

The Nature  
Conservancy   
Florida

# CONSERVATION 2025

OUR LEGISLATIVE PLATFORM





COVER

Photo credit: Melissa Machonis/TNC Photo Contest 2018  
A pink flamingo in a pond at Flamingo Gardens in Davie, Florida

© Michael Rivera [CC BY-SA 3.0]  
Florida State Capitol in Tallahassee, Florida

Photo credit: Remi Excudie/TNC Photo Contest 2018  
A Florida panther stares at the camera before attempting to  
pounce on the photographer

# CONSERVATION 2025

## Our Legislative Platform

---

A NOTE FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR	2
THE PEOPLE OF TNC IN FLORIDA	3
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	3
PROTECT NATURAL TREASURES	4
REIMAGINE & INNOVATE SOLUTIONS	5
PUT OUR MONEY WHERE OUR FUTURE IS	6
EMPOWER LOCAL & RURAL COMMUNITIES	7
GET DIRTY	8
HIGHLIGHTS: TNC IN FLORIDA'S PRESERVES	9

Friends in Conservation:

As a landowner and steward of some of Florida's precious resources, The Nature Conservancy in Florida (TNC in Florida) invites another legislative session and our continued collaboration with elected officials across the state to conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends. At TNC in Florida, we're sharing our science-based solutions and expertise with partners across the U.S. and around the world, including right here in the Sunshine State. Know that we are here to work with you in both developing sound public policy and executing it with real world expertise.

The Nature Conservancy is a leader in environmental protection (the world's largest conservation organization, in fact), and we have an ambitious plan to secure a thriving planet – for people and nature. Our global 2030 goals inform the work that our more than 80 employees in Florida do each day. They guided us in developing the TNC in Florida strategic plan, which in turn provides direction to our efforts from oyster restoration in the Panhandle to the preservation of sensitive ecosystems in Central Florida and protection of water quality in South Florida. In preparation for this legislative session, we gathered our technical experts and the leaders of our strategic plan objective areas to identify the priorities on which our science and data tell us we should focus. Many meetings, discussions, and follow-ups later, the State of Florida has clear public policy needs that we have the urgent opportunity to address this Session. They are presented in this platform for conservation during the 2025 Regular Session of the Florida Legislature. Leaders in our state government have demonstrated their support for solving issues like these. We are lucky to have not only a bright future but, more importantly, the public servants willing to create it.

As a Florida native, avid outdoor enthusiast, and cyclist, I'm a fan of "Real Florida," its diverse landscapes, and natural beauty. I'm grateful to know that many of our state legislators share my appreciation for Florida's natural environment and passion for protecting it. Thank you for joining us as a committed partner in conservation. For nature, for people, for Florida, together we find a way.

With sincere gratitude,



Greg Knecht  
Executive Director

THE NATURE CONSERVANCY IN FLORIDA

1035 South Semoran Boulevard, Suite 2-1021B | Winter Park, FL 32792 | (407) 682-3664  
[nature.org/Florida](http://nature.org/Florida) | [facebook.com/NatureConservancyFL](https://facebook.com/NatureConservancyFL) | [twitter.com/Nature\\_Florida](https://twitter.com/Nature_Florida)



# THE PEOPLE OF TNC IN FLORIDA

## Our Board of Trustees



Pat Balthrop



Tom Costello



Chris Dillavou



Tracy Duda Chapman



Ron Edwards



Jarred Fayson



Ted Haddock



Christie Heavener



Ryan Hixon



Cheryl Holder, MD



Garry Jones



Rena Langley



John Levinson



Phoebe McMillan



Gilbert Miller



Sejal Patel, MD



Hon. Bruce Rauner



Anne Savage



Robert Spottswood



Joann Tredennick



Noah Valenstein

## Our Government Relations Staff

Public affairs provided by  
McGuire Woods Consulting LLC



**Greg Knecht**  
Executive Director



**Jennifer Carpenter**  
Deputy Executive Director



**Garrett Wallace**  
Southern U.S. Govt. Relations Director



**Janet Bowman**  
Sr. Policy Advisor



**Kahreem Golden**  
Florida Government Relations Manager

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For more than 60 years, The Nature Conservancy in Florida (TNC or TNC in Florida) has worked to conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends. Led by science and data, we build coalitions and constituencies demonstrating leadership and informing policy decisions across the state. The public policy that will be developed during the Florida Legislature's 2025 Regular Session will be vital to our state's legacy of thriving environments and economically productive natural resources. Legislators and other influencers will make decisions that will be crucial determinants of TNC's progress toward our global 2030 goals to secure a thriving planet for people and nature.

Achieving our 2030 goals and the objectives of TNC in Florida's Strategic Plan requires us to engage in the state's legislative process to support smart, impactful conservation funding, policy, and practices. To that end, the following strategy themes will guide our efforts in the Florida Capitol this year: (1) Protecting Natural Treasures, (2) Reimagining & Innovating Solutions, (3) Putting Our Money Where Our Future Is, (4) Empowering Local and Rural Communities, and (5) Getting Dirty. While TNC will be directly involved in many other important activities with our partners in government, these five strategies represent the top priorities on which we must actively engage right now for the prosperity of the natural resources that support all life, including ours. We look forward to our continued collaboration with Governor Ron DeSantis, Senate President Ben Albritton, Speaker of the Florida House of Representatives Daniel Perez, the Florida Cabinet, state legislators, and all our partners across executive agencies and the environmental protection community. Together, we will create a state in which people and nature thrive.

# PROTECT NATURAL TREASURES

## Support the Florida Wildlife Corridor

At the heart of TNC's mission is a simple yet challenging premise: the need to conserve our freshwater, terrestrial, estuarine, and marine ecosystems and the biodiversity they hold. The quality of life that Florida's residents and visitors enjoy and the economy that enables it depend largely on our state's unmatched natural resources. We must accommodate 23 million current residents, more than 800 new residents every day, and 140 million visitors; we must also balance development with preserving the natural treasures that attract those people. In recent years, Governor DeSantis and the Legislature have made investing in the conservation of rare, sensitive, and ecologically important lands a priority, and the Florida Wildlife Corridor is the signature element of the Sunshine State's ability to continue that legacy. The Corridor protects wildlife, preserves pristine lands and waters, provides drinking water, and supports major sectors of the regional economy like tourism and fishing. It is important to both nature and people that goals related to prioritizing the Corridor are realized.

**The Nature Conservancy in Florida supports** protecting Florida's natural treasures, especially those within the Florida Wildlife Corridor:

- Implementing smart growth strategies to manage population growth.
- Requiring consideration by road-building and other infrastructure authorities to acquire for conservation and/or avoid negative impacts to land identified as high-priority Wildlife Corridor tracts (i.e., tracts under high development pressure).
- Continuing to acquire lands that address strategic needs such as connecting wildlife corridors, enhancing water quality and storage, or providing buffers to existing state lands.
- Implementing conservation easements on critical parcels like those in the Rural and Family Lands program, keeping agriculture vibrant and ensuring the sustainability of Florida's precious lands.
- Protecting rural areas and wildlife corridors from disruption by the construction of new road corridors through sensitive areas.

Photo credit: Anderson Photography and Nature Graphics  
Florida black bear and cubs in Apalachicola region, Florida

# REIMAGINE & INNOVATE SOLUTIONS

## Rethink Current Approaches & Discover New Answers

As an organization that is led by science, informed by data, and engaged in the on-the-ground work of conservation, TNC in Florida champions fresh perspectives and novel problem-solving. Our state has opportunities to rethink old ways of approaching the challenges we face and to stand at the forefront of conservation innovations. As a trusted partner among policymakers, management agencies, scientists, agriculture, recreational anglers, the shellfish industry, and more, TNC in Florida is uniquely positioned to help the state sustain healthy lands, oceans, and water.

**The Nature Conservancy in Florida supports** reimagining current approaches and innovating new solutions to our environmental goals and challenges:

- Appropriating funds, supporting the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) in rulemaking, and seeking innovative solutions to improve water quality including septic-to-sewer conversions and enhancements to stormwater management.
- Adopting and implementing the recommendations of Florida's Blue-Green Algae Task Force.
- Leveraging funding to achieve habitat connectivity, complete wildlife corridors, and maximize taxpayers' return on their investment in conservation.

# PUT OUR MONEY WHERE OUR FUTURE IS

## Fund Conservation

Nature will take care of people if people take care of nature. Florida is a leader in funding the conservation of precious natural resources and recognizes the need for meaningful, sustainable investment in the work that ensures a bright future for both people and nature. We have an enduring legacy of leaders who prioritize the conservation and preservation of rare, sensitive, and ecologically essential lands, waters, and wildlife. TNC in Florida has been a long-term partner to the State by investing in the acquisition and management of property for protection, providing technical expertise and the means for scientific discovery, and informing policy decisions that contribute to our vision of a world where the diversity of life thrives and people act to conserve nature for its own sake and its ability to fulfill our needs and enrich our lives.

Programs like Florida Forever and the Rural and Family Lands Protection Program highlight the State's dedication to conservation and preservation. Florida's budget for fiscal year 2024-2025 directed almost \$1 billion toward conserving lands and waterways, protecting water quality and supply, restoring Florida's springs, and maintaining the National Gold Medal standard for our state park system in addition to more than \$1 billion toward Everglades restoration and other important environmental issues. This legislative session allows us to continue demonstrating our commitment to a future for Florida that is abundant, connected, and resilient, offering both nature and people the opportunity to thrive.

**The Nature Conservancy in Florida supports** putting our money where we know the future and prosperity of our state lies by funding environmental protection:

- Funding conservation, natural resource management (e.g. land and aquatic), and agency programs that meet the goals of TNC in Florida's strategic plan.
- Appropriating funding for Everglades restoration at a level that meets the Governor's request and fulfills the State's role in the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan.
- Ensuring continued access to federal funding for conservation priorities.
- Continuing to support state funding for Florida's preeminent conservation programs.

Florida Forever: continued recurring appropriations and additional funding based on FDEP capacity

Resilient Florida: \$220 million

The Florida Communities Trust: \$15 million

The Rural and Family Lands Protection Program: \$200 million

- Funding natural resource management with appropriations to FDEP and the Division of Forestry plus additional land management funding allocated to the following entities.

Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS): Florida Forest Service

FDEP: Division of State Lands, Division of Lands and Recreation, and Office of Greenways and Trails

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC)

Water Management Districts

- Investigating a funding management strategy for new conservation acquisitions and natural resource management innovations that optimize taxpayers' return on their investment.
- Funding FDACS, FDEP, and FWC programs and projects for coastal and marine fisheries habitat, restoration, and management.
- Funding state and local government efforts to address sources of pollution such as stormwater runoff and septic tanks, including septic-to-sewer conversions.



# EMPOWER LOCAL & RURAL COMMUNITIES

## Help Them Help Nature

To protect Florida's wildlife, wildlands, and natural resources, we must ensure that our built environment works in harmony with nature. From constructing new roadways and buildings to treating our yards with chemicals, everything we do in our built environment affects our natural ecosystems. Beyond protecting land and water, TNC in Florida restores habitats, works with farmers to enhance agricultural lands, and protects critical wildlife corridors. The work that we and others do across the state is essential to the vitality of local communities affected by environmental impacts. Those communities must have the tools and authority necessary to achieve locally tailored conservation goals.

**The Nature Conservancy in Florida supports** empowering local and rural communities to take decisive action that addresses the environmental needs and challenges of their citizens and ecosystems:

- Enabling local governments and regional resilience or climate collaboratives to enact and implement zero-carbon goals.
- Incentivizing distributed renewable energy technologies to provide resilience for critical facilities (e.g., schools, hospitals, emergency operations centers, and libraries) for emergency management and disaster recovery.
- Allowing homeowners, businesses, and local communities to set goals, enact policies, and employ strategies that make sense for the protection of their natural environments and resources.
- Deploying policies, projects, and funding that enhance agriculture, the economy, and the environment (e.g., agrivoltaics, economic development in farming/rural communities, emissions reduction and carbon sequestration in Floridian agricultural and working lands).
- Incentivizing and removing barriers to the utilization of rooftop solar energy by homeowners and businesses.
- Encouraging progress toward the aggressive scenario identified in the Florida Department of Transportation's Electric Vehicle Master Plan, including (1) the purchase of electric vehicles in state and local governmental procurement and (2) funding and implementing the emergency management recommendations of the Florida National Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Plan.

# GET DIRTY

## Do the Work of Conservation

TNC in Florida is often in the lead on solving the big challenges facing our state: water quality on our coasts and in our kitchens, wildlife habitat squeezed by growth, protecting our working waterfronts, sea-level rise on our coasts, and protecting the last of Florida's pristine places. Every day, our staff and partners roll up their sleeves and do the work of conserving, preserving, and managing our natural resources. We understand the practical needs and implications related to legislative goal setting. After all the legislating and appropriating is finished, the job of protecting natural environments is done by passionate teams and individuals who need the support of our government and public policy.

**The Nature Conservancy in Florida supports** the people and projects responsible for getting dirty and doing the on-the-ground work of protecting our natural resources:

- Supporting adequate agency and natural resource management FTEs .
- Executing sustainable strategies and practices for natural resource management.
- Funding projects like the Perdido Bay restoration in Escambia County.
- Advancing technology to enhance future and existing stormwater retention.

Photo credit: Eric Blackmore  
A prescribed fire at the Disney Wilderness Preserve, Florida

# HIGHLIGHTS

## TNC in Florida's Preserves

### Apalachicola Bluffs & Ravines Preserve

Apalachicola Bluffs and Ravines Preserve protects some of the rarest habitats: these natural communities include sandhills, slope forests, seepage streams, and massive exposed bluffs along the Apalachicola River. The unusual geologic features present on the preserve provide refuge for rare and imperiled plants and animals—some found nowhere else on Earth, making this region one of five biodiversity hotspots in North America. The preserve also protects longleaf pine sandhill uplands, breathtaking river bluffs, and million-year-old fossils.

### Blowing Rocks Preserve

After six decades of protecting Florida's great places, TNC considers Blowing Rocks Preserve one of our proudest achievements. This peaceful, barrier island sanctuary is a well-known model for large-scale, native coastal habitat restoration. The natural features found here are disappearing fast from many Florida islands, and a number of endangered plants and animals call this special place home—including rare loggerhead, green and leatherback sea turtles.

The preserve was named for its rocky Anastasia limestone shoreline—the largest on the Atlantic coast. At high tide when the sea is rough, seas break against the rocks and force plumes of saltwater up to 50 feet skyward.

### Tiger Creek Preserve

Tiger Creek Preserve sits on the eastern edge of the Lake Wales Ridge, one of Florida's ancient islands. Separated from the mainland long ago by a shallow sea, the Ridge is peninsular Florida's oldest and highest landmass. Fast forward to the present day, this ancient separation is the reason why the preserve has one of the highest concentrations of threatened and endangered plants and animals in the country. Some exist nowhere else on Earth. Named after the pristine blackwater stream that forms its spine, the preserve contains hardwood swamps, hammocks, scrubby flatwoods, pine flatwoods, sandhill and longleaf pine/wiregrass habitat. It's a land that must be burned in order to survive, and one where some animals literally swim through ancient white sands.

### Disney Wilderness Preserve

Home to more than 1,000 species of plants and animals, the Disney Wilderness Preserve in central Florida is an essential part of the Everglades ecosystem. It contains 3,500 acres of restored wetlands that act as nature's "sponges," capturing rain, filtering out nutrients, and replenishing our groundwater.

Although the preserve is not affiliated with Walt Disney Parks and Resorts, The Walt Disney Company provided funds for restoration and wildlife monitoring on the preserve and continues to partner on a number of on-site projects today. The preserve stands as a testament not only to Walt Disney's love of nature, but also to the power of cooperation, perseverance, and innovative thinking.

© Ralph Pace  
Blowing Rocks Preserve, 2016

### About The Nature Conservancy

Florida is known for its lush greenery, tropical climates, and natural beauty. It is the land of the Muscogee, Apalachee, Timucua, Seminoles, Tocobaga, Ais, Calusa, Jeaga, Mayaimi, Tequesta, and Matecumbe. We are graced with 1,300 miles of shoreline and the greatest concentration of natural springs in the world.

Founded in the United States through grassroots action in 1951, The Nature Conservancy has grown to become one of the most effective and wide-reaching environmental organizations in the world. Thanks to more than a million members and the dedicated efforts of our diverse staff and over 400 scientists, we are the world's largest conservation organization and impact conservation in 77 countries and territories, including all 50 U.S. states.

Since 1961, The Nature Conservancy has worked in Florida to advance conservation and protect natural lands. Our core strategies address the greatest threats to Florida's nature and people, focusing on areas where we are uniquely positioned to make the most significant contribution to Florida's future. We have protected over 1.3 million acres of vulnerable lands and waters across the state since our founding, and we own and manage more than 40,000 acres including four preserves that are open to the public. The rich diversity of landscapes comprising our Center for Conservation Initiatives campus preserves reflects Florida's unique geography and biodiversity. The preserves encompass marine and coastal environments in the southeast; working forests in the panhandle; the connected lands, waters, and communities in the center of the state; and Florida's ancient wilderness.

**Florida's Future Vision** We envision a future for Florida that is abundant, connected, and resilient, offering both nature and people the opportunity to thrive.

**TNC Vision** Our vision is a world where the diversity of life thrives, and people act to conserve nature for its own sake and its ability to fulfill our needs and enrich our lives.

**TNC Mission** The Nature Conservancy's mission is to conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends.

**TNC Values**

- Integrity Beyond Reproach
- One Conservancy
- Respect for People, Communities, and Culture
- Commitment to Diversity
- Tangible, Lasting Results