitats. These areas of expertise also provide us with the perspective to guide penalty money from the Deepwater Horizon disaster to meaningful stewardship and restoration projects and, in fact, implement some of those projects as an agent of the Natural Resource Damage Assessment (NRDA) trustees, Restoration Council, or National Fish and Wildlife Foundation.

Monitoring of habitat changes helps inform sea level rise strategies. Long-term coastal resource conservation and management work provide a foundation of data and perspective that gives a long view to our recommendations. Our experience also prepares us to address new challenges, such as the response and restoration efforts resulting from catastrophic storms like Hurricanes Irma and Michael.

*Therefore be it resolved:*

*Audubon 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 will work with conservation allies, business and community leaders, public officials, and agencies to:*

### **Employ Sound Science to Guide Conservation**

- Use coastal birdlife as a way to connect people to nature and engage them to be involved with protection of Florida's special coastal places through partnerships such as Audubon's Atlantic Flyway Initiative's Coasts program and the Florida Shorebird Alliance;

- Recruit, train, and deploy volunteers at Gulf Coast and Northeast Florida beach-nesting, rooftop-nesting, and wading bird rookery sites to actively help conserve coastal birds;
- Improve the management of coastal Important Bird Areas and other special places either with direct responsibility or in advisory or volunteer capacities through bird stewarding programs and partnering with Audubon chapters;
- Partner with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission to convene spring and fall partnership meetings on the Gulf Coast and in Northeast Florida;
- Establish symbolic fencing around historic and new shorebird-nesting areas, tree islands, and protective fencing on gravel rooftops and monitor the breeding productivity of nests throughout each season following the Florida Breeding Bird Protocol;
- Engage in nesting site disturbance abatement with Florida Shorebird Alliance partners;
- Implement migratory and wintering coastal bird population data collection at important Gulf Coast sites to better conserve non-breeding bird hotspots; and
- Help assess the impacts to birds and habitat from post-nesting season storm events like Hurricanes Irma and Michael, and in-season storm events like subtropical storm Alberto to identify priorities for recovery/restoration efforts.

### **Advocate for Birds and Other Wildlife**

- Advocate for wise land and recreation management and the acquisition of coastal conservation lands for habitat now, as well as in a future of higher sea levels;
- Advocate for freshwater management rules and policies that will reduce nutrient loads in coastal waters from biosolids disposal, septic tanks, urban fertilizer applications, and agricultural sources in order to decrease the duration and breadth of cyanobacteria and red tide outbreaks;
- Promote planned shoreline retreat, rather than armoring, in the face of climate change;
- Promote habitat protection strategies to provide routes for coastal habitats and wildlife to migrate upslope ahead of sea level rise;
- Encourage the planning authorities of coastal local governments to consider sea level rise in decisions about zoning and future infrastructure;

- Advocate for the value of coastal habitats for protection from the effects of climate change (e.g., carbon sequestration and wave attenuation value of marshes and shoals);
- Ensure adequate resources exist to enforce Critical Wildlife Area protections through collaboration with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission by implementing patrol schedules and increased officer effort at key nesting sites;
- Oppose and organize opposition to oil and gas exploration, drilling, and production in Florida's nearshore waters and promote clean energy alternatives;
- Encourage use of RESTORE Act, other oil spill penalty monies, and hurricane recovery funding for ecosystem restoration and resilience rather than harmful development schemes;
- Collaborate with Audubon's Gulf Policy Team and hurricane recovery team to secure funding for restoration projects that benefit birds and their habitats; and
- Collaborate with DC policy office to enlist chapters to support Coastal Barrier Resources Act (CBRA) unit expansion and engage targeted members of the Florida legislative delegation.

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STATE CONSERVATION PRIORITY: WATER

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Water defines Florida's natural ecosystems. Seasonally abundant rainfall seeps into aquifers and over floodplains, with billions of gallons of freshwater flowing through springs and rivers towards highly productive marshes and seagrass beds along the coast. Florida's aquatic systems and unique position in the Atlantic Flyway make it a critical resource for resident and migratory birds.

Alteration of Florida's landscape has drastically reduced its ability to store the plentiful water that the state receives. This has resulted in overdrained wetlands and depleted aquifers, while simultaneously delivering harmful amounts of nutrient-laden water to our coastal ecosystems. People, industry, and nature are without sufficient water during dry periods and droughts. This has caused significant harm to Florida's birdlife as evidenced by the 90% loss of wading birds in the Everglades.

High demands for water throughout Florida combined with dwindling natural storage capacity have created an intense, and unfortunate, struggle for water between people and the environment. Agricultural, industrial, and public uses all compete for the water needed to maintain healthy springs, rivers, and wetlands.

Surface waters throughout the state are listed as impaired because of poor water quality. Pollution from agricultural, industrial, and urban sources is harming Florida's waterways and ecological communities. Farm and urban fertilizers combined with human and animal waste have elevated nutrient loads in springs, lakes, rivers and coastlines. Years of overuse and inaction have left a daunting legacy of nutrient-rich sediments accumulated within our aquatic systems.

The combined effects of drainage, pollution, and overuse of water threaten the sustainability of Florida's natural systems, the state's economy, and quality of life.

*Therefore be it resolved:*

*Audubon 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 will work with conservation allies, business and community leaders, public officials, and agencies to:*

**Protect Water at the Source – Aquifers, Wetlands, Lakes, and Springs**

- Engage with Water Management Districts as a key stakeholder in healthy water systems in the state of Florida, and:



- Encourage WMDs to identify and reserve water needed for the health of natural systems, including water made available by restorations projects;
  - Encourage WMDs to set protective limits for flows and levels in water bodies, and implement recovery strategies where these are not met;
  - Advocate for sufficient funding for WMDs to perform direct water supply duties including water conservation, ecosystem restoration, alternative water supply, water storage projects, and water quality monitoring programs.
- Encourage expansion and improvement of floodplain, springshed, and water recharge protection through public land acquisition, conservation easements, and restoration programs, such as Florida Forever;
  - Promote restoration projects that improve freshwater flows to and expand the spatial extent of wetlands as a preferred method for achieving restoration goals;
  - Assist water managers in creating operational plans that are protective of natural systems and deliver the benefits expected from restoration projects;
  - Focus research and messaging on systems where birds are a visible and meaningful metric of health;
  - Ensure no loss of protection from any proposed changes to the 404 permit program in Florida while also working to improve the regulatory process on state and local levels;
  - Work with public and private landowners to encourage improved habitat and watershed connectivity through payment for environmental services, wetland restoration, and conservation easements in priority areas like the Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed and the Everglades Headwaters National Wildlife Refuge; and
  - Prioritize work to improve ecological conditions in important aquatic resources throughout the state including the Springs Coast, Big Bend, the Apalachicola River and Bay, the Green Swamp ecosystem, the Greater Everglades ecosystem, and Audubon's Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary.

### **Advocate for Sustainable Water Supplies for Natural and Built Systems**

- Advocate for water conservation programs to include water use reduction as a condition in water supply consumptive use permits;
- Enact stronger efficiency standards for all water uses in combination with sustainable limits on use that ensure the protection of aquifers and aquatic habitats;

- Promote development and funding of water conservation efforts, including education and incentives;
- Promote sustainable alternative water supply projects, including those using reclaimed and storm water, that improve conditions in natural systems; and
- Encourage decision-makers to support projects that have a positive effect on water availability for natural systems.

### **Advocate for Water Quality Improvements**

- Campaign for stronger state and local stormwater treatment requirements that protect ecological health;
- Endorse requirements for, especially in impaired basins:
  - Connections to central sewer where feasible;
  - Fertilizer use to be limited to the standard of “no harm” to water resources;
  - Elimination of land application of sewage biosolids;
- Encourage reclaimed water use in ways that benefit or protect the water quality of natural systems;
- Engage agencies to ensure water quality milestones from the Restoration Strategies for Clean Water for the Everglades plan are met on schedule and the consent decree overseeing Everglades phosphorus standards remains in place;
- Assist agencies in the creation and revision of Basin Management Action Plans that include effective projects and strategies to reduce nutrient impacts on receiving water bodies;
- Work to improve enforcement of state water laws, including those established or modified by SB 552, to achieve water quality improvements throughout the state.

### **Continue our long-standing work to protect and restore America’s Everglades**

- Secure increased and consistent funding at the state and federal levels to advance the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Project and other key Everglades restoration programs in order to increase freshwater storage, maximize freshwater flows and achieve maximum ecosystem benefits as quickly as possible;

- Continue efforts to improve our knowledge on the status and ecology of Roseate Spoonbills, Wood Storks, Southern Bald Eagles, and the Everglades Snail Kite – important indicator species that are being used to assess and refine Everglades restoration;
- Implement the Everglades Agricultural Area Storage Reservoir project from Senate Bill 10 and advance the Central Everglades Project to direct more water to Everglades National Park and Florida Bay;
- Support efforts at the local, state, and federal levels that reduce excessive nutrients from entering Lake Okeechobee and the Northern Estuaries and advocate for water management decisions that prioritize the ecological functions and long-term health of Lake Okeechobee and the Northern Estuaries.
- Educate people about the ecological benefits of Everglades restoration through Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary and Audubon’s EagleWatch programs; and
- Bring elected officials into the Everglades ecosystem by offering educational tours of Lake Okeechobee and Florida Bay with Audubon’s science and policy staff.

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STATE CONSERVATION PRIORITY: CLIMATE

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The Earth's climate is changing. Temperatures are rising, snow and rainfall patterns are shifting, and more extreme climate events – like more powerful hurricanes, heavy rainstorms and record high temperatures – are already happening. Many of these observed changes are linked to the rising levels of heat-trapping carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases (GHGs) in our atmosphere, caused by human activities.

Human-induced climate change is projected to continue. Heat-trapping gases already in the atmosphere have committed us to a hotter future with more climate-related impacts over the next few decades. The magnitude of climate change beyond the next few decades depends primarily on the amount of heat-trapping gases that human activities emit globally, now and in the future.

**Ecosystems and the benefits they provide to society are being affected by climate change. The capacity of ecosystems to buffer the impacts of extreme events like fires, floods, and severe storms is being overwhelmed.**

Impacts on biodiversity are already being observed in alteration of the timing of critical biological events such as spring bud burst and substantial range shifts of many species. In the longer term, there is an increased risk of species extinction. Events such as droughts, floods, wildfires, and pest outbreaks associated with climate change are already disrupting ecosystems. These changes limit the capacity of ecosystems to continue to play important roles in reducing the impacts of these extreme events on infrastructure and human communities.

Bird wintering ranges have shifted and some birds have altered their migration habits to adapt to changes in temperature or other environmental conditions. Long-term studies have found that bird species in North America have shifted their wintering grounds northward by an average of more than 40 miles since 1966, with several species shifting by hundreds of miles.

Florida is especially vulnerable to sea level rise, hurricanes, and other intense weather patterns and increased average temperatures. Prolonged droughts and intense storms will reduce nesting season productivity for many bird species. Wildlife and natural systems will not adapt easily to changes in temperatures, seasons, and rainfall patterns.

Florida businesses, residents, and visitors are significant consumers of energy and our activities contribute significantly to GHGs in the atmosphere. Because the state is so

vulnerable to the effects of climate change, Florida should be a leader in policies and actions to reduce GHG emissions and take actions to limit the effects of climate change.

Florida is just beginning to address issues of climate resiliency such as shoreline migration and saltwater impacts on drinking water sources. In addition to resiliency, Florida is only beginning to address mitigation actions to reduce our emissions as a state. Local governments are leading the charge on conversion to renewable energy generation, fuel-efficient electric or hybrid vehicle fleets, improved public transportation, and other actions.

*Therefore be it resolved:*

*Audubon 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 will work with conservation allies, business and community leaders, public officials, and agencies to:*

### **Advocate for the Reduction of Greenhouse Gases**

- Encourage local and state governments to:
- Target reductions that significantly reduce carbon dioxide pollution;
- Make investments in solar energy and energy efficiency;
- Provide incentives for investments in energy efficiency in low-income communities;
- Promote policies that encourage, and do not discourage, electricity production from renewable sources;
- Oppose drilling for oil and gas off Florida's coasts and on public lands;
- Oppose fracking and acid matrix stimulation for oil and gas until adoption of rules avoid excessive use of water and prevent harm to water resources and air quality as well as to prevent methane from escaping into the atmosphere;
- Support responsible siting of solar energy facilities in partnership with local governments responsible for land use regulation;
- Oppose transportation projects that increase dependence on single passenger vehicle use and support alternatives including expanded public transportation and safe and bicycle and pedestrian use; and
- Encourage local governments to protect tree canopy and engage residents in tree-planting.

## **Encourage Energy Conservation in Homes, Workplaces and Communities**

- Encourage people to improve energy efficiency of homes and workplaces including weatherization, equipment maintenance, and turning off unused appliances;
- Encourage the public to use ENERGY STAR energy-efficient appliances, lighting, and fuel sources in homes and workplace;
- Support building standards and efficient consumer energy use to reduce electric power demand, for example, encourage local governments to require ENERGY STAR qualified appliances for all new construction;
- Encourage waste recycling and reduced food waste to reduce methane emissions from landfills and emissions from waste-to-energy plants; and
- Encourage conservation and efficient use of water as water supply and treatment requires large amounts of electric power.

## **Promote Ecologically Sound Sea Level Rise Adaptation Strategies**

- Conduct research and monitoring to document and report on coastal habitats, birds, and other wildlife to inform coastal resiliency programs;
- Educate the public and policymakers about impacts of the rising waters on birds and other wildlife, habitats, and water resources;
- Oppose ecologically harmful and expensive adaptation strategies, including beach armoring, seawalls, and other practices that marginalize or eliminate habitat;
- Support adaptation strategies such as Everglades restoration to make coastal habitats more resilient to saltwater intrusion; and
- Support coastal retreat policies that help relocate residents and businesses away from dynamic coastal areas.

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STATE CONSERVATION PRIORITY: WORKING LANDS

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Florida is home to sixty-nine distinct ecosystems, each having evolved to host thousands of plant and animal species, including some that are rare and endemic. Native birds help maintain healthy ecosystems. As development, intensive agriculture, and human activity reduce the extent and functions of habitats, extra effort is required to protect Florida's native birds and the ecosystems upon which they depend

Audubon and partner organizations have designated a network of Important Bird Areas throughout the western hemisphere. Audubon Florida is committed to developing and promoting important bird area conservation strategies within the state.

Although human activities have altered much of natural Florida, federal, state, county, and local governments have protected and restored considerable acreage as parks and other conservation lands. Of Florida's 35 million acres, 28% has been designated as conservation land. In addition to public land, many millions of acres of ecologically important bird and wildlife habitat occurs on privately owned ranches and forest land.

State and local budget cuts have slowed efforts to protect conservation lands and agencies are under pressure to surplus public lands. Public conservation land is also subject to negative impacts from linear facilities such as highways which may be proposed crossing through conservation land.

Private lands serving as important bird and wildlife habitat are also subject to development pressure, and potential conversion from ranches and forests to sites for urban development.

Florida's Important Bird Areas benefit from active constituencies of habitat stewards whose observations and advocacy are essential to good management of public lands and to building public and private landowner support of these ecologically important areas.

*Therefore be it resolved:*

*Audubon 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 will work with conservation allies, business and community leaders, public officials, and agencies to:*

- Support state laws and local land use decisions and programs that protect conservation lands and provide for managing those lands to restore and maintain wildlife, and habitats;

- Support the expansion of conservation easement purchase programs including the Rural and Family Lands Protection Program;
- Continue to grow and improve the effectiveness of volunteer participation in the Audubon Florida Jay Watch and Eagle Watch program efforts;
- Collaborate with private landowners to encourage conservation of habitat on ranchlands and privately owned forest lands;
- Seek guidance from chapters and partners to focus resources on the most appropriate places such as IBAs, proposed conservation and restoration projects, and places that Audubon members and others consider special based on their own observations, experiences, and observed ecological attributes;
- Work to protect conservation lands from loss by surplus determinations, and seek to develop practical consensus measures to prevent or minimize damage to conservation lands due to highway projects and other linear facilities; and
- Engage Audubon chapters and other citizen groups to take action to protect specific natural places, such as working with private landowners to achieve good stewardship by supporting incentives to commit property to conservation, including purchase of conservation easements and similar programs that allow land to remain in agricultural use while protecting important habitat features.



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STATE CONSERVATION PRIORITY: BIRD-FRIENDLY COMMUNITIES

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Florida is home to a remarkable diversity of habitats, plants, birds, and other wildlife. Natural ecosystems contribute to Florida's economic vitality and quality of life; yet human activity and development are putting increasing pressure on the natural resources and bird populations are being compromised.

Florida's significance as part of the Atlantic Flyway is evident throughout the state. Over 500 species of birds occur in Florida including year-round residents, seasonal nesters and those passing through. Neotropical songbird migrants, facing the daunting odds of long overwater flights, use Florida as last southbound jumping off points and first northbound landfall. In short, in Florida ample food, clean water and shelter are critical to the survival of many species of birds.

At the same time warm winter temperatures lure humans-- both visitors and a growing population. While federal, state, county, and local governments have protected and restored considerable acreage as parks and other conservation lands over the past century, urbanization continues to fragment and transform ecologically productive land with roads, buildings, sterile lawns and exotic plants. Human created hazards such as walls of glass, pesticides and domestic predators limit the function of urban areas for birds.

We can mitigate for these impacts, however, with the choices we make for our communities.

Native plants provide the foundation of the food chain, as well as shelter and spaces for birds to raise their young. By simply choosing native plants for our yards and public spaces, we can restore vital habitat for birds within our communities and help them adapt and survive in the face of climate change. Audubon's Plants for Birds program is designed to enable anyone to have a positive impact by planting native plants that will help birds right where they live.

The reflective qualities of glass windows lead to bird strikes. Bright city lights can distract and confuse birds migrating at night. Combined, these two urban features result hundreds of millions of birds perish each year. Concerted "Lights Out" campaigns can address this threat.

As urban features replace natural nesting opportunities, cavities, trees, snags and burrows, providing artificial alternatives becomes increasingly important. Nest boxes and bird houses, nesting platforms and artificial burrows can offset the nesting challenges birds face within urban communities.

Audubon grassroots network is well versed in outreach and education. Their events and programs connect and inspire all ages to enjoy birds, to understand the challenges they face in an increasingly urbanized world and to advocate for the laws that protect them. Where birds thrive, people prosper.

These programs also present an opportunity to engage new, more diverse audiences to broaden Audubon's community and achieve our ambitious goals for equity, diversity and inclusion.

Audubon Florida along with many of our partner organizations and the 45 Audubon chapters is well positioned and committed to developing and promoting Bird Friendly Communities throughout the state.

*Therefore be it resolved:*

*Audubon 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 will work with conservation allies, business and community leaders, public officials, and agencies to:*

**Promote and support the National Audubon Plants for Birds program by:**

- Recruiting all 45 chapters to sign up as Florida partners and resources;
- Partnering with like-minded organizations on plants sales, speakers, projects to mobilize communities to promote the use of native plants in all landscapes;
- Engaging with corporate partners to advance the use of native plants and bird friendly elements on larger landscapes such as Florida Power and Light's "Solar Sanctuaries"; and
- Supporting Plants for Birds programs through the Collaborative grants, Burke Center for Native Plants and Audubon in Action grant processes.

**Bird friendly buildings – minimize building strikes and lighting distractions by:**

- Exploring opportunities to work with one large urban chapter on a lights-out program; and
- Sharing information on best practices to avoid window strikes on homes and smaller buildings.

**Avian Architecture - Providing good homes for birds by:**

- Coordinating with the Eagle Watch program through the Center for Birds of Prey and other partners to replace Osprey platforms, track damage to Eagle nests

destroyed during weather events;

- Encouraging grassroots supported Bluebird trails, and building of nest boxes, platforms, starter burrows, etc. through grant programs such as Collaborative Grants and Audubon in Action grants; and
- Working with local utilities to install and monitor SE American Kestrel nesting boxes.

**Outreach, Education, Conservation and Advocacy - Increase and engage Audubon membership by:**

- Promoting Audubon Adventures Plants for Birds edition for use in the classroom and afterschool programs;
- Supporting the creation of College level Audubon Chapters or sub-chapters;
- Making sure printed resources, banners, signs are available as needed;
- Providing speakers on relevant topics; and
- Recruiting advocates on statewide and National issues such as the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) and the Endangered Species Act.

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## REGIONAL CONSERVATION PRIORITY: SOUTHWEST FLORIDA

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Audubon has a long history in the Western Everglades region, beginning with hiring wardens to protect wading bird colonies from plume hunters, later creating the Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary (now a vital partner for these chapters), and helping to secure federal and state public lands. Audubon Florida and its five affiliated southwest Florida organizations are committed to working together to protect and restore the Southwest Florida watersheds and downstream coastal ecosystems in the face of rapid human population growth and increasing anthropogenic climate change impacts.

A primary means of protection is public land acquisition and management through programs such as Florida Forever, Rural and Family Lands Protection, Lee County's Conservation 20/20, and Conservation Collier. Bitter disappointment with the Legislature's past refusal to fund Florida Forever led the Southwest Florida Audubon organizations to pursue an active campaign to advocate local delegation support for buying highly ranked local Florida Forever and Rural and Family Lands projects and federal projects that benefit the Greater Everglades Ecosystem and Western Everglades' Big Cypress and Corkscrew Swamps.

Additionally, southwest Florida local governments have suffered from widespread denial of increasing climate change risks to human and natural communities. The region hosts significant coastal habitats, which will disappear unless better planning for resource-oriented adaptation and mitigation occur.

*Therefore be it resolved:*

*The five local Audubon organizations in the Southwest Florida Region, using sound science, professional policy guidance, and in complement to Audubon Florida's statewide conservation priorities, will mobilize volunteer and staff leadership, members, allies, community leaders, elected officials, and government agencies to cooperatively advance three regional priorities:*

- Lessen harmful algal bloom (HAB) crises in Southwest Florida by advancing nutrient source control, watershed restoration, wetland preservation, and educating the public and policy makers on HAB science from reliable sources;
- Advocate that our local legislative delegations support 2019 session budgets to fund purchase of high priority local Florida forever and rural and family lands projects; and

- Promote regional and local sea level rise/climate change adaptation and mitigation planning and implementation, including advancing a possible Southwest Florida regional climate change compact of local governments and agencies.

Implementation of these priorities will require cooperation amongst the five Audubon organizations in Southwest Florida. Actions include engaging Legislative delegation members at home on land acquisition projects, including field trips to key areas; advocating wetland preservation and restoration on a watershed scale; coastal bird habitat protection; promotion of local renewable energy generation and efficiency; engagement of local officials' support for NOAA/FGCU/UF research; creative public outreach; and advancing effective land use adaptation. A Southwest Florida Climate Change Compact would fold several of these strategies into a coordinated plan.

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## REGIONAL CONSERVATION PRIORITY: EVERGLADES

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The lower east coast of Florida, known for its beautiful beaches, productive estuaries, unique wildlife, and proximity to the Everglades, attracts many people. Out of the three National Parks in the region, Everglades and Biscayne National Parks have the highest population density adjacent to their borders. These unique conditions create a distinct set of conservation challenges when trying to accommodate human needs while protecting and restoring the Everglades and other wildlife habitat in Southeast Florida.

Restoring the Everglades and other regional wetlands and landscapes provides critical life support and services for people and wildlife, 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 to enjoy.

The lower east coast of Florida and the Everglades is home to more than 350 species of birds including the iconic Roseate Spoonbill, the endangered Wood Stork and Everglade Snail Kite. As a result of the draining of wetlands for flood control, agriculture, and residential development in addition to the misuse of water resources, many species are jeopardized. Preserving current populations and enabling the return of wading bird super-colonies and other indicator species that once symbolized the Everglades are the best measures of conservation success.

The following goals reflect a shared commitment across the four chapters encompassed within the Everglades Regional Conservation Committee (RCC). Together the RCC will work toward these goals.

*Therefore be it resolved:*

*The Audubon chapters in the Everglades region, in alignment with Audubon Florida and the Atlantic Flyway, will use information derived from sound science, to mobilize volunteer leadership, members, conservation allies, community leaders, public officials and governmental agencies to:*

### **Everglades Restoration**

- Take advantage of existing birding fieldtrips and educational programs to promote and advocate for Everglades restoration projects and water quality and conservation efforts

to our existing communities and new audiences in order to expedite and improve their implementation throughout the entire Greater Everglades Ecosystem;

- Educate new Administration, new Florida legislators and new Congress on the significance of consistently funding Everglades restoration projects and programs at the State and Federal levels. Educate new South Florida Water Management District Governing Board members on the importance of a restored budget so they can fulfill their mission; and
- Ensure progress on the design of the EAA Storage Reservoir to increase freshwater flows to Everglades National Park and Florida Bay. Advocate for timely implementation of CEPP to augment even more southern freshwater flows. As projects come online, ensure operations deliver maximum ecological benefits as envisioned.

### **Bird and Wildlife Conservation**

- Participate in bird monitoring programs, enhance the body of knowledge involving birds in the Everglades and Southeast Florida and use this knowledge to prevent degradation and fragmentation to reestablish a contiguous migratory bird habitat that aid in increasing survival of resident and migratory species;
- Establish a committee to develop a Plants for Birds program tailored to South Florida eventually leading to an Audubon bird-friendly habitat certification; and
- Edit existing Audubon Plants for Birds toolkit to reflect the needs of our geographic regions. Use this toolkit to educate local governments, schools and the public to illustrate the importance of creating wildlife corridors in our backyards.

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**REGIONAL CONSERVATION PRIORITY: INDIAN RIVER LAGOON**

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The Indian River Lagoon Regional Conservation Committee’s (“RCC”) 2019 conservation priorities shall include efforts to increase funding for land conservation and to seek out long-term solutions for the safe and effective disposal of biosolids.

*Therefore be it resolved:*

*The Audubon chapters in the Indian River Lagoon Region, in alignment with Audubon Florida and the Atlantic Flyway, using information derived from sound science, will mobilize volunteer leadership, members, conservation allies, community leaders, public officials, and governmental agencies to:*

**Support local, regional, and state initiatives to increase land conservation funding from 2017 levels, especially at the state level, which means advocating the Florida legislature to appropriate at least \$100M in annual expenditures to acquire new environmentally sensitive lands, and to manage existing and future public lands.**

- IRL chapters will work regionally through city councils, county commissions, and state legislators to work towards preserving new lands while managing and restoring existing lands. Our tools will include individual and form letters, attendance at scheduled public meetings, and personal one-on-one meetings. The RCC shall allow local chapters, as well as Audubon Florida, to make their own determination regarding the appropriate use of Amendment 1 funds.

**Work together to advocate for local regulation of land application of biosolids, to urge the Florida Legislature to amend the necessary laws so that local regulation of biosolids can occur, and for creation of regional and statewide strategies for sustainable use of biosolids.**

- We will support Resolution #18-03 of the Treasure Coast Regional Planning Council to increase awareness of biosolids management issues in Florida, prioritize the reduction and eventual elimination of inappropriate land application of biosolids, and the establishment of a Pilot Projects Program for funding local utilities to implement new wastewater treatment technologies to use biosolids resources more efficiently and sustainably.



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**REGIONAL CONSERVATION PRIORITY: CENTRAL FLORIDA**

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Central Florida RCC encompasses ten chapters in seven counties with 47 miles of beaches on the Atlantic, uplands, wetlands and the central ridge of Florida. Our geography includes much of the remaining conservation corridor through the central peninsula. Proper management is critical to providing wildlife habitat, and assuring protection of Important Bird Areas (IBAs) associated with the diverse upland and aquatic ecosystem components in Central Florida.

While continuing our regional priorities of partnering with land owners and property managers and protecting water quality and water resources, the following goals reflect a shared commitment for our ten chapters.

*Therefore be it resolved:*

*The Audubon chapters in the Central Florida Region, in alignment with Audubon Florida and the Atlantic Flyway, using information derived from sound science, will mobilize volunteer leadership, members, conservation allies, community leaders, public officials and governmental agencies to:*

**Promote Lake Apopka Restoration, Visitor Access, & New Audubon Nature Center**

- Chapters will focus joint resources and efforts to assure continued progress on restoration of the Lake Apopka North Shore marshes and to increase appropriate public access to the marshes for birdwatching, nature study, and compatible recreation activities. Chapters will work with Audubon Florida and Orange & Oklawaha Valley Audubon Societies to promote the long-term goal of building and operating a new Audubon Center to showcase Lake Apopka as Florida’s most important inland bird habitat.

**Monitor and Act on Local & State Government Land Use Decisions Impacting Wildlife Habitat**

- Chapters will work together to advocate for full funding for Florida Forever and the Rural and Family Lands Protection Act to secure money to purchase identified conservation property (such as those listed below) by meeting with legislators to build support for specific properties rather than lobbying solely for the umbrella programs.

1. Lenholt Farm: a vital property which links Ocala National Forest and the extensive state holdings along the Wekiva River
2. Conlin Lake X/Kirchman Tract: an 11,000-acre, pristine property at the headwaters of the Econlockhatchee and Kissimmee Rivers watershed
3. Purchase of conservation easements on Kissimmee Valley ranchlands where owners are interested and willing to participate

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REGIONAL CONSERVATION PRIORITY: FLORIDA GULF COAST

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Audubon Florida's Gulf Coast region stretches from northern Charlotte County to Citrus County and includes 11 Audubon Chapters: Venice Area Audubon, Sarasota Audubon, Manatee Audubon, Eagle Audubon, St. Petersburg Audubon, Clearwater Audubon, Tampa Audubon, West Pasco Audubon, Hernando Audubon, Citrus County Audubon and the recently formed Cedar Keys Audubon. Florida's Gulf Coast includes a rich assemblage of habitats that support a great diversity of birds, fish, and plant species. Many essential wildlife habitats are being degraded, altered and fragmented and rural landscapes are suffering increased development pressures. Populations of many species of colonial waterbirds, beach-nesting birds, migratory shorebirds and the Florida Scrub Jay have declined in their historic ranges and require significant intervention and management efforts to prevent local extirpation or extinction.

Seasonal freshwater flows from springs, streams, and rivers in adjacent uplands and wetlands are vital to the area's diverse and productive estuaries. Estuarine ecosystems throughout Florida's Gulf Coast region suffer from degradations or alterations of upstream habitats due to pollution, flood control, strip mining, development, and consumptive water use projects. Audubon staff and chapter volunteers have worked to protect shore bird and wading bird nesting habitats. The Suncoast Shorebird Partnership now ranges from the Tampa Bay area into Charlotte County and is part of the larger, multi-partner Florida Shorebird Alliance. Least Tern rooftop-nesting monitors and banding garner statewide and National recognition.

Additionally, the effects of climate change and sea level rise and red tide threaten offshore and coastal ecosystems (beaches, saltmarshes, estuaries, and bays) and the birds that depend upon them throughout the region.

*Therefore be it resolved:*

*The Audubon chapters in the Gulf Coast Region of Florida, in alignment with Audubon Florida and the Atlantic Flyway program, and using information derived from sound science, will work together to increase Audubon's influence on conservation decisions in this region using the following strategies:*

Take an active role in local and regional habitat management initiatives and continue to raise the Audubon profile as a stakeholder by engaging in the process on both private and public lands as follows:

- Use chapter scheduled fieldtrips, Christmas Bird Counts and Great Backyard Bird Counts as relationship building tools and provide lists to e-bird and links, data and notes of thanks to land managers;
- Conduct bird surveys and generate data using e-bird, collaborating with the Cornell Lab of Ornithology to power data-driven approaches to science, conservation and education;
- Use all Chapter projects and activities as for opportunities to engage, educate and encourage new audiences and partners;
- Recruit advocates and expand Audubon membership through community science projects using well established programs such as Eagle Watch, Bluebird Trails, Shorebird stewarding, Colony Watch, Jay Watch, Climate Messengers, Hooked Bird Project, Christmas Bird Counts;
- Work with Homeowners associations and private management companies to encourage planting Native plants for birds and wildlife;
- Recruit and train advocates of all ages to speak at local and regional public meetings regarding issues facing coastal and other environmentally sensitive environments;
- Seek opportunities to be serve on advisory boards, publicly acknowledge/celebrate successes and participate in land management reviews, including making every effort to have an RCC representative present at each SWFWMD Board meeting; and
- Engage cordially and be proactive.

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## REGIONAL CONSERVATION PRIORITY: NORTHWEST FLORIDA

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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, four major bay/estuary systems, marshes, and floodplains that are home to some of the most diverse wildlife in North America, including resident and migratory birds. Beaches also provide habitat for endangered beach mice and nesting areas for up to five species 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.

The Panhandle is also home to several important military bases, which are not only important economically, but also harbor thousands of acres of wildlife and forests. Several of the bases rely on extensive areas along the Gulf of Mexico that are used as ranges; these would be compromised by commercial activities such as energy extraction.

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 in the state, Northwest Florida was the most impacted by this disaster— be it from oil physically reaching the shore, the effect of human relief preparations on habitat, or the eventual cleanup process.

In the wake of this event, our remaining coastal wildlife and habitat are more important than ever. Long term effects of the spill are uncertain. While helping to monitor these effects, we also pledge to address the known pressures on these species in an attempt to offset what could be lasting impacts of the Deepwater Horizon event.

*Therefore be it resolved:*

*The Audubon chapters in the Northwest Florida region, in alignment with Audubon Florida and the Atlantic Flyway, using information derived from sound science, will*

*mobilize volunteer leadership, members, conservation allies, community leaders, public officials, and governmental agencies to:*

Build the case for strategic land conservation in the Panhandle using a variety of tools including written and public comments, e-bird, field trips, programs, etc. to:

- Support the federal designation of the western part of the Panhandle as the Northwest Florida Sentinel Landscape. This designation will allow access to various federal programs which provide incentives for conservation in order to prevent encroachment of incompatible land uses on the mission of the region's important military bases;
- Support the Florida Panhandle National Heritage Area initiative, "National Heritage Areas" are areas designated by Congress as places where natural, cultural and historic resources combine to form a cohesive, nationally important landscape;
- Support the development of the Great Northwest Coastal Trail (from Pensacola to Wakulla County) and other proposals to enhance ecotourism in the Florida Panhandle;
- Continue to support the acquisition of critical conservation lands such as the Apalachicola River project under the Florida Forever program;
- Advocate for the intended use of Amendment 1 funds and Gulf Restore Act funding; and
- Reach out to our elected officials and members of the Northwest Florida Water Management District governing board to urge that the strategic land conservation goals in the SWIM plans are met.

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REGIONAL CONSERVATION PRIORITY: NORTHEAST FLORIDA

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From Nassau to Flagler along the coast, and Marion to Hamilton counties inland, the Northeast region covers sixteen counties and is served by seven Audubon chapters and two Audubon staff – one based on the coast, one inland. The region harbors unique water resources, a variety of ecosystems, and climate strongholds that support resident wildlife and the birds of the Atlantic Flyway.

The beaches and dunes of the region’s coastal strand are the last significant nesting sites for shorebirds and seabirds on the East Coast of Florida. Extensive coastal marshes are essential nurseries for fish and invertebrates, while coastal scrub and maritime hammocks are home to resident bird species and provide essential breeding and foraging areas for migrating birds. Birds of conservation concern include the Least Tern, American Oystercatcher, Black Skimmer, Gull-billed Tern, Piping Plover, Red Knot, Worthington’s Marsh Wren, Clapper Rail, Reddish Egret, Roseate Spoonbill, Wood Stork, Burrowing Owl, Bald Eagle, Swallow-tailed Kite, and Painted Bunting.

Special places in Northeast Florida include some of the largest magnitude springs in the world whose outflows feed rivers such as the Ichetucknee, Ocklawaha, St. Johns, Silver, and Suwannee. Large sandhill lakes provide for recharge of the Floridan aquifer. These systems are being severely impacted by excessive nutrients and over-pumping of the aquifer. Mining, surface-water withdrawals, and dredging pose additional threats in the region. Local communities, dependent on nature-based economies, are suffering from the degradation of these water resources.

Special places such as the Ocala and Osceola National Forests, state forests, parks, and preserves are home to bird species of conservation concern such as the Red-cockaded Woodpecker, Florida Scrub-jay, Southeastern Kestrel, Bachman’s Sparrow and Northern Bobwhite. Adequate monitoring and habitat management measures are critical for long-term protection of wildlife in these areas as pressures from human activity continue to increase.

*Therefore be it resolved:*

*The Audubon chapters in the Northeast Florida Region, in alignment with Audubon Florida and the Atlantic Flyway program, and using information derived from sound*

*science, will work together to strengthen Audubon's role as a conservation leader in Northeast Florida using the following strategies:*

### **Promoting conservation of and advocacy for bird habitat through regional sharing of resources.**

- Solidifying our stakeholder status on conservation lands through communications with land managers about our activities on their lands;
- Assisting in surveying and stewardship activities throughout the region, including the EagleWatch, JayWatch, and shorebird steward programs along with rookery surveys;
- Educating resource managers about bird-related data and tools available to them through community science efforts like eBird;
- Building bird-friendly communities that provide habitat and conserve water by fostering improved landscaping practices for residential, public, and commercial properties;
- Promoting the value of treatment wetlands using the Sweetwater Wetlands/Alachua Audubon model;
- Including conservation messaging in chapter activities such as bird walks, programs, and events currently without a specific connection to our conservation goals, and
- Increasing outreach to more diverse populations.