



Audubon OF FLORIDA

2009 STATEWIDE CONSERVATION PRIORITIES AND CAMPAIGNS

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 give chapter leaders, board members and staff summary policy priority documents (in the form of short resolutions). The resolutions are external documents and articulate goals with purpose and passion.

Audubon of Florida is adopting National Audubon Society’s overarching themes:

- (1) *Conserve birds, other wildlife, and their habitats*
- (2) *Engage people in conservation action*
- (3) *Build capacity as a decentralized organization and grassroots network*

For the purpose of conservation planning we will use slightly modified versions of six of the eight National Audubon goals that relate most to policy and advocacy. Note in the list below that each of the six goals links to one of the three themes expressed above:

- 1. Conserve Sites and Landscapes Essential for Birds (*conserve birds and habitat*)
- 2. Conserve At-Risk and Declining Common Species of Birds (*conserve birds and habitat*)
- 3. Reduce Greenhouse Gas Emissions (*conserve birds and habitat*)
- 4. Increase the number and diversity of people taking conservation action (*engage people*)
- 5. Strengthen and Expand Our Field Structure (*build capacity*)
- 6. Build Financial Stability (*build capacity*)

These have been distilled into three statewide policy resolutions below. In addition, two policy campaigns have been identified for 2009 and are included as resolutions at the end of this packet.

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CLIMATE CHANGE

The world's scientific community has reached consensus that global warming is occurring and that human greenhouse gas emissions from fossil fuels, used to generate electricity and power vehicles, are a main cause of climate change.

Florida, its bird species, wildlife and natural lands are especially vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, including sea level rise, more intense storms and storm surges, droughts and fires.

These impacts, along with other stresses on natural environments, place birds and wildlife at greater risk of extinction. Specifically many bird species—because of their special evolutionary strategies, including migration and specialized habitat and foraging needs—will be significantly affected by climate change.

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 global warming:

- Promote local, state and federal action to set specific greenhouse gas emission reduction goals and targets.
- Pass federal laws to cap and reduce greenhouse gas emissions to levels that stabilize the climate and avoid the most severe impacts of global warming.
- Promote the adoption of state and federal policy and mechanisms to achieve clean alternative energy generation and fuel production, and reduce vehicle and transportation-related greenhouse gas emissions.
- Promote conservation, energy efficiency, green building standards, compact development and other energy efficiency technologies, programs and policies.
- Implement a renewable portfolio standard so that electric power utilities can harness sustainable solar, biomass and other energy generation technologies.
- Influence and support the adoption of strong vehicle emissions standards in Florida to significantly reduce the greenhouse gas emissions from this sector.
- Identify, influence and support other opportunities —such as a state and/or regional cap and trade system—in order to accelerate Florida's transition to a clean energy economy and for rapid reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.

Promote ecologically sound adaptation to global warming:

- Oppose transportation projects such as new roads that increase Florida's dependence on single passenger vehicles and support alternative transportation strategies.
- Identify strategies to minimize risks posed by rising sea levels and other global warming effects.
- Analyze and identify opportunities emerging from the Governor's Action Team; block ecologically harmful and expensive adaptation strategies; and influence, support and propose ecologically sound adaptation strategies.
- Oppose beach armoring, sea walls and other practices that marginalize coastal bird habitat.

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CONSERVE AT-RISK AND DECLINING COMMON SPECIES OF BIRDS

Organized in response to the Everglades plume trade a century ago, Audubon continues to hold bird and wildlife conservation among its core goals today. Many species are at risk from the effects of human activities. Maintaining abundant resident and migratory bird and other wildlife populations and reversing recent declines requires increased understanding and circumvention of threats.

Audubon of Florida will engage primarily on issues affecting the state's birdlife in concert with National Audubon's goals of keeping common native birds common and increasing populations of declining bird species. We will advocate for species in other taxa when there are broader habitat conservation or policy implications benefiting a suite of species.

Threats facing these species include land conversion, poor land management, water quality and quantity issues, natural area isolation and fragmentation, urban effects such as structure collisions, increased predation, coastal "management," human disturbance, road mortality, and the weakening commitment of government to enforce existing protections and extend new ones to recently imperiled species.

Therefore be it resolved that:

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:

- Stabilize and/or increase populations of at-risk birds.
- Stabilize and/or increase populations of declining common birds.
- Advocate for public acquisition of key imperiled wildlife habitat.
- Improve management and restoration of key habitats and systems.
- Improve containment and eradication of invasive exotic species.
- Reduce recreational disturbance of imperiled wildlife and habitats.
- Strengthen state and federal protected species rules to increase emphasis on appropriate designation and protection of species and critical habitat.
- Broaden selection of innovative programs to support conservation on private lands.
- Improve enforcement of existing nongame wildlife protections.
- Increase consideration for wildlife protection in permitting and rule-making across state and federal agencies

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- Increase consideration for the effects of disturbance in decisions about recreational uses of our public conservation lands.
- Expand consideration of critical for wildlife in the federal, state and local growth management transportation planning processes.
- Improve legislative awareness of nongame wildlife conservation needs and funding issues.
- Heighten visibility of wildlife viewing and nongame wildlife conservation constituencies.
- Engage new and traditional audiences for the purposes of building field capacity, influencing decisionmakers and building our financial capacity for the purpose of conserving birds.

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HABITAT—PUBLIC LANDS, GROWTH MANAGEMENT, AND PROTECTING WATER RESOURCES

Habitat conservation will continue to be a major focus for Florida Audubon. Audubon has a history of promoting and working to pass and secure funding for land acquisition programs. Growth management is still a principal tool to limit conversion of open landscapes to urban uses. Water resource protection is critical to maintaining and restoring priority habitats.

Florida has preserved almost two million acres of land through Preservation 2000, Florida Forever and other land conservation programs. Another two million acres of natural areas await protection and millions of acres of working agricultural lands that also support wildlife and benefit water resources are also worthy of protection strategies. Even with public lands strategies in place, up to 200,000 acres of land are converted to residential and commercial uses each year.

New tools to put working agricultural lands in permanent conservation by harnessing the economics of growth to land protection offer promising strategies to complement public acquisition. Audubon is encouraging *Conservation through Land Use* and supporting greater use of related tools to leverage protection and restoration of habitat and water resources through transfer of density credits and clustering of development rights.

Conservation lands must be managed to control invasive exotic plants and animals, allow or mimic natural fire regimes and provide for human use while preventing overuse and abuse. Public land management agency budgets are not keeping pace with the challenges of managing increasing portfolios of land. Public land management agencies generally do not have the staff and funding needed to adequately manage and restore conservation lands.

Water is a public resource and should be clean, safe and managed for the benefit of natural systems. Florida's aquatic and estuarine systems have been heavily damaged by drainage, pollution, overuse and mismanagement. Alteration of natural and seasonal recharge of groundwater and flows of surface water must be balanced with environmental needs.

The problems of competition between water for the environment and human supply have been highlighted during recent historic droughts. Droughts provide an opportunity to push water conservation to the forefront of state and local public policy.

Florida's freshwater is especially vulnerable to pollution, and many springs, lakes, rivers and estuaries are impaired from nutrients and sediments. Florida's programs to limit pollutant loads are not effectively addressing the challenge.

Florida's growth management and transportation policies are still not effectively dealing with the state's population growth. New development, often following new roads, is

pushing into rural areas. Since growth often follows roads, the Department of Transportation and other road building agencies force the state's true land planning agencies into reactive rather than proactive roles in directing the future growth along highway corridors.

Recent legislation directs local governments to engage in regional planning processes that provide the opportunity to designate and map key ecosystems for protection. These also allow Florida's land use tools to be used more intentionally for environmental protection.

The upcoming legislative "sunset review" of the Department of Community Affairs creates the opportunity to modify Florida's growth management policies. While the potential exists that this vehicle could be used to weaken DCA's authority to review local planning decisions, it also presents an opportunity to strengthen Florida's growth management policies.

Therefore be it resolved that:

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:

- Secure at least \$300 million appropriations for Florida Forever.
- Help implement the Rural and Family Lands Protection program under Florida Forever.
- Support the buyout of US Sugar lands and a plan to convert those lands (or lands traded for them) to water storage and treatment.
- Encourage a retained focus on land protection in the Northern Everglades (Lake Okeechobee)
- Initiate new local and regional public land acquisition initiatives.
- Encourage *Conservation through Land Use* to place conservation easements on private lands as compensation for increased development density.
- Fund management of public lands to restore natural habitats, control invasive species and make appropriate use of prescribed fire.
- Require mandatory water conservation programs as condition of consumptive use permits and mandatory reuse as a condition of wastewater discharge permits.
- Revise state policies to give natural systems legal allocations of water to assure their long-term health before water is permitted for other uses.
- Urge water management districts to set uncompromising schedules for reserving water for natural systems and establishing Minimum Flows and Levels (MFLs).
- Maintain, improve and restore natural storage capacity in order to reduce withdrawals and diversions from natural systems.
- Expand, accelerate and improve floodplain and water recharge area acquisition and management to prevent these areas from being developed while restoring natural areas and ecosystems.

- Encourage partnerships for water storage to help finance, share water resources and allow storage of water on private lands.
- Reduce pollution, maintain and strengthen water quality standards and support water quality restoration programs to clean up polluted waterways.
- Protect Florida's springs and the springsheds that are their recharge sources.
- Work for stronger federal, state and local wetlands protection policies.
- Amend Florida's Constitution to allow Northwest Florida Water Management District to collect the same rate of ad valorem taxes as other Districts.
- Focus state policies on filling in urban areas and increasing public participation in regional planning.
- Urge state agencies, led by the Florida Department of Community Affairs, to have an increased role in guiding the state's growth, and assuring that isolated local decisions do not destroy natural resources vital to the people of the entire state.
- Focus state growth management oversight on ecosystems and natural areas. Advocate a greater role for state agencies in protecting resources of regional or statewide concern, and protecting key environmental restoration projects, such as in the Everglades.
- Initiate and support innovative approaches to land use planning that take advantage of transfer of development rights and green space preservation-type approaches to setting aside conservation areas and rural and farm lands.



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COASTAL BIRD HABITAT

Florida's shorebirds and seabirds depend on our coastal habitats for breeding, wintering and migratory habitat. Of the twenty-three shore-dependent birds considered by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission to be "species of greatest conservation need," only two are "abundant," three are "stable" or "increasing," and *thirteen* meet the standard of "unknown or low, unknown or declining."

The ability of shorebirds and seabirds to survive and prosper in Florida's coastal habitats is jeopardized by a number of threats including beach renourishment, coastal armoring, dredging and filling, beach grooming and recreational disturbance.

Florida's beaches and other coastal habitats are important recreation destinations and are one source of the state's economic vitality.

Sea levels are predicted to rise in response to global warming. Impacts from sea level rise include erosion, shore migration and seawater intrusion into aquifers and freshwater streams.

Drainage and mismanagement of freshwater ecosystems contributes to the decline of coastal habitats by altering the timing, quality and quantity of freshwater flows.

Audubon has long conducted research from the Tavernier and Coastal Islands Sanctuaries offices and has many chapters actively involved in coastal conservation.

Audubon is uniquely positioned to lead the state's coastal bird conservation efforts due to our ability to influence policy and recruit volunteer stewards for these resources.

Therefore be it resolved that:

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:

- Improve management of coastal conservation lands for shorebirds and seabirds.
- Diminish the pressures of recreational disturbance on imperiled shorebirds and seabirds.
- Ensure bird colonies are posted and protected.
- Elevate the profile of imperiled migrating and wintering shorebirds in Florida's conservation community.
- Improve collaborative and coordinated monitoring efforts for shorebirds and seabirds statewide.

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- Provide leadership in recruiting, training and employing volunteer stewards for shorebird and seabird monitoring and protection.
- Influence the design, timing and frequency of beach renourishment projects to provide consideration for shorebirds and seabirds.
- Engage in state discussion of inlet bypassing with an eye to preservation of inlet shoals and islands essential to migratory and wintering shorebirds.
- Expand listed species considerations in coastal armoring permitting to include imperiled species other than nesting marine turtles.
- Eliminate the destruction of shorebird and seabird habitat currently occurring from the cosmetic practice of beach grooming.
- Represent the interests of beach-dependent wildlife in the rush to protect coastal structures from the effects of climate change including sea level rise and increased storm intensity and frequency.
- Work to reverse the drainage and mismanagement of freshwater resources.
- Engage new and traditional audiences for the purposes of building capacity, influencing decision-makers and increasing financial resources focused on conserving coastal birds.



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SEAGRASS CONSERVATION

Florida's underwater grasslands are the basis for one of our most productive ecosystems. Mismanagement of this fragile resource—including destruction by dredge and fill activities, pollution, and propeller scarring—threaten both Florida's ecology and marine economy. More than a decade ago, researchers found more than 173,000 acres of Florida's seagrasses had suffered significant scarring from propellers and groundings, and since that time, the damage has only grown exponentially. In 2008, legislation attempting to begin to address the threat of propeller scarring failed to become law.

Audubon of Florida is uniquely positioned to undertake seagrass conservation efforts addressing not just seagrass scarring but the full spectrum of threats to this resource, with our history of research in Florida Bay, ability to influence policy, and the passion of our chapter volunteers for this issue.

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, and public officials to:

- Encourage state regulators to emphasize avoidance of impacts rather than seagrass mitigation.
- Require that seagrass mitigation be in-kind.
- Apply a more stringent public interest compatibility test in the severance of sovereignty submerged lands resulting in the destruction of seagrasses.
- Eliminate exemptions to mitigation requirements including those extended to single-family docks.
- Require that seagrass from sites with approved impacts be relocated.
- Require a minimum mitigation ratio of 1:3.
- Eliminate the exemption of maintenance dredging from mitigation requirements.
- Give DEP the authority to post shallow water/ no motor zones in areas of seagrass mitigation or protection.
- Create civil penalties for the scarring of seagrass beds in state waters.
- Use seagrass health as a standard for setting and reviewing minimum flows and levels.
- Make seagrass recovery a baseline objective for ecosystem restoration programs including those for Florida Bay, the Everglades, Indian River Lagoon and other estuaries.
- Invest funds from the Ecosystem Management Trust Fund in seagrass restoration projects.

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- Increase consideration for seagrass impacts in the permitting of boat ramp creation or expansion proposals.
- Engage new and traditional audiences for the purposes of building field capacity, influencing decisionmakers and building our financial capacity for the purpose of conserving seagrass resources.