



## **A PROPOSAL TO INCREASE AND IMPROVE FLORIDA FOREVER**

Florida Forever, our State's landmark land conservation program, must be enhanced and increased in order to address the conservation, environmental and recreation challenges of today and tomorrow. The historic re-authorization and revitalization of Florida Forever that is outlined below has been proposed by the Florida Forever Coalition for the 2008 Session of the Legislature.

### **An Urgent Need**

- Florida's special natural and recreational land is disappearing at an alarming rate -- hundreds of acres a day!
- The current real estate slump in Florida provides historic opportunities for land conservation. Without more funding now, these places will be lost forever.
- The Florida Department of Environmental Protection has identified as much as \$17 billion in "priority" land for protection through Florida Forever.
- A total of \$10 billion is necessary to protect the two million acres required to protect Florida's natural heritage, according to The Nature Conservancy.
- An additional \$4.3 billion is necessary for city and county park departments to acquire the 120,000 acres needed for future parks and recreational sites, according to a study by The Trust for Public Land, Florida Recreation and Park Association, Florida League of Cities, and Florida Association of Counties.

### **Enhanced Funding**

The Coalition believes that the successor program can be achieved through:

- A combination of cash and bonding authority for a ten year period
- Starting, in FY 2008-2009, at the level of funding of \$600 million per year for 5 years
- Increasing, in FY 2013-2014, to \$900 million annually for 5 years
- (Under existing law, all existing Preservation 2000 bonds will be fully paid off in FY 2013-14.)

### **Funding Multiple Benefits**

The distribution of Florida Forever funds, designed to achieve multiple conservation and environmental benefits, is unchanged in the Coalition's proposal:

- 35% for DEP Division of State Lands
- 35% for water resource protection by the 5 Water Management Districts
- 22% for Florida Communities Trust (FCT)

- 2% for Florida Recreation Development Assistance Program (FRDAP)
- 1.5% is allocated for each of the four programs:
  - State Park additions (State Department of Environmental Protection)
  - State greenways and trails ((State Department of Environmental Protection)
  - productive forests (Division of Forestry, Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services)
  - fish and wildlife programs (Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission)

## **Program Priorities**

The Coalition supports the revision and updating of components within the distribution to allow for optimization of funding provided through the successor programs, and to address emerging concerns such as climate change. These components identify how each program may go about achieving the absolute highest return on the investment of state land buying dollars.

- I. Division of State Lands: The Coalition seeks to revise and update the criteria used by the Division of State Lands to rank possible conservation projects. The Coalition proposes a multi-tiered work plan including a transparent ranking system. New categories for priority selection should include:
  - The creation of a land acquisition priority list which applies the best available science to guide acquisition of environmentally sensitive lands. It is also recommended that greater utilization of conservation science should be applied when making priority selections.
  - Partnership Category/Regional Incentives
    - Regional Incentive Component—This category would provide for local and regional cost-share projects where additional points are given for parcels identified in a regional visioning process.
    - Bargain/Cost-Share Category—This category includes targeted environmental lands where the opportunity exists for a substantially reduced price through shared or alternative funding options.
  - Climate Change: Parcels identified for benefit in adapting or mitigating for climate change and which otherwise meet objectives of program.
  - Rural and Working Lands Projects and Program: Incentives for the purchase of protective easements from ranchers and farmers making productive use of their land
  - Substantially Complete: A new category for land acquisition of parcels necessary to complete DEP projects already underway.
  
- II. Water Resource Component The protection of Florida’s natural water supplies is a top objective of Florida Forever. Water supply protection is advanced by several Florida Forever programs and can be more successfully achieved by:
  - Focusing on the acquisition of land to protect water resources, including wetlands, springs, riparian corridors, and recharge areas.
  - Increasing watershed protection funding by all of the Water Management Districts.
    - Increasing funding for watershed protection by the Northwest Florida Water Management District and Suwannee River Water Management District, both of

which have historically received less funding than the other Water Management Districts.

- III. Florida Communities Trust (FCT) - The major source of land acquisition funding for communities, FCT can increase the reach of its limited share of Florida Forever (22%) by the following strategies proposed by the Coalition:
  - Provide incentives in ranking for land that is identified in a regional conservation lands plan compiled as part of regional visioning process.
  - Provide increased emphasis on projects that provide water access to the public.
- IV. Ecological Corridors - The DEP Office of Greenways and Trails, State Parks Division of Recreation and Parks, Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, and Division of Forestry receive 6% of Florida Forever Program funds to facilitate the creation of ecological corridors in conjunction with other protected lands (e.g. in holdings and additions).
- V. Florida Recreation Development Assistance Program (FRDAP) - This key program receives 2% of Florida Forever funding. In order to allow local governments to maximize the impact of the program, the Coalition proposes to maintain Florida Communities Trust funding for the Program, and to eventually increase the cap on the number of projects than can come from one applicant.
- VI. Land Management - The Coalition strongly endorses improved management of existing state lands. The Coalition proposed to enhance land management in the following ways:
  - Doubling – from 1.5% to 3% -- the percentage of funding expended by select (non-parks) programs under Florida Forever.
  - Increasing the allocation of water management district land management funding that goes to the Northwest Florida Water Management District.
  - Increasing options for land management by nongovernmental entities, e.g. leases with ranchers for grazing.
  - Coordinating and sharing of resources between agencies and through the use of public and private partnerships.

### **The Florida Forever Coalition**

The Coalition is made up of dozens of organizations that support conservation, environmental protection, and recreation needs across Florida. A steering committee is composed of the following organizations (*and their points of contact*):

Audubon of Florida	<i>Eric Draper</i>	<i>850-224-7546</i>
Defenders of Wildlife	<i>Laurie Macdonald</i>	<i>727-823-3888</i>
Florida Recreation and Park Association	<i>Eleanor Warmack</i>	<i>850-878-3221</i>
Florida Wildlife Federation	<i>Preston Robertson</i>	<i>850-656-7113</i>
1,000 Friends of Florida	<i>Uma Outka</i>	<i>850-222-6277</i>
The Nature Conservancy	<i>Janet Bowman</i>	<i>850-222-0199</i>
The Trust for Public Land	<i>Pepper Uchino</i>	<i>850-222-7911</i>

## **Funding History**

The Preservation 2000 program was initially authorized in 1990, for a ten year period of time at a total level of \$3 billion.

The Florida Forever program which followed the Preservation 2000 program was authorized in 2000 for a ten year period of time at a total level of \$3 billion. Florida Forever is funded through the sale of bonds. Debt service on the bonds is then paid by revenue generated from Documentary Stamps which results from real estate transactions and land sales. Bonding is important because it spreads the benefits of lands protected forever to future generations of Floridians.