

2024 Audubon Assembly



**2025 Conservation
Action Agenda**

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GUIDANCE ON THE 2025 CONSERVATION ACTION AGENDA

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 a member vote leading up to 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 quarterly as Regional Conservation Committees (RCCs). Chapter leaders, supported by policy staff, recommend conservation priorities that prioritize regional concerns and reflect the RCCs' commitment to work together on them. 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. Statewide priorities are long-standing priorities that continue across many years, but are updated to reflect accomplishments, new opportunities, and evolving strategies each year. This year's priorities are organized to align with Audubon's strategic plan, the Flight Plan, to clearly illustrate how fundamentally Audubon Florida's work contributes to these hemispheric goals. To learn more about Flight Plan, click [here](#).



STATE CONSERVATION PRIORITY: HABITAT CONSERVATION 2025

The Flight Plan's Habitat Conservation milestone focuses on creating a robust network of climate-resilient lands and waters to combat habitat losses that pose a severe threat to bird populations. Recognizing that habitat loss, intensified by climate change, is a leading cause of bird population declines, Audubon Florida prioritizes the protection and restoration of essential bird habitats across Florida. This work will draw upon Audubon Florida's science, land management, and policy expertise and be guided by the following initiatives.

Wings Over Working Lands

Audubon's "Wings Over Working Lands" initiative emphasizes the importance of protecting habitat on private working lands and public conservation lands. By encouraging sustainable practices, these landscapes can serve as crucial habitats and migratory corridors for wildlife, connecting wetlands, forests, and protected areas. This approach not only helps protect biodiversity but also offers benefits like improved water quality, flood control, and climate resilience. By working together with communities and land managers, Audubon promotes practices that balance productive use with the preservation of essential natural resources.

Water for Birds and People

Audubon's "Water for Birds and People" initiative focuses on ensuring clean and abundant water in rivers, lakes, streams, wetlands, and marshes, which are essential for bird survival. By combining science, policy, and advocacy, Audubon achieves measurable and scalable conservation benefits for these habitats. Audubon collaborates with federal, state, and local officials to secure funding and protect these crucial habitats for the benefit of both birds and communities.

Coastal and Marine Resilience

Audubon's "Coastal and Marine Resilience" initiative focuses on protecting and restoring coastal habitats through policy, advocacy, and hands-on conservation efforts. Healthy coastal ecosystems, such as wetlands and beaches, play a vital role as the first line of defense for communities facing sea-level rise and increasingly intense storms. By maintaining and enhancing these natural barriers, Audubon helps safeguard both wildlife and coastal populations against the growing impacts of climate change.

Urban Conservation

Audubon's "Urban Conservation" initiative strives to create safe and healthy habitats for birds in cities and neighborhoods. By focusing on initiatives like "Plants for Birds" and "Bird-friendly Buildings," the program ensures birds have access to food, shelter, and safe spaces to raise their young. The "Plants for Birds" program encourages the use of native plants in yards and public areas, helping restore vital habitats and supporting birds as they adapt to climate change. This initiative empowers individuals to make a positive impact on bird conservation where they live.

STATE CONSERVATION PRIORITY: Habitat | Wings Over Working Lands 2025

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. Audubon and allied partner organizations have identified Important Bird Areas (IBAs) crucial to avian diversity. 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.

To ensure the survival of intact ecosystems in the face of a surging wave of urban growth, federal, state, county, and local governments have protected extensive conservation lands and parks. Of Florida's 35 million acres, approximately 32% has been acquired as publicly owned conservation land. Significant areas of these public lands, having been previously impacted, are under restoration.

In addition to public land, millions of acres of ecologically important bird and wildlife habitat are located on privately owned ranches and forest land. These private lands include most of Florida's remaining high-quality forests, farmlands, native long-leaf pine, and scrub, plus extensive, intact wetland systems. Florida's ranches and working forests yield food and timber, support local economies, safeguard clean water, and form some of our nation's most beautiful landscapes.

Audubon Florida has a long history of collaboration with private ranchland owners, beginning more than 60 years ago with an ambitious effort to obtain voluntary agreements with ranchers to designate their land as sanctuaries for the then endangered Bald Eagle. By 1962, Audubon had established some 600,000 acres of these voluntary sanctuaries in the Kissimmee floodplain north of Lake Okeechobee. Many of the ranches participating in this program are under the ownership of the same families today and see Audubon as a constructive collaborator with their own efforts to protect ranchlands.

Public and private lands currently serving as important bird and wildlife habitat are subject to both development pressure and proposals to convert them from protected public property, working ranches, and forests, into sites for urban development or linear facilities such as new highways.

Florida's IBAs benefit from active constituencies of habitat and bird 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, in alignment with the National Audubon Society's Flight Plan – a strategic plan to protect birds and the places they need, today and tomorrow – will call on the volunteer leadership of Audubon chapters, members, and grassroots networks, and will work with conservation allies, business and community leaders, public officials, and agencies to:

- Support state laws and encourage local land-use decisions and programs that protect conservation lands and provide resources for managing those lands to restore and maintain wildlife and habitats.
- Work to develop increasingly better partnerships with private landowners and assist them in finding adequate financial incentives enabling them to ensure that rural farmland and ranches will not be converted to uses that destroy the ecological value of their properties.
- Support increased state funding for the expansion of conservation easement purchase programs including less-than-fee Florida Forever acquisitions and the Rural and Family Lands Protection Program.
- Promote the protection of the Florida Wildlife Corridor as a compelling reason to expand the Florida Forever and Rural and Family Lands Protection programs.
- Continue to grow and improve the effectiveness and diversity of volunteer participation in the Audubon Florida Jay Watch and EagleWatch program efforts.
- Continue to grow and improve the quality of data and data management for Audubon Florida Jay Watch and EagleWatch programs to provide historical datasets that can be used to detect the effects of changing climates on focal bird species.
- 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 or incompatible use proposals made by the state agencies who manage them.
- Seek to develop practical consensus measures to prevent or minimize damage to conservation lands due to highway projects and other linear facilities.
- Influence decisions on the location and design of new highways and highway expansion projects to require maximum avoidance of conservation lands and private lands containing important ecosystem components.
- Work to require transportation agencies to purchase new conservation lands in conjunction with major highway projects to offset impacts to conservation lands and easements on private lands.
- Actively encourage and build support for the expansion of existing major highways as the preferred alternative to avoid new roads through natural areas.
- 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 the purchase of conservation easements and similar programs that allow land to remain in agricultural use while protecting important habitat features.

STATE CONSERVATION PRIORITY: Habitat | Water for Birds and People 2025

Water defines Florida's natural ecosystems. Seasonally abundant rainfall seeps into aquifers and over floodplains, with billions of gallons of fresh water flowing through springs and rivers toward 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.

The alteration of Florida's landscape has drastically reduced its ability to store the plentiful water that the state receives. This has resulted in over-drained wetlands and depleted aquifers, while simultaneously delivering harmful amounts of nutrient-laden water to our springs, rivers, lakes, and eventually, coastal ecosystems. Climate change represents an existential threat to Florida's environment, economy, and way of life. Its effects on Florida's water resources include sea level rise, extreme heat, and stronger storms exacerbating the effects of Florida's rainy and dry season extremes.

Red tide and blue-green algae events, resulting in fish kills and dangerous health risks for Floridians, are caused by warming temperatures and increasing nutrient pollution discharges. People, industry, and nature are without sufficient water during dry periods and droughts, often leading to catastrophic wildfires threatening human and wildlife communities. Florida's birdlife, including the iconic wading birds of the Everglades, has suffered significant harm from the loss of water available to natural systems. These problems must be addressed at the source.

Increasingly 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 and Florida's waterways and ecological communities are harmed through drainage and pollution from agricultural, industrial, and urban sources. 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.

Access to clean, safe water for consumption and recreation is a basic human right. Underserved communities are often faced with more than their fair share of water pollution challenges. These same communities are also more likely to be exposed to unsafe drinking water and flooding.

Therefore, be it resolved:

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strategic plan to protect birds and the places they need, today and tomorrow – will call on the volunteer leadership of Audubon 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, Rivers, Lakes, and Springs

- Engage with Water Management Districts (WMDs) as key stakeholders in healthy water systems in the State of Florida:
 - Encourage WMDs to identify and reserve water needed for the health of natural systems on a priority basis, including water made available by and for restoration projects.
 - Encourage WMDs to set protective limits for flows and levels in aquifers and water bodies and implement effective recovery strategies where these are not met.
 - Advocate for sufficient funding, including avoidance of rolled-back millage rates, so that WMDs can adequately perform 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.
- Promote restoration projects that improve freshwater flows to and expand the spatial extent of wetlands as a preferred method for achieving restoration goals.
- Integrate the science and observations of climate change-driven ecological impacts into regulatory, restoration, and research-based water resource efforts.
- Assist WMDs in creating operational plans that are protective of natural systems and deliver the benefits expected from restoration projects.
- Support programs and projects that ensure efficiency and resilience in Florida's water management systems.
- Use birds as a visible and meaningful metric of the health of priority ecosystems.
- Work to improve wetland protections at state and local levels to ensure no loss and seek enhanced protection and oversight of permitting programs administered by local, state, and federal agencies governing dredge and fill activities.
- Collaborate with the South Florida Water Management District and other regional stakeholders on the Corkscrew Watershed Initiative to identify viable short- and long-term strategies to restore wetland hydroperiods and natural flows within Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary and surrounding conservation lands while maintaining flood protection and water supply needs in the area.
- Work with private landowners to encourage improved habitat and watershed connectivity through payment for environmental services, wetland restoration, and conservation easements in priority areas within the St. Johns River Water Management District, Southwest Florida Water Management District, and South Florida Water Management District.

- Prioritize work to improve ecological conditions in important aquatic resources throughout the state such as the Springs Coast, Indian River Lagoon, 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

- Encourage all levels of government to consider the increased likelihood of extreme weather events in their planning efforts.
- Advocate for water conservation programs that include water-use reduction, minimize use of surficial aquifer and surface water supply sources, require increasing use of advanced treated alternative water supplies as conditions in water supply consumptive use permits.
- Ensure that state reviewers meet their obligation to evaluate all new Consumptive Use Permits by Florida's rigorous public interest test and that there is accurate actual use reporting and monitoring on all permits issued.
- Advocate for improved independence and efficiency in agricultural water use when updating current water management infrastructure to maintain high-quality agricultural water supply at a reasonable cost, balance the need for water deliveries to natural systems, improve irrigation efficiency, and develop improved retention, water reuse, and recycling practices.
- Advocate for the reduction of turf grass with conversion to native plants, to reduce the use of water for landscape irrigation.
- Advocate for stronger efficiency standards for all water uses in tandem with sustainable usage limits to protect 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 effectively treated reclaimed water and stormwater, which improve conditions in natural systems.
- 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 and wastewater treatment standards that will protect ecological health.
- Support requirements, especially in impaired basins, for:
 - Connections to central sewer and the use of enhanced nitrogen-removing septic systems where appropriate,
 - Agricultural stormwater permit requirements to reduce harmful offsite discharges,
 - Limits on fertilizer use to the standard of "no harm" to water resources,
 - Elimination of land application of sewage biosolids or other non-fertilizer nutrient sources that harm water quality, and
 - Incentivization of innovative technology to dispose of biosolids.

- Encourage adequately treated reclaimed water use in ways that benefit or protect the water quality of natural systems.
- Assist agencies in the revision and/or creation of Basin Management Action Plans that focus on source controls, utilize effective strategies and projects to reduce nutrient impacts on receiving water bodies, and include a higher level of oversight of both permits and permitted facilities.
- Work to improve enforcement of state water laws to achieve water quality improvements throughout the state.
- Seek to improve agricultural water use and management through the improvement of the substance, funding, enrollment in, and enforcement of agricultural best management practices.
- Improve urban stormwater management through incentives and rules.

Continue our Long-standing Work to Protect and Restore America's Everglades

- Secure consistent funding at the state and federal levels to advance and expedite the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan and other key Everglades restoration programs to increase freshwater storage, maximize freshwater flows, and achieve maximum ecosystem benefits as quickly as possible.
- At a minimum, honor the Legacy Florida Act's commitment of at least \$200 million annually towards Everglades' restoration projects and programs, and advocate for match-funding from the federal government. Recurring state and federal funding is critical to advance Everglades restoration.
- Expedite the completion of the Everglades Agricultural Area Reservoir and advance the Central Everglades Planning Project to direct more water to Everglades National Park and Florida Bay.
- Engage agencies to ensure water quality milestones from the Restoration Strategies for Clean Water for the Everglades plan are on schedule and that the consent decree overseeing Everglades phosphorus standards remains in place.
- Make water quality a priority – strengthen efforts at the local, state, and federal levels to reduce excessive nutrients from entering Lake Okeechobee and the Northern Estuaries, and advocate for water management decisions that prioritize the restoration of ecological functions for the long-term health of Lake Okeechobee and the Northern Estuaries. Promote plans to increase water storage north of Lake Okeechobee to reach these goals.
- Advocate for Lake Okeechobee management practices that will ensure balanced outcomes for all users of the Lake, including operational flexibility to ensure the maximization of water sent to the Everglades and Caloosahatchee Estuary to restore hydrology; the minimization of harmful discharges to the estuaries to prevent extreme lake levels; and effective recovery plans for these systems after damaging events.
- Advocate for robust post-project monitoring of Everglades restoration projects to measure restoration success.
- Continue efforts to improve our knowledge of the status and ecology of Roseate Spoonbills, Wood Storks, Southern Bald Eagles, and Snail Kites –important species that are being used as indicators to assess and refine Everglades restoration.

- Educate the public about the ecological and climate change adaptation and mitigation benefits of Everglades restoration including highlighting outcomes of hydrological research at Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary.
- Expose elected officials to the Everglades ecosystem by offering them educational tours of Lake Okeechobee, Florida Bay, and Corkscrew Swamp with Audubon's science and policy staff.

Advocate for Equitable Water Policies that Ensure All People Have Access to Clean, Safe, and Affordable Water Supplies

- Research and assess where new water policy can support environmental justice.
- Seek opportunities to engage in dialogue with diverse communities to shape water policy that is equitable.
- Assure that no community is disproportionately harmed economically or otherwise when water resource benefits are distributed.
- Advocate that local, state, and federal environmental programs and agency decisions are administered fairly and without any form of discrimination.
- Advocate to ensure that industrial, agricultural, and other water quality and quantity impacts do not affect any communities, including vulnerable ones.

STATE CONSERVATION PRIORITY: Habitat | Coastal and Marine Resilience 2025

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 migrate. Neotropical songbird migrants, facing the daunting odds of long overwater flights, use coastal habitats as their last southbound jumping-off points and first northbound landfalls. The geology of Florida's coasts and its birdlife is always in flux.

Florida's coasts are home to a remarkable diversity of habitats, birds, and other wildlife. Marshes, beaches and shoals, barrier islands and inlets, 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 as species of greatest conservation need, or considered indicator species by Audubon.

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, recreational disturbances, and rising sea levels.

Nearshore environments supporting shorebirds, seabirds, wading birds, and waterfowl are threatened by excessive nutrient loads in surface water runoff from urban and agricultural fertilizer applications, stormwater, septic tank drainage, and periodic wastewater treatment plant failures that discharge to estuarine systems on 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. Coastal waterbird die-offs are increasingly common from both known and unknown causes and require increased resource investment to analyze and resolve.

Because of the extraordinary value and tremendous vulnerability of coastal birds and their habitats, Audubon Florida has long ranked coastal conservation among its highest priorities. National Audubon Society has also elevated coastal habitats as a strategic priority in the *Flight Plan* and *Conservation Blueprints*, and National Fish and Wildlife Foundation prioritizes coastal conservation and recovery of focal shorebird populations through the Atlantic Flyway Shorebird Initiative.

Additionally, Audubon Florida advocates for natural climate solutions in the face of climate change and sea level rise together with adaptation and mitigation strategies, especially for coastal habitats like saltmarsh, the beach-dune system, and maritime hammock. 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 in 2010 and has contributed to our continued efforts to work together on recovering the Gulf's waterbird populations and habitats.

Audubon's Gulf of Mexico network helped pass the federal RESTORE Act to commit penalty funds from the spill to Gulf restoration and recovery of coastal waterbird populations.

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 steward leadership, local Audubon organizations, and our many partner agencies and organizations. Site-based habitat and species management throughout Florida produce tangible results. In addition to on-the-ground improvements, the resulting data informs our policy work by identifying immediate threats to priority geographies and species.

Deep and diverse expertise in these issues combined with a large cadre of committed volunteers makes it possible to provide leadership to the Florida Shorebird Alliance—a partnership of Audubon Florida, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Florida State Parks, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, municipalities, and other strategic organizations. Our broad grassroots base positions us well to advocate at local levels for sea level rise mitigation strategies that can benefit vulnerable coastal habitats. These areas of expertise also provide us with the perspective to guide new funding opportunities, such as the federal Inflation Reduction Act to meaningful stewardship and habitat restoration projects and even implementation of some of those projects—as we have done with penalty money from the Deepwater Horizon disaster.

Monitoring of priority coastal bird populations and coastal habitat changes informs adaptive strategies as birds and people face sea level rise. Long-term coastal resource conservation and management work provides a foundation of data and perspective that gives a long view to support our recommendations.

Therefore, be it resolved:

Audubon Florida, in alignment with the National Audubon Society's Flight Plan – a strategic plan to protect birds and the places they need, today and tomorrow – will call on the volunteer leadership of Audubon 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

- Connect a diversity of people to nature using coastal birdlife to engage them in the 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 a broadly diverse group of volunteers in a variety of stewardship capacities at Gulf Coast and Northeast Florida beach-nesting, rooftop-nesting, and wading bird rookery sites to actively conserve Audubon priority coastal birds.

- Improve the management of coastal habitat in priority geographic areas through bird stewarding programs and partnerships with Audubon chapters and other local communities.
- Partner with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission to convene spring and fall shorebird partnership meetings on the Gulf Coast and in Northeast Florida to identify and address conservation successes and challenges.
- Actively engage in nesting site disturbance management with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and through stewardship initiatives incorporating volunteers and Florida Shorebird Alliance partners.
- Actively seek funding opportunities for coastal habitat creation, enhancement, and restoration projects that provide additional habitat for coastal waterbirds as their habitats shift due to sea level rise.
- Implement migratory and wintering coastal bird population data collection focused on Red Knot, Piping Plover, and migratory shorebird feeding and roosting flocks at key Gulf Coast sites to better conserve non-breeding bird hotspots.
- Help assess the impacts to birds and habitat from post-nesting season storm events like Hurricanes Irma, Michael, and Ian, and in-season storm events like Hurricanes Elsa, Fred, and Helene to identify priorities and opportunities for recovery or restoration efforts.

Advocate for Birds and Other Wildlife

- Advocate for wise land management, low or no impact recreational use, and the acquisition of coastal conservation lands for habitat now, as well as in a future of higher sea levels.
- Advocate for water quality management rules and policies that will reduce nutrient loads in coastal waters (from wastewater, urban and agricultural fertilizer applications, and stormwater sources) to decrease the frequency, duration, and intensity of cyanobacteria and red tide outbreaks, as well as the spread of novel bacterial pathogens affecting wild birds.
- Promote planned shoreline retreat for vulnerable human communities rather than armoring in priority coastal areas, in the face of climate change.
- Promote habitat protection strategies that will provide for upland migration of coastal habitats and wildlife ahead of sea level rise.
- Encourage planning authorities of coastal local governments to consider sea level rise in decisions about zoning, affordable housing, planned development, and future infrastructure.
- Advocate for the value of coastal habitats as protection from the effects of climate change (e.g., carbon sequestration and wave attenuation value of marshes and seagrass meadows).
- Ensure adequate resources to enforce Critical Wildlife Area protections through collaboration with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission by advocating for increased officer patrol protocols at key nesting sites.
- Expand awareness of and protections for seabirds and shorebirds by enlisting local Sheriff's Offices and Police Departments to increase patrols at relevant county and

city beach-nesting bird areas.

- Remain vigilant regarding attempts to open Florida's nearshore waters and the eastern Gulf of Mexico to oil and gas exploration, drilling, and production, and promote clean energy alternatives.
- Encourage the use of RESTORE Act, hurricane recovery funding, and new funding sources like the Inflation Reduction Act for ecosystem restoration and resilience rather than harmful development proposals or coastal armoring.
- Collaborate with Audubon's Gulf Policy team and hurricane recovery team to secure funding for restoration projects that benefit birds and their habitats.
- Advocate to preserve and enforce bedrock bird protection legislation such as the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and the Endangered Species Act.

STATE CONSERVATION PRIORITY: Habitat | Urban Conservation 2025

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 causes, including climate change and rapid urbanization, are putting increasing pressure on natural resources with bird populations decreasing by 30% over the past 50 years.

Florida's significance as part of the Atlantic Flyway is evident throughout the state. More than five hundred species of birds are found 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 the last southbound jumping-off point and first northbound landfall. In short, in Florida, ample food, clean water, and shelter are critical to the survival of birds, wildlife, and humans alike.

At the same time, warm winter temperatures lure humans—both as visitors and a rapidly growing resident population—to Florida. 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 home landscapes, and exotic plants. Human-created hazards—such as reflective walls of glass on buildings, pesticides, and domestic predators—decrease the function of urban areas for birds. We can begin to mitigate these impacts with the choices we make in our communities.

The reflective quality of glass windows in our homes and buildings results in bird strikes. Bright city lights can distract and confuse birds migrating at night leading to exhaustion. Combined, these two urban features result in many millions of bird deaths each year. Concerted “Window Strikes” and “Lights Out” campaigns begin to address this threat.

Native plants are the foundation of the food chain and provide shelter and safe spaces for birds to raise their young. By selecting the appropriate native plants for yards and public landscapes, Florida can provide vital habitat for birds within its communities as they adapt to a changing climate. Audubon's Plants for Birds program provides tools to have a positive impact right where they live.

As development reduces natural nesting opportunities, such as cavities, trees, snags, and burrows, providing artificial alternatives become increasingly important. Nest boxes and bird houses, nesting platforms, and manufactured burrows can offset the nesting challenges birds face within urban and suburban communities.

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

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

Audubon Florida, along with partner organizations and Florida’s 44 Audubon chapters, is positioned and committed to conserving and creating bird habitat in urban spaces for the protection of resident and migratory birds, wildlife, and humans.

Therefore, be it resolved:

Audubon Florida, in alignment with the National Audubon Society’s Flight Plan – a strategic plan to protect birds and the places they need, today and tomorrow – will call on the volunteer leadership of Audubon chapters, members, and grassroots networks, and will work with conservation allies, business and community leaders, public officials, and agencies to:

Promote and Support the Plants for Birds Program

- Encourage Florida’s chapters to partner with like-minded organizations on plant sales, speakers, and projects that mobilize communities to promote the use of native plants in all landscapes.
- Promote the use of Audubon Florida/Florida Power & Light Company’s Plants for Birds grants and National Audubon Collaborative Grants to maximize the visibility and value of native Florida plants in the landscape.
- Promote the use of native plants to both public and private entities such as utilities, homeowners’ associations, and other large land users.
- Evaluate elements of solar sites (Solar Energy Centers) for inclusion in the Florida Power & Light Company Solar Stewardship program.

Minimize Building Strikes and Lighting Distractions (Bird Friendly Buildings)

- Share information on National Audubon Society’s “Lights Out Program” and other opportunities to reduce disorientation and building strikes, especially during migration.
- Promote National Audubon Society educational materials on and solutions to window strikes, a major cause of avian mortality.
- Promote peer-to-peer learning, connecting chapters as they implement new initiatives within their communities.

Provide Good Homes for Birds

- Coordinate with the EagleWatch program through Audubon's Center for Birds of Prey and other partners to replace Osprey platforms and track damage to eagle nests destroyed during weather events.
- Encourage grassroots-supported bluebird trails and the building of nest boxes, platforms, Burrowing Owl starter burrows, and arrays for Purple Martin colonies.
- Encourage installation and monitoring of Southeast American Kestrel nesting boxes.

Increase and Engage Audubon Membership through Outreach, Education, Conservation, and Advocacy

- Promote Audubon Adventures Plants for Birds edition (both English and Spanish) for use in the classroom and afterschool programs.
- Provide speakers and share presentations on relevant topics.
- Implement Bird Friendly Community projects that will engage new and diverse audiences while building chapter capacity for conservation.

STATE CONSERVATION PRIORITY: Climate 2025

Earth's climate is changing. Average temperatures are rising, rainfall patterns are shifting, and extreme climate events—such as more powerful hurricanes, heavy rainstorms, and record high temperatures—are already occurring. 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.

Solving human-induced climate change requires industrial and institutional changes. Heat-trapping gases already in the atmosphere will lead to a hotter future with even more climate-related impacts. The magnitude of climate change beyond the next few decades depends primarily on the amount of heat-trapping gases that human activities continue to emit globally, now and in the future.

A changing climate negatively affects ecosystems and the benefits they provide to society, overwhelming their capacity to adapt to and mitigate some of the impacts of extreme events such as fires, floods, and severe storms. Observed alterations in the timing of critical biological events, such as spring bud burst and substantial range shifts of many species, illustrate the already occurring impacts to biodiversity. Accelerated climate change creates an increased risk of species extinction. Events such as droughts, floods, wildfires, and pest outbreaks associated with and exacerbated by climate change are already disrupting and destroying ecosystems. These changes limit the capacity of ecosystems to continue to play critical roles in reducing the impacts of these extreme events on flora, fauna, 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 forty miles since 1966, with several species shifting by hundreds of miles.

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

Globally and within the state, climate change is already having a disproportionately larger effect on people of color, women, working families with low-wage jobs, the elderly, and other vulnerable populations. Studies have shown that these groups

overwhelmingly carry the brunt of environmental stressors such as increasing temperatures, climate-driven migration and decreasing water and food security. Building resilient societies, economies, and infrastructure with an increased focus on environmental justice is critical to ensuring a more equitable and livable future.

As a state, Florida has started to address issues of climate resiliency such as sea level rise, sunny day flooding, shoreline migration, and intrusion of saltwater on drinking water sources. While the State of Florida lags in developing and adopting mitigation actions to reduce emissions, local governments and investor-owned utilities and transportation agencies continue to lead the conversion to renewable energy generation, energy diversification and battery storage, fuel-efficient electric or hybrid vehicle fleets, improved public transportation, regional coordination, and other mitigation actions.

With the state so vulnerable to the effects of climate change, Florida could and should be a leader in policies and actions that reduce GHG emissions. Efforts to absorb carbon, mitigate and adapt to rising sea levels and increased storm activity, improve water supply security, and develop energy efficiency plans can limit the effects of climate change in Florida.

Therefore, be it resolved:

Audubon Florida, in alignment with the National Audubon Society's Flight Plan – a strategic plan to protect birds and the places they need, today and tomorrow – will call on the volunteer leadership of Audubon 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 Gas Emissions by Encouraging Local and State Governments to Target Actions That Will Significantly Reduce Carbon Dioxide Pollution

- Commit to GHG emission inventories of government operations and communities.
- Use these inventories to identify and adopt policies that would result in significant emission reductions.
- Advocate for corporate responsibility for emissions and sequestration of carbon.

Encourage Renewables

- Advocate for state policies that encourage, and do not discourage, electricity production from renewable sources.
- Oppose drilling for oil and gas off Florida's coast and on public lands.
- Oppose fracking and acid matrix stimulation for oil and gas extraction until rules

are adopted that avoid excessive use of water, prevent harm to water resources and air quality, and prevent methane emissions.

- Support responsible siting of solar energy facilities in partnership with local governments responsible for land use regulation.
- Encourage investments in solar energy generation, energy storage/battery technology, and improved energy efficiency.

Increase Energy Efficiency

- Advocate for national, state, and local government incentives and grants for investments and assistance to improve energy efficiency in low-income communities.
- Advocate for incentives that facilitate energy efficiency upgrades, like weatherization, for homes and workplaces.
- Encourage conservation of water and efficient water use, as water supply and treatment require large amounts of electric power.
- Support green building standards to reduce electric power demand, for example, by encouraging local governments to require green building certification such as LEED or Florida Green Building Coalition standards for all new construction.

Improve Transit

- Encourage municipalities to adopt policies that facilitate a transition to non or low GHG emitting vehicles for municipal fleets and for the public, such as “electric vehicle ready city” standards for new construction.
- Oppose transportation projects that increase dependence on single passenger vehicle use and support alternatives.

Promote Ecologically Sound Natural Infrastructure Projects

- Encourage/conduct research and monitoring to document and report on habitats, birds, and other wildlife to inform coastal and statewide resiliency programs.
- Advocate for increased collaboration of the Florida Resilient Coastlines program with state Water Management Districts and Regional Climate Compacts to implement projects focused on improving natural infrastructure as a vehicle to mitigate the effects of climate change.
- Educate the public and policymakers about the impacts of a changing climate on birds and other wildlife, habitats, and water resources.
- Encourage local governments to protect tree canopy and engage residents in tree-planting to address rising temperatures.

- Encourage the use of Adaptation Action Areas to promote the protection of coastal and other habitats of importance for birds and other wildlife.
- Prioritize the protection of shorelines using natural infrastructure and oppose ecologically harmful and expensive adaptation strategies, including beach armoring, seawalls, and other practices that marginalize or eliminate habitat.
- Support conservation land acquisition of corridors that allow for coastal habitats to migrate upslope ahead of sea level rise and land acquisition of habitat that mitigates flooding and stormwater issues.
- Support policies and programs that assist in development of carbon sequestration projects, such as blue carbon, forestry, and ranching.
- Support adaptation strategies such as Everglades restoration to make coastal and inland habitats more resilient.
- Support coastal retreat policies that help relocate residents and businesses away from dynamic coastal areas.
- Address saltwater intrusion threats to Florida’s aquifers through protective legislation, regulation, and funding.

Promote Statewide and Regional Collaboration

- Advocate for staffing and expansion of the scope of Florida’s Chief Resilience Officer to accomplish the goals of the office.
- Promote regional partnerships among governments, organizations, and businesses to analyze and mitigate climate change impacts.
- Facilitate regional collaboration on resiliency projects to optimize funding opportunities through the state’s Resilient Florida grant program.
- Support scientific decision-making when evaluating potential impacts to coastal areas by encouraging adoption of regional sea level rise projections.

Partner With Underserved Communities and Representative Organizations to Ensure Equitable Resilience Planning, Funding Distribution, Policies, and Outcomes

- Promote collaboration among the various local governments, regional planning councils and Water Management Districts, and the transportation agency led resiliency planning efforts.
- Advocate for state coordination on federal projects and feasibility studies underway, such as St. Augustine Back Bay, Central and Southern Florida System, Miami Back Bay, and Collier County Coastal Storm Risk Management.



STATE CONSERVATION PRIORITY: Community Building 2025

Creating lasting change requires broad public engagement and collective action. To safeguard birds and the natural world they depend on, we must expand our community of advocates, building a movement of people who care and act for birds, both on the ground and through leadership, to generate real conservation impact.

Florida's rich diversity in both wildlife and in our communities can make the state more resilient in the face of a changing climate, development pressures, and other challenges. Birds are central to Audubon's mission: their beauty, songs, and personalities captivate people around the world. Their heroic migrations forge tangible connections across distant habitats. By fostering a shared appreciation for birds, that collective first step toward inspiring action to protect them and the places they need is taken.

An active and engaged community of Floridians who care about birds will drive progress across a range of Flight Plan priorities and programs. From volunteering for Jay Watch and coastal steward programs to reporting bird bands, and more, bird enthusiasts help advance our community science efforts and provide critical data to inform sound policy and land management decisions. Through letters, calls, and public testimony, Audubon moves the needle on local, state, and federal priorities, ensuring that government agencies uphold their responsibilities to protect clean water and preserve habitats. With a commitment to safeguarding Florida's unique landscapes, Audubon can champion the use of native plants, support urban habitat creation, protect wetlands close to home, and much more.

Audubon is dedicated to providing quality, timely information about critical environmental and conservation issues. By keeping its members and supporters informed and engaged, they are empowered to take meaningful action when it matters most.

The birds that Audubon protects are wonderfully diverse—in color, size, behavior, geographical preference, and countless other ways. By honoring and celebrating the equally remarkable diversity of people as well, Audubon can bring new creativity, effectiveness, and leadership to its work throughout the hemisphere.

Conservation issues and climate challenges impact everyone and it will take everyone to build a world in which birds, natural places, and communities jointly thrive. To best achieve these goals, Audubon has made equity, diversity, and inclusion a strategic imperative. Protecting and conserving nature and the

environment transcends political, cultural, and social divides, and we believe that inclusive decision-making leads to strong, more lasting solutions.

Furthermore, Audubon recognizes that better and more durable decisions are made when all points of view are included. By joining together, across generations, regions, lifestyles, perspectives, and backgrounds, Audubon can protect quality of life for people and birds alike.

Therefore, be it resolved:

Audubon Florida, in alignment with the National Audubon Society's Flight Plan – a strategic plan to protect birds and the places they need, today and tomorrow – will call on the volunteer leadership of Audubon chapters, members, and grassroots networks, and will work with conservation allies, business and community leaders, public officials, and agencies to:

Inspire the Next Generation of Conservation Leaders, Audubon Members, and Staff

- Provide mentorship, experiential learning, and networking opportunities to Florida college students through Audubon Florida's Conservation Leadership Initiative.
- Support the creation and ongoing work of Audubon Campus Chapters in Florida.
- Provide in-depth learning and professional skill-building opportunities for college students through internships and volunteer opportunities through Audubon Florida Centers and other programs.

Leverage Audubon's Grassroots Network to Broaden Our Reach and Amplify Audubon Florida's Flight Plan Priorities

- Address region-wide conservation issues in collaboration with Audubon Community Chapters across Florida through the seven Regional Conservation Committees and their regional priorities.
- Support the growth and long-term sustainability of Florida's 44 Audubon chapters.
- Engage with volunteers through Audubon's community science programs, such as EagleWatch, Jay Watch, and shorebird stewarding, which expand Audubon's statewide impacts by engaging individuals directly in meaningful projects, while also cultivating advocates.

Inspire Engagement and Action at the Center for Birds of Prey and Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary

- Facilitate education programming tailored to K-12, college, and adult audiences, such as field trip programs, summer camps, and dialogs with Audubon staff.

- Host public programs to connect with guests on site and share the conservation stories and goals of Audubon on a site-specific, statewide, and national level.
- Participate in local community events, creating awareness of Audubon's work and opportunities to visit its Centers with a new, broader audience.
- Recruit and train volunteers to assist with Center operations and outreach activities, fostering a sense of community and collaboration, empowering them to become advocates who champion Audubon's mission.

Produce and Disseminate Engaging and Timely Conservation Communications through a Variety of Media and Accessible Options

- Be a source of dependable, science-based, practical information for a range of audiences through:
 - Develop materials readable by people with different sight and reading levels across reports, social media posts, web posts, etc.
 - Use a variety of media to convey content including text, infographics, photos, and video.
 - Include both in-print and digital content where appropriate.
 - Translate content, when possible, into multiple languages, sharing material with different audiences.
- Actively engage media partners to spread the Audubon mission and goals, including:
 - Interviews with traditional media outlets.
 - Engage with social media platforms/individuals/organizations.
 - Work with partner organizations to create and share content.

Welcome New Communities into the Audubon Florida Network through Intentionally Incorporating Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging Principles into Our Work

- Seek opportunities to partner with underrepresented communities and community-based organizations that represent impacted groups and frontline communities (e.g., those representing Indigenous, Black, People of Color, LGTBQAIA+, etc.).
- Improve accessibility options for Centers, field trips, events, and online programming. In addition, offer comprehensive information ahead of time, so individuals can prepare and make informed decisions.
- Design and publish multi-media communications material that is accessible to vision-impaired communities as well as translated materials for multiple languages.



REGIONAL CONSERVATION PRIORITY: SOUTHWEST FLORIDA 2025

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.

Among the climate impacts, increasing temperatures and poor water quality that feeds harmful algal blooms remain a major threat in this region. This climate issue also intersects regional wetland protection, habitat restoration, stormwater, and pollution prevention policies.

Coinciding with and quite related to climate impacts is the crisis of species declines and extinctions. Audubon organizations see these amongst avian species, but their food base of insects and plants are just as concerning. Birds are telling the story of not only needed preservation and restoration of wildlands, but there is a rising understanding that we all must learn to share our urban communities with wildlife. It seems individuals and our local communities are powerless to address these declines, but this is not so.

Regarding the vitally important issue of equity, diversity, inclusion and belonging, Audubon and its chapters recognize the underrepresentation of diverse communities in our leadership, membership, programs, and staff. This lack of diversity, including not only in race, but also age and socioeconomic status, is a challenge to be addressed for everyone's collective benefit. Our regional work could benefit immensely from collaboratively working with underrepresented neighborhoods and communities.

Therefore be it resolved:

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

Habitat: Lands

- Support the acquisition, protection, restoration, management, and compatible public access to vital habitats in the Southwest Florida region.

- Pursue all viable means to these ends, including especially [Conservation Charlotte](#), [Conservation Collier](#), [Lee Conservation 20/20](#), Florida Forever, federal Land and Water Conservation Fund, and other programs active in this region.
- Protection and recovery of Florida Scrub Jay populations through participation in Jay Watch with Audubon Florida, land acquisition support in strategic habitats, and permit monitoring and comments.
- Protection and recovery of Wood Storks primarily through shallow, seasonal wetland protection and restoration support, including land acquisition, permit engagement, and regulatory reforms to better achieve “no net loss” goal.

Habitat: Coastal and Marine Resilience

- Implementation of coastal bird stewardship programs, including nesting and non-nesting stewardship staffed by Audubon biologists and trained volunteers, in cooperation with Audubon Florida, FWC, Rookery Bay, DEP/State Parks, landowners, and local governments.

Habitat: Urban Conservation Initiative

- Work to reduce bird strike deaths targeting building glass and design and communication tower placement and design. Actions involve education of public and promotion of residential and commercial window mitigation, revision of building codes, and participation in permitting and planning meetings on towers.
- Protection and recovery of Florida’s Burrowing Owl populations through monitoring, research, public education, rodenticide elimination campaigns, and collaboration with FWC and local governments. This is complemented by land acquisition efforts.
- Cultivation of Urban Habitat for Birds through conversion of grass to native plants and other urban habitat sharing with wildlife. These efforts include Audubon Plants for Birds and Doug Tallamy’s Homegrown National Park movement.

Community Building

- Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging work will continue to be part of all bird conservation and habitat restoration and protection through targeted engagement of children, families, schools, groups and neighborhoods that suffer most from habitat loss, climate destabilization and declining biodiversity and are underrepresented in conservation efforts. This engagement will be pursued for all our regional conservation initiatives, as well as individual chapter work.

REGIONAL CONSERVATION PRIORITY: EVERGLADES 2025

The lower southeastern coast of Florida, known for its beautiful beaches, productive estuaries, unique wildlife, and proximity to the Greater Everglades (a UNESCO World Heritage and designated RAMSAR Wetlands Site), is also one of the nation's densest and fastest growing urban areas. This combination creates a distinct set of conservation challenges when trying to accommodate human needs while protecting and restoring a uniquely tropical biodiversity hotspot within North America. This includes, but is not limited to, the Greater Everglades, coastal ecosystems such as Lake Worth Lagoon, Biscayne Bay, Florida Bay, the coral reef system, and other wildlife habitat in Southeast Florida.

Restoring the Greater Everglades ecosystem, other freshwater and marine habitats, and terrestrial landscapes in the region provides critical life support and services for people and wildlife, such as recharging and conserving water supplies to provide drinking water for millions of residents and visitors, absorbing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, mitigating the impacts of sea level rise and extreme weather events, providing world-class tourism and recreational opportunities crucial to the South Florida economy, and preserving areas of wilderness for current and future generations to enjoy.

The lower southeastern coast of Florida and the Greater Everglades is home to more than 350 species of birds including the iconic Roseate Spoonbill, the endangered Wood Stork, Snail Kite, and Cape Cable Seaside Sparrow within our wetlands, and the Mangrove Cuckoo, a Florida specialty bird, in our coastal habitats. As a result of the draining of wetlands for flood control, agriculture, and residential development, in addition to the misuse and pollution of both fresh and marine water resources, many species are now jeopardized. Preserving current populations and ensuring the continuing return of wading bird supercolonies and the indicator species that once symbolized the Greater 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, using information derived from sound science, and motivated by community compassion, will mobilize volunteer leadership, members, conservation allies, community leaders, public officials, and governmental agencies to:

Habitat: Water for Birds and People

- Highlight Everglades restoration in our education/outreach programs, campaigns, and tours to educate the public, private sector, and government entities on the benefits of Everglades restoration, particularly in relation to conservation and water quality, to expedite and improve implementation throughout the entire Greater Everglades Ecosystem.
- Participate in the Everglades Coalition (EVCO) to support advocacy efforts to fund, restore, and protect the Greater Everglades Ecosystem.
- Monitor projects at the county and municipal level to ensure that Everglades restoration goals are being met, support projects that meet our objectives, oppose those that may impede restoration progress, and advocate for smart growth practices.

Habitat: Urban Conservation Initiative

- Facilitate and encourage involvement in bird monitoring programs, including shorebirds, hawk watches, Christmas Bird Counts, bird banding, and community science such as through eBird and Merlin, as well as supporting formal research to enhance the understanding of birds in Southeast Florida ecosystems and to support implementation of regional conservation projects.
- Protect critical remaining natural habitat and buffers by advocating against detrimental effects of development through education, civic engagement, and political campaigns.
- Restore and create wildlife habitat within Southeast Florida's dense urban corridor by promoting the Plants for Birds and Living Shoreline programs, eradicating nonnative invasive species, supporting the creation and maintenance of natural habitats, and educating the public about the importance of such habitats and their pollinators.
- Advocate for the protection of target species and their habitats when threatened by development, pollution (e.g., air, water, light), feral and domestic cat predation, window strikes, and other risks through efforts like Project Perch, the Purple Martin Landlord Program, the Lights Out Program, and other specific campaigns as needed.

Climate: Clean Energy and Natural Climate Solutions

- Educate chapter members, community members, and decision-makers on current and future impacts of climate change on built and natural environments, such as freshwater supplies, sea level rise, storm frequency and intensity,

habitat degradation, and shifts in bird and other wildlife behavioral and distributional patterns. Incorporate climate change initiatives in current and future programs.

- Advocate for mitigation and adaptation policies that promote regional resiliency to climate change particularly in adopting new technologies and methodologies such as renewable energy sources, energy efficiency measures, and the use of nature-based solutions.

Community Building

- Continue and enhance opportunities for diverse audiences to engage with chapters by connecting and partnering with all communities, particularly the underserved, through existing frameworks, utilizing inclusive language in outreach and promotional materials, and offering programs accessible to people with potential barriers to participation (e.g., language, mobility, financial, cultural, gender, etc.). Expand ongoing efforts to offer bilingual and translated programming and mobility-accessible field trips.

REGIONAL CONSERVATION PRIORITY: INDIAN RIVER LAGOON 2025

The Indian River Lagoon (IRL) is a singular treasure. Its health begins in the lands surrounding it. Over-drainage and nutrient pollution start in our watersheds, end up in our waters, and harm biodiversity and our quality of life. Recent widespread loss of sea grasses, algal blooms, and starving manatees are not acceptable.

With increasing urbanization, there is an opportunity to create beneficial habitat within these urban areas. Native plants thrive with natural water and soil conditions resulting in water conservation, reduced need for polluting chemicals to sustain them, and increased climate resilience through that adaptability. Landscaping with native plants creates better habitat for wildlife, including resident and migrating birds and pollinators.

Audubon and our nation have a reinvigorated focus on historical and ongoing discrimination and inequity based on race, gender identity, religion, and other group identifications. Passive acceptance has not created enough interaction with diverse communities. Intentional action is needed to welcome new communities into Audubon and increase awareness of how everyone can and should contribute to protecting our environment for birds, wildlife, and people alike.

The Indian River Lagoon Regional Conservation Committee's 2025 conservation priorities continue efforts from prior years: increase funding for conservation initiatives throughout the region, seek long-term solutions for protecting water quality, continue public education on the values of native landscaping, and increase equity and inclusion of all people with Audubon.

Clean water is a unifying thread through all our priorities. The priorities also improve resilience toward an issue of unique importance to the region—sea level rise due to climate change.

Chapters will advocate, educate, and perform outreach among all sectors of our community, from our neighbors, the public-at large, agency staff, and elected officials, through personal meetings, by attending public meetings, sharing information through individual and form letters, social media, and the press, making presentations, and by any other means to effectively convey our messages.

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, and motivated by community compassion, will mobilize volunteer leadership, members, conservation allies, community leaders, public officials, and governmental agencies to:

Habitat: Wings Over Working Lands

- Support local, regional, and state initiatives to increase funding for land conservation initiatives by working with:
 - Local governments to explore local bond initiatives for land acquisition and conservation. Developing local funding stimulates cost share on projects, multiplying overall funding concomitantly.
 - Regional state legislators to restore and sustain funding for Florida Forever and associated programs at the \$300 million per-year level.
 - Water Management Districts to sustain millage rates and direct funding toward land and water conservation projects on public and private lands.

Habitat: Water for Birds and People

- Advocate for the state and/or local governments to:
 - Phase out land application of all biosolids, diverting them toward energy and other useful purposes.
 - Strengthen and enforce fertilizer ordinances, requiring summer bans on fertilizing and increased enforcement.
 - Improve urban and agricultural Best Management Practices, including riparian buffers, littoral zones and living shorelines.
 - Support septic-to-sewer conversions throughout the region and require regular inspections.
 - Support LOSOM goal of greatly reducing Lake Okeechobee discharges to the St. Lucie River.

Habitat: Urban Conservation Initiative

- Work with local governments to develop ordinances:
 - To stop the sale of all invasive plants and wildlife on the CISMA list.
 - To reduce turfgrass limits to 20% in new developments and redevelopments, with an emphasis on encouraging native plant use.
 - For improved and unimproved properties toward developing a model ordinance (FNPS ordinance; tree protection; reduce exotic palms).
- Educate decision makers, homeowner's associations, garden clubs, and other groups of citizens on the benefits of native landscaping and how to implement best management practices.
- Encourage community members to plant natives by providing resources, such as including links for native plant benefits on their websites and social media, as

well as distributing native plants and seeds to the public.

- Support local native plant nurseries and encourage more nurseries to carry and promote the use of native plants.

Habitat: Coastal Protection and Resilience

- Work with state agencies such as FDEP and Florida Fish and Wildlife to advocate for the protection of important seabird and shorebird nesting and wintering habitat through spoil island protection and enhancement, such as adding more spoil, maintenance of suitable nesting habitat, and removal of vegetation as needed.

Community Building

- Actively solicit involvement from underrepresented communities in programs, field trips, and other activities. It is important to emphasize that we cannot merely invite diverse groups to join us, but that we also must join them in their community activities, on a two-way street of fostering closer relationships.
 - Use Audubon centers, public outdoor spaces, and field trips as avenues to welcome new people into our Audubon community.
 - Provide educational opportunities to low-income and Title 1 students.
- Use education and outreach to resolve the disconnect between human life and nature in community members to foster a sense of environmental responsibility, most notably in high school and college aged students and migrants to Florida who are unfamiliar with Florida ecosystems and the importance of their health for human health and prosperity.



REGIONAL CONSERVATION PRIORITY: CENTRAL FLORIDA 2025

The Central Florida Regional Conservation Committee includes much of the remaining conservation corridor through the central peninsula. While continuing our regional priorities of partnering with landowners and property managers, and protecting water quality and water resources, the following goals reflect our shared focus in 2025.

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, and motivated by community compassion, will mobilize volunteer leadership, members, conservation allies, community leaders, public officials, and governmental agencies to:

Habitat: Wings Over Working Lands / Water for Birds and People

- Advocate for full funding for Florida Forever and the Rural and Family Lands Protection Program to secure money to preserve through purchase or conservation easements identified conservation property (such as those listed below).
- Meet with legislators and other decision-makers to build support for specific properties rather than lobbying solely for the umbrella programs.
- Land use plans must ensure the integrity of both the Floridan Aquifer and the Florida Wildlife Corridor.
 - Lenholt Farm: A vital property which links Ocala National Forest and the extensive state holdings along the Wekiva River
 - Conlin Lake X/Kirchman Tract: An 11,000-acre, pristine property at the headwaters of the Econlockhatchee and Kissimmee Rivers watershed
 - Conservation easements on Kissimmee Valley ranchlands where owners are interested and willing to participate
 - Green Swamp: Considered Florida's hydrologic heart with its related uplands a critical part of the central portion of Florida's Wildlife Corridor running through Polk, Lake, Sumter, Hernando, and Pasco counties

Climate: Clean Energy and Natural Climate Solutions

- Work to educate local municipalities, zoning boards, city/county governments with accurate, science-based data when permits to site solar farms are being planned and/or when they come on the agenda.
- Advocate for placement of solar facilities in the proper location and explain to community groups and residents why/how solar farms are good neighbors.

Community Building

- Continue to look for opportunities to build community relationships in underserved communities which are often adversely affected by land management decisions, with the goal of asking how Audubon may be of assistance to their cause.

REGIONAL CONSERVATION PRIORITY: FLORIDA GULF COAST 2025

Audubon Florida's Gulf Coast region stretches from northern Charlotte County to Citrus County, including 11 Audubon Chapters: Venice Area, Sarasota, Manatee, Eagle, St. Petersburg, Clearwater, Tampa, Pasco, Hernando, Citrus County, and Cedar Key. 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. Rural landscapes are experiencing increased urbanization due to burgeoning human population. Urban/suburban development results in habitats suffering from uninformed landscaping practices and poor implementation scheduling.

The effects of climate change, sea level rise, harmful algal blooms, and fluctuating precipitation patterns threaten offshore, coastal and inland ecosystems and the birds that depend upon them throughout the region. Populations of many species of colonial waterbirds, beach-nesting birds, migratory shorebirds, songbirds including the Florida Scrub-Jay, and even Burrowing Owls have declined in their historic ranges. These and others now require significant intervention and management efforts to prevent further population declines and local extirpation.

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 shorebird 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.

Chapters take active roles in local and regional habitat protection, to improve functionality of natural systems, and to continue to raise the Audubon profile as a stakeholder. This is done by working collaboratively with other conservation and wildlife organizations across the state by using chapter field trips, Christmas Bird Counts, Great Backyard Bird Counts, and Hooked Bird campaigns. These are complemented by Shorebird Stewardship, bird population surveys, and community science programs to recruit volunteers and build datasets using programs such as eBird for relationship-building tools and the foundation for advocacy, conservation, and education.

Therefore, be it resolved:

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

Habitat: Water for Birds and People

- Underscore the benefits of natural areas, wetlands, living shorelines and native plant landscaping as natural and nature-based climate and water solutions, working with various local and state agencies, and educating the public on maintaining private and conservation lands property and advocating for habitat conservation, preservation, and restoration.
- Continue to address local water quality issues by building on current and previous funding opportunities for improvement of water quality impact on local wetland and riverine habitats.

Habitat: Coastal and Marine Resilience

- Identifying and supporting advocates to speak at local and regional public meetings regarding issues facing coastal and other environmentally sensitive areas, seeking opportunities to serve on advisory boards, participate in land management reviews, and build relationships with local and state agency staff. Examples include the Hooked Bird campaigns and colonial waterbird nesting areas protection and monitoring.
- Support developing climate resilient solutions, such as restoring natural coastlines to respond to the effects of sea level rise and changing climate patterns such as droughts and floods, as well as educating the public on the benefits of natural areas, wetlands, living shorelines and native plant landscaping as nature-based climate solutions.

Habitat: Urban Conservation Initiative

- Promoting Bird Friendly programs such as “Plants for Birds,” “Lights Out,” “Green Building,” and other best practices.
- Monitoring and protecting urban areas for migrating birds and advocating against development encroachment on important bird and wildlife habitats.
- Educating homeowners and landscaping companies about the impact of cutting trees down during nesting season, timely use of fertilizers, safe choices of pesticides, and use of native plants in landscapes.

Community Building

- Recruiting mentors to participate in the Audubon Florida Conservation Leadership Initiative, supporting the Young Birders’ Clubs and other school age

environmental groups and activities in our counties.

- Developing ways to use local connections to reach as wide a range of members of our community as possible, including all ages, abilities, and socioeconomic status, and involving them in conservation issues and initiatives.

REGIONAL CONSERVATION PRIORITY: NORTHWEST FLORIDA 2025

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 also hosts several important military bases, which are not only important economically, but also harbor thousands of acres of wildlife and forests. Several 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 habitats 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.

History tells us that the Panhandle is vulnerable to catastrophic damage from hurricanes, as demonstrated by the ongoing devastation of Hurricane Michael in 2018. It is likely that future storms impacting the Panhandle will be more intense and frequent due to climate change.

Development in the Panhandle is accelerating and posing many challenges such as loss of green space, poorly planned control of stormwater runoff, and climate-related pressures that threaten disruption of remaining wildlife habitats, and corridors.

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, and motivated by community compassion, will mobilize volunteer leadership, members, conservation allies, community leaders, public officials, and governmental agencies to:

Habitat: Urban Conservation Initiative

- Create Bird Friendly Communities by advocating for native pollinator gardens and Plants for Birds.
- Protect birds from collisions with buildings by participating in the Lights Out program and window-strike prevention.
- Provide artificial nests for birds, such as Eastern Bluebirds and Purple Martins, etc. and encourage the public to participate.

Habitat: Wings Over Working Lands

- Protect and sustain the region's biodiversity by supporting the Department of Defense sponsored Northwest Florida Sentinel Lands program, creating a wildlife corridor across the Panhandle.
- Continue to support the acquisition and management of critical conservation lands with particular emphasis on Florida Forever projects.

Habitat: Coastal and Marine Resilience

- Partner with established and evolving Panhandle Estuary programs and supporting other programs of interest to the Audubon Florida conservation mission.

Community Building

- Build the case for strategic land conservation and sustainability in the Panhandle, leveraging community advocacy with tools such as written and public comments, eBird, field trips, programs, etc.
- Mutually support chapters across the Panhandle on conservation activities and projects that engage the collective power of an inclusive community invested in environmental equity and justice.

- Initiate integrated planning to develop viable support plans for maintenance of chapter conservation activities, such as protecting important historical documents in the wake of natural disasters such as hurricanes.

REGIONAL CONSERVATION PRIORITY: NORTHEAST FLORIDA 2025

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

Habitat Conservation

- Create native, bird-friendly communities through the development of chapter-sponsored native plant gardens, educational seminars and other events, and the distribution of native plants to local communities.
- Continue participation and capacity building in: EagleWatch, Jay Watch, kestrel box monitoring, Lights Out Northeast Florida, Prairie Creek Preserve Bird Banding Lab, local shorebird partnerships, environmentally beneficial wastewater wetland treatment facilities, Ocklawaha River restoration, climate change resiliency, and solar production.

Community Building

- Continue to develop partnerships with local, state, and federal agencies, decision-makers, non-profit entities and for-profit companies, homeowner associations, and water management districts to promote birds and bird habitat.
- Continue to work with educational institutions, homeschool groups, public libraries, and underserved communities to spread conservation messages and foster an appreciation for the natural world.