



Audubon OF FLORIDA

2009 REGIONAL CONSERVATION PRIORITY RESOLUTIONS

Every year Audubon of Florida updates its state policy and regional conservation plans and resolutions to express both our policy goals for the upcoming year and to give chapter leaders, board members and staff summary policy priority documents (in the form of short resolutions).

Regional Conservation

Audubon of Florida is well along the way to having programs in the six regions identified in our strategic planning process. Regional conservation committees (RCCs) made up of chapter leaders and supported by policy staff are given responsibility to recommend conservation plans for their regions. The plans are then expressed as resolutions approved at the fall Assembly and subsequently by the Board.

Engaging People in Conservation

Audubon is a volunteer organization that has long connected people with nature. In Florida we can do more and we can evolve with shifting 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 roughly 600 listed chapter leaders. In general the chapter network is strong with healthy chapters, is supported by a full time coordinator and benefits from annual training and leadership programs. Chapters and chapter leaders are the heart and soul of the Audubon movement. To the extent possible our plans and programs will emphasize including and empowering chapter leaders and promoting strong and healthy chapters.

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Audubon OF FLORIDA 2009 Conservation Priorities

CENTRAL FLORIDA ECOSYSTEMS: UPPER KISSIMMEE RIVER , GREEN SWAMP/WITHLACOOCHEE, ST. JOHNS /ECONLOCKHATCHEE RIVER, INDIAN RIVER, LAKE WALES RIDGE AND WEKIVA CORRIDOR

Audubon is engaged in a program for the protection and restoration of the four 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 effort to preserve them.

While more eagles nest in Central Florida today than in the entire lower 48 states during the 1960's, growth sprawling out from Orlando and other urban areas along with water management decisions threatens 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 one of Florida's important estuaries that has been seriously compromised by overdevelopment and alteration of freshwater flows.

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 reduction in groundwater recharge have put Central Florida on a path to water shortages.

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:

- Build regional community consensus on the adoption of a "greenprint" or similar mapped database of habitats and natural lands to that must be conserved.
- Increase the effectiveness and funding of existing land acquisition programs and facilitate the creation of new programs to acquire targeted sites.

- Encourage the protection of land with new land use tools such as transferable development rights, density/conservation land tradeoffs, “rural land stewardship” 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 which result in substantial permanent commitments to preserve natural areas.
- Advocate for the adoption of Local Government Comprehensive Plans which provide strong conservation requirements for remaining natural areas in identified ecosystems.
- Urge decisionmakers to enact of meaningful water conservation requirements that avoid excessive use, and avoid consumptive use withdrawals from rivers, lakes and wetlands.
- Support regulations and conservation programs that protect existing Bald Eagle nest sites and propose protection of areas with high nesting potential.
- Foster better management of habitat on public lands.
- Support regulations and land conservation programs to preserve Florida Scrub-jay habitat.
- Advocate for projects and funds to implement urban transit, commuter rail, light rail, and other public transportation which reduce dependence on automobiles.
- Seek changes in Local Comprehensive Plans which favor compact urban development forms associated with public transportation systems and which minimize the need for automobile-based travel.
- Support scaled back 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.



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GREATER EVERGLADES ECOSYSTEM

The Greater Everglades Ecosystem encompasses three million acres of wetlands and Florida's most productive estuaries. The Everglades' slow-moving fresh water 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 is a unique international wildlife treasure and is home to more than 350 species of birds including the Wood Stork, Everglades Snail Kite and Roseate Spoonbill. The greater ecosystem also provides refuge for other important wildlife, including the Florida panther and Key deer. Additionally, the Everglades provides critical life support and services for humans -- recharging water supplies, absorbing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, providing world-class tourism crucial to the South Florida economy, and making available a backyard wilderness -- improving overall quality of life to millions of South Florida residents.

For decades, this magnificent system 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. Birdlife still serves as an indicator of ecological health, and the best measure of success for the Everglades restoration is the return of abundant bird populations.

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 Delivery, the Everglades Construction and Stormwater Projects, the Lake Okeechobee Protection Project and Watershed Plan, Kissimmee River Restoration and others.

Restoration is hindered by inadequate funding and faltering government commitment to full restoration, as well as 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 (CERP alone includes 68 restoration components) and Audubon is focusing on those projects that have the greatest promise to improve ecological conditions throughout the greater Everglades system.

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:

Accomplish the following policy outcomes:

Everglades Agricultural Area (EAA): To promote and implement a comprehensive sustainability plan for the EAA that focuses on Everglades restoration, sustainable agriculture, and sustainable growth within and around existing communities.

- Advocate for Governor Crist's River of Grass Initiative and for needed EAA lands, especially in the Legislature;
- Use the continuing ecological decline of the Everglades and indicator species data to advance the debate on water storage, conveyance and treatment in the EAA;
- Influence decisions on use of state funds and lobby to secure state restoration funds;
- Secure state and district commitments to at least 1.5 million acre-feet of water storage;
- Oppose Inland Port proposals that would compromise restoration;
- Calculate Storm Water Treatment Areas (STAs) and water storage needs in the EAA including land need as part of the Aquifer Storage & Recovery (ASR) contingency plan and buffer zones around urban areas;
- Acquire flooding easements on lands in the EAA to ensure proper water management for the Everglades system;
- Analyze systems of conveyance of appropriate quantity and quality of water south to the Everglades;
- Increase treatment of waters entering the Everglades through the expansion of STAs and improvement of Best Management Practices (BMPs);
- Emphasize water storage, water treatment, habitat restoration (including corridor and flows), and water retention as essential ecological functions that should be recreated in the EAA to provide important benefits for South Florida;
- Assure the long-term land use of the EAA is consistent with Everglades restoration; and
- Promote the *Vision for a Sustainable Everglades Agricultural Area*.

Climate Change: Establishing Everglades Restoration as a method for adaptation to climate change impacts:

- Promote prioritization of CERP projects that will provide a freshwater head to prevent salt water intrusion and sea level rise.
- Advocate for retention and restoration of natural lands, and policy to reduce GHG emissions from agricultural lands, especially as natural lands, including wetlands and forests, are important carbon sinks and buffer zones for climate impacts.
- Advocate for restoration methods that will allow the greatest extent of peat buildup throughout the Everglades, which can serve as a defense against sea level rise.
- Communicate the importance of Everglades restoration for climate change adaptation to the extent that funds allocated through cap and trade legislation to be used for adaptation can be dedicated to Everglades restoration efforts.

Southern Everglades & Florida Bay

- Secure action on first phase of Tamiami Trail and complete Mod Waters as defined by Congress;

- Secure movement on next phase of Tamiami Trail improvements as an Everglades restoration project;
- Make progress on C-111 design and operation, and on all components of Decompartmentalization;
- Secure SFWMD sponsorship of south Everglades land acquisition and wetlands protection;
- Educate public and policy makers about Everglades restoration's ecological benefits to Florida Bay;
- Make progress in achieving CERP water reservations;
- Secure compliance by Southeast Florida local governments with SB 444 wastewater use requirements;
- Work with scientists to build the case and advocate to remove barriers to sheetflow in Water Conservation Areas (WCAs) and Everglades National Park (ENP);
- Advocate for strong seepage management design and implementation

Lake Okeechobee

- Release science-based report on phosphorus (P) pollution and strategies to achieve P balance in Lake Okeechobee and Everglades;
- Reinitiate Lake Okeechobee sub-basin planning;
- Produce a paper urging expanded STAs, BMPs and pressing for early water quality benefits from the River of Grass initiative;
- Influence Lake Okeechobee watershed local government land use plans;
- Monitor and comment on new U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE) water regulation schedule;
- Press ACOE forward on Hoover Dike improvements;
- Secure state funds for specific Lake Okeechobee water quality projects and programs; and
- Prevent reversal of "back-pumping" decisions.
- Push to implement or improve residential fertilizer rule and eliminate land disposal of sewage sludge.

Sustainable Development:

- Advocate for and shape smart-growth regional development limits;
- Protect UDB line in Miami-Dade County;
- Lobby and intervene in land use decisions as appropriate;
- Prevent development that compromises greater Everglades protection and restoration;
- Continue campaign against federal wetland permits in Cocohatchee Slough;
- Push advocacy and science to achieve new rules and/or laws to eliminate or constrict the use of melaleuca removal for mitigation of wetlands loss; and
- Oppose destructive road projects.



Audubon OF FLORIDA 2009 Conservation Priority

FLORIDA GULF COAST ECOSYSTEMS

Audubon has an extensive history in the Gulf Coast Region. St. Petersburg Audubon Society will celebrate a 100-year anniversary in 2009. Hernando Audubon will celebrate its 50-year anniversary. Florida's Gulf Coast Region stretches from Sarasota County to Citrus County. With existing urban areas built to capacity, development pressures are spilling over into adjacent rural landscapes.

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, disturbed, and dominated by human use as population growth and development have progressively diminished habitats that once supported abundant and balanced populations.

Populations of 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 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, hyper-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 to Lee County. Least Tern rooftop nesting monitors continue to garner statewide recognition and engage new people. 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 encroaching development.

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:

- Make science based decisions regarding water conservation, protection of springs and the aquifers, fertilizer ordinances and water withdrawal from lakes and rivers.

- Participate in regional visioning applying principals of smart growth. Superhighways like the Suncoast Parkway have provided increased access to once remote areas. Planning for development should include the use of tools such as FAVA (Florida Aquifer Vulnerability Assessment) maps to steer growth away potential aquifer contamination.
- Advocate for wildlife corridors and against fragmentation of systems such as the Green Swamp, the Withlacoochee Watershed, etc.
- Continue to play a vital role in the Suncoast Shorebird Partnership. This means preserving nesting and resting areas identified that support imperiled and at-risk species. With most of the coastal habitats in the Central Region seriously compromised, the monitoring and protection of coastal species (including bird stewards and monofilament campaigns) also provide extensive opportunities for education and outreach.
- Engage in wildlife research and management programs for protection of such species as Florida black bear, Florida Scrub-jay, Red-cockaded Woodpecker, Eastern Bluebird and Burrowing Owl. Support Operation Migration and the Whooping Crane East Coast Partnership.
- Identify leaders willing to work on Reduction of Greenhouse Gases and sustainable clean energy campaigns, education and outreach.
- Participate locally in the National and statewide campaigns for Cap and Trade legislation and Renewable Portfolio Standards.
- Oppose offshore drilling.
- Support increased cooperation between regional chapters with common conservation challenges thereby creating a greater regional presence
- Engage more of the public in conservation issues.
- Train and encourage advocacy that will complement the work of Audubon of Florida policy staff on regional and statewide issues while providing leadership for local issues.
- Attract new members and financial support by highlighting volunteer programs, conservation successes and the legacy of Audubon in the region.
- Create a coalition of chapter leaders that are well supported and well versed in Advocacy and can play a powerful role in Audubon efforts to protect the bird, wildlife and habitat and climate of the Gulf Coast Ecosystems.



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NORTHEAST FLORIDA ECOSYSTEMS

The beaches of Northeast Florida are critical to shorebirds and seabirds in every season, including such imperiled species as Piping Plover, Least Tern, American Oystercatcher, Red Knot, and Gull-billed Tern. Portions of these beaches are critical as nesting areas for some species, and as resting and feeding areas for migrating and wintering species; habitat quality in addition to habitat quantity is essential to these birds' future.

The region's marshes are also of critical importance and are essential as nurseries for fish and invertebrate stocks and shelter significant wading bird populations as well as secretive rails.

Coastal maritime hammock is one of the most imperiled habitats of this region. In combination with Coastal Strand habitat, it is one of the few remaining acceptable nesting locations for dwindling populations of Painted Buntings. Similarly, these habitats provide essential autumn refueling sites for neotropical migrants and serve as first refuges upon their spring return.

Coastal Scrub habitat in this region has been degraded by fire suppression and by fragmentation to the point it no longer supports Florida Scrub-jays.

The resources of the inland counties of the Northeast Florida region include the lower St. Johns River, an incredible diversity of springsheds, as well as the significant expanse of the Osceola National Forest and of prairie-type habitats.

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:

- Support the continuation and the expansion of state, local, water management district and regional land acquisition programs and the prioritization of projects that secure Northeast Florida habitats.
- Develop public and political support for strategies to limit the impact of growth and watershed alteration on the health of wildlife habitats and to restore degraded habitats.
- Participate in local and regional development planning processes to preserve environmentally sensitive lands and the wildlife they harbor.
- Opposing destructive activities such as unnecessary deposition of sand on living

shorelines, dredging, and coastal armoring projects that diminish the habitat value of these areas.

- Define, encourage and support better wildlife management measures, such as protecting birds from disturbances by humans, dogs and vehicles and supplementing natural nest sites with nest boxes.
- Strengthen and enforce existing laws to protect habitat and water resources.
- Support outreach and education programs to encourage people, local governments and property owners to protect habitats and bird populations of regional significance.
- Support stronger policies and more effective actions to protect water resources including strict interpretation and enforcement of wetland and water quality laws.
- Engage in the emerging North Florida water supply debate, advocating for water for natural systems and wildlife.
- Actively participate in public outreach and education on water quality issues, on the importance of preserving environmentally sensitive lands and on climate change challenges.
- Use the newly established Northeast office to complement the conservation work of local Audubon societies (chapters) and further Audubon's national, state and regional mission.



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NORTHWEST FLORIDA ECOSYSTEMS

Audubon of Florida is engaged in a plan for protection and restoration of coastal habitats in Northwest Florida. The Northwest region includes a variety of habitats traversed by ten rivers that drain to eight estuaries. Among these rivers, several originate in other states with less protective water resource laws than Florida.

The Northwest region provides critical stopover habitat and staging areas for neotropical migratory birds, is home to countless resident bird species and hosts significant numbers of wintering shorebirds and waterfowl. The diversity and abundance of individual species is of state and national significance.

The Northwest region is one of the most biologically diverse parts of the US.

Threats to the natural resources of the Northwest Region stem almost exclusively from the area's recent, rapid population growth. Local Audubon Societies (chapters) and other groups have a history of advocacy on behalf of these systems. However, in face of rapid growth, more comprehensive watershed and ecosystem-driven plans are necessary for each of this region's drainage basins.

Audubon of Florida, Bay County Audubon Society, and other groups have coordinated responses to development as proposed in the West Bay Sector Plan. We have found that maintaining the biological health of the area depends on the decisions found in land-use plans and commitments by the St. Joe Company and state and local governments to protect habitat as compensation for development allowed by the sector plan.

The sector plan proposes the protection of over 40,000 acres through mitigation, removal of development rights, and conservation deed restrictions, including much of the coastline of the West Bay area. Concerns remain about permanent protection of the conservation lands, the exact location of the mitigation lands, as well as the designation of a holder of the conservation easements. There are additional concerns about transportation rights-of-way and habitat fragmentation.

National Audubon Society has announced plans to establish, in coordination with Bay County Audubon Society, an Audubon Center at West Bay. Additionally, Audubon of Florida has ongoing obligations to support the Hyatt Center operated by Francis M. Weston Audubon Society.

In other parts of the Northwest, rapid conversion and urbanization of landscapes are removing key parts of habitats and leading to widespread wetland losses.

Northwest Florida benefits from having a significant amount of public conservation land and undeveloped private land, which, if properly managed and protected could provide considerable long-term conservation of many species.

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:

- Develop public and political support to protect and restore target areas in Northwest Florida including West Bay (St. Andrew Bay).
- Conduct a feasibility study for the Audubon Center at West Bay and prepare a business plan.
- Protect the preservation and mitigation lands identified in the West Bay Preservation Area by advocating for plans that will maintain these areas for the benefit of birds and wildlife and secure the lands with permanent conservation easements.
- Support the continued operation of Francis M. Weston Audubon's education center, the Hyatt Center, with fundraising efforts, planning, permanent use agreements, a management plan and endowment.
- Initiate and support innovative approaches to land use planning that employ transfers of development rights and green space preservation-type strategies to set aside conservation areas.
- Be involved directly in the land use planning, infrastructure development, and regulatory decisions that will shape the future of the region.
- Promote state, local, water management district and regional land acquisition programs and insist on aggressive efforts to control exotic species and use appropriate land management practices that benefit birds and other wildlife.
- Support stronger policies and more effective actions to protect water resources including strict interpretation and enforcement of wetland, water quality and water supply laws as well as programs to reduce erosion from unpaved roads and disturbed habitats.
- Oppose road projects, including those by the Northwest Florida Transportation Authority, that will have the effect of fragmenting or degrading core habitats. Support transportation alternatives.
- Amend Florida's Constitution to allow the Northwest Florida Water Management District to levy ad valorem millage equivalent to other districts and allow taxpayer support of programs to protect the Panhandle's water resources.



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SOUTHWEST FLORIDA ECOSYSTEMS

Southwest Florida, particularly inland areas, is one of the fastest growing regions in the nation. Audubon of Florida is 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 four 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, and juvenile Snook, which require healthy estuarine environments. These four 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.

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:

- 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 for necessary land acquisition and projects to achieve this restoration, including the US Sugar purchase, C-43 Reservoir, and water quality treatment projects.
- Defend the Charlotte Harbor and Peace River watershed from any further mining and other land use impacts.
- Assure implementation of appropriate management plans for Babcock Preserve, lands under conservation easements, and other conservation lands to maintain and improve wildlife habitat while allowing compatible human use for public lands.
- Further restoration by working with the Glades local communities to direct development away from needed conservation lands in such a way that both economic and ecological sustainability are achieved.

- Southwest Florida coastal habitat is along a migratory flyway, provides critical shorebird nesting areas, and requires protection and management for the benefit of birds and other wildlife.
- Using innovative tools, incentives and regulations, work to retain ranching and other low impact agricultural uses in Southwest Florida while working with landowners to reduce drainage and nutrient impacts to watersheds and retain or increase habitat values.
- Develop public and political support to protect and restore critical components of the Big Cypress, Corkscrew, Caloosahatchee, Fisheating Creek, and Charlotte Harbor ecosystems.
- Support state, local, water management district and regional land acquisition, management and protection necessary for essential habitat preservation, restoration, and water management.
- 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.
- 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.
- Advocate and facilitate aggressive greenhouse gas pollution reduction commitments and actions at all levels of government and community, focusing on renewable energy sources, conservation and efficiency.
- 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.