

FLORIDA NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY



2019
POLICY
ADVOCACY
HANDBOOK

Legislators, County Commissioners, and other elected officials need to hear from their constituents because they are elected to represent your views. This handbook was produced to help FNPS members lobby their elected officials **effectively and help advance the Florida Native Plant Society's mission to protect, conserve, and restore the native plants and native plant communities of Florida.**

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INTRODUCTION

During the past year, the Palm Beach County Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society expanded its conservation advocacy program into a regional initiative called the Southeast Chapter Initiative for Community and Policy Advocacy. The goal was to encourage an advocacy group comprised of FNPS members from neighboring chapters (Miami-Dade, Palm Beach, Martin, Broward and Monroe counties) to actively reach out to the state legislators who represent them in Tallahassee.

They accomplished this by recruiting and training volunteers who were willing to develop relationships with their state representatives and senators. The focus was to provide solid science-driven conservation information coupled with a call to lead on our conservation priorities—specifically to support funding for the Florida Forever state land-buying program—to our elected officials. The methods and strategies used for effective outreach to state legislators can be adapted to other elected officials, from your local County Commission or City Council, to the Governor and your US Representative or Senators.

Volunteers were taught how to familiarize themselves with their local legislators through online research, attending legislative delegation meetings, legislative office visits, and follow-up calls. Field trips to local natural areas, which are at the core of the FNPS tradition, were organized expressly to entice legislators and their staff to attend. The effort was entitled “*Take your Legislator into the Field.*”

In addition, FNPS has a standing Policy and Legislation Committee that actively identifies and advocates for strong native plant and land conservation policies in the State Legislature, local and regional governments and Congress. Members of the chapters comprising the Southeast Chapter Initiative had a presence on this Policy Committee and were able to provide some insight to the workings of legislators and the advocacy process. See <https://www.fnps.org/what-we-do/policy> to learn more about our advocacy work.

These efforts laid the groundwork for development of this handbook so the lessons learned can be shared across all FNPS chapters. It is designed to help FNPS chapters conduct their own advocacy, and champion our mission to preserve, conserve and restore the native plants and native plant communities of Florida.



It is time to create a catalyst for MORE action.

We must build on the positive reputation and rapport we have established with legislators and staff who recognize FNPS as a credible source of information and guidance on a wide range of conservation issues.

Land conservation through the *Florida Forever* program is the single most effective tool for advancing our mission to preserve the **state's** plant biodiversity. It also supports efforts to conserve water, restore water quality, protect floodplains, sustain our native wildlife, and impart greater environmental resilience.

In order to advocate effectively for land conservation policy, it is imperative that we learn how to lobby legislators as effectively as possible.

Two pressing issues make *Florida Forever* more important than ever:

- (1) Next year the *Florida Forever* bonding capacity expires, which means our ability to restore historic levels of \$300 million annually could disappear.
- (2) Three major toll roads that could negatively impact land already conserved through public ownership, or compromise lands identified as priority areas for conservation, have been approved by the Legislature. The proposed roads would promote development across wide swaths of rural Florida.

Take action NOW.

This handbook is designed to serve as a road map for chapters to replicate all or portions of the Regional Initiative conducted in southeast Florida.

YOU can make a difference.

Step 1: Know your legislator

Your chapter will want to identify and reach out to your local lawmakers to express your personal views as well as FNPS's view on our top priority policies. You can find tips for talking to your legislators in this manual.

To identify and find contact information for your legislators and their staff, visit these websites and note where their local and Tallahassee offices are located: www.flsenate.gov and www.myfloridahouse.gov



Get to know more about your legislators and their staff. Learn their committee assignments and positions on various conservation issues.

Introduce yourself as a constituent, and if you are going to invite the lawmaker and staff to join an event, introduce your chapter and the Florida Native Plant Society as a local resource.

Attend upcoming community events or town hall meetings to keep in touch with your legislator and support any commitment to conservation.

Step 2: Contact your legislators: Email, calls, and regular mail

When contacting your legislators or other elected officials, remember to always be courteous and clear during communications. Start your conversation by stating your name and address so they know you are a local constituent; i.e., one of their voters!

Give a short sentence or two about why you support or oppose a certain proposal or position, like the restoration of funding to Florida Forever or opposition to funding unnecessary toll roads **through Florida's remaining natural areas**. The next few pages will provide you with tools, resources, ideas and message points on exactly how to reach out to your legislators, but first, some helpful tips to keep in mind:



Timing is very important

If your issue is going to be voted on soon during an occurring Legislative Session, contacting your legislator quickly by phone or e-mail is most effective. However, if time allows, take advantage of other ways to reach out to your legislator, like writing a personal letter or meeting with them and/or their staff in the local district office.

The Florida Legislative Session officially runs for 60 days of each year. In even years, Session runs the second week of January through the first week of March. In odd years, Session runs from the first week of March through the second week of May. The 2020 Session begins January 14 and runs through March 13. There will be six weeks of preparatory committee hearings before Session begins.



Forge relationships with staff

Legislative staff are extremely important because they often convey your message of support or opposition to a bill and share any personal take on the issue to your lawmaker. You should strive to develop a working relationship with staff so they know you are a credible resource on issues related with natural Florida, and that you or other FNPS members will be happy to provide them with sound, science-based information. Staff work long hours and appreciate when a friendly “local” is willing to help.



Voice your position

Legislators act on behalf of their constituency. Even if your legislator doesn't currently support your position, voicing your views and concerns is a good way to put your issue on their radar screen and remind them that folks back home are paying attention to how those concerns are being addressed by their elected official.



Know the issue

Legislators must deal with a wide range of issues and rarely have sufficient time to devote to any specific problem. They depend largely on their staff, and on input from you—their constituents—to be fully informed about an issue. Be sure to provide clear and concise information in support of your position or concern. Summarize the FNPS position, which is often shared via emails, action alerts, or on the FNPS web page at <https://www.fnps.org/what-we-do/policy>.

Explain your own reason(s) for taking that position. Your personal, local story can make clear why your state representative or senator should support it too. When you speak to a staff person, ask questions about the legislator's position on the issue, and be ready to briefly discuss your/FNPS position.

Legislative Tracking systems provided by the Florida House and Senate allow the public to identify and track specific bills and committee actions throughout the legislative process. When you create a Legislative Tracking account, you can personally select and follow the issues you care about and receive automatic updates when the status of those items change. Find them online at

<https://www.flsenate.gov/Login?referrer=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.flsenate.gov%2FTracker> and
<https://www.myfloridahouse.gov/Sections/MyHouse/login.aspx>

Calling your Legislators

If the time is short before a matter will be decided by a vote of the full legislature or by a legislative committee, then it's important to take immediate action by calling your lawmaker's office directly. Your phone call could be "the" call that helps push forward your position on Florida Forever funding or another critical conservation issue. Remember, you can visit www.flsenate.gov or www.myfloridahouse.gov to find out how to contact your legislators, or other legislators in leadership positions who will play an important role on your issue.

Key things to remember when you call

- Be professional. Establish credibility by communicating your position in a courteous and factual way. Review your talking points in advance and have them in front of you when you speak with the legislator or their staff person. You may not have much time to state your case. Often during Session, an intern will answer the phone, so if you ask for the Legislative Aide, you'll know your message will get through.
- Provide your information. Legislators and their staff want to know how their constituents feel about certain issues, so first identify yourself as a constituent: **"this is _____ and I live in Senator ____'s /Representative ____'s district", or give your street address, which** often strikes a chord of familiarity and endears you to staff.
- Knowledge is power. Legislators keep track of multiple issues. A concise call saves time and is easily absorbed and remembered by legislators and their staff. Stay on message to make the best argument for your position on an issue. Always refer to a specific bill number or budget item and state your support or opposition to it.
- Thank staff for their time and consideration. Legislative staff appreciate being thanked for listening to you and making sure that your comments are given to your legislator. Always say thank you.



Step 3: Relationship building

If your elected representatives know you as a voter, constituent, friend or supporter, they are likely to be more responsive to you than if you only contact them when you are in need. The best time to get to know your legislators is in their district, when they are less distracted by the pressures of Session. Visit your Senator or Representative's **offices** to get to know them better and educate them about native species, conservation and protection of native habitat. Connecting with your **legislators is important even if you didn't vote for them or if you disagree with them on some policy issues.**

If legislators don't seem to care about environmental policy, it doesn't mean you should ignore them. Rather, you need to try to educate and influence them about the importance of our issues. You obviously **don't need to have a friendship or strong relationship with all your legislators.** In fact, it may be more beneficial to focus much of your attention on one legislator in your delegation who is in leadership or is most interested in your issue, or conservation issues generally.

Six Ways to Build Relationships

1. Plan a Field Trip

Invite legislators, their families and staff, on a field trip with your local chapter. This allows them to get a first-hand understanding of the reasons the Society strives to protect native plants and native plant communities. Refer to section Step 4 *In the District* below for tips on site visits and planning Field Trips

2. Attend Meetings

Attend in-district events such as town hall meetings. These are a great way to bring your issues to their attention and speak with them personally. Don't be afraid to speak or introduce yourself. THEY WORK FOR YOU!

3. Provide Expert Assistance

Establish yourself as an informed local expert they can call on when they have questions about an environmental issue. Provide useful, balanced information that informs and establishes you as a person they can turn to when they need to know more or understand an issue better.

4. Engage with Social Media

Sign up for your legislator's email list on their website; follow them on social media. Share their decisions and actions that are consistent with FNPS's policy statements.



5. Go to Events

Participate in constituent and election events like fundraisers, meet-and-greets, debates, forums, and campaign walks.

6. Thank your legislators

Say "thank-you" to them and their staff in at least an email. Write a letter-to-the-editor to your local newspaper when your legislator vocally supports an issue FNPS has a policy statement on.

STEP 4: In the District

From Field Trips to Delegation Meetings

The weeks when the Florida Legislature is not in Session are an opportune time to build relationships. Generally, legislators are at home in their district from May to December. This is an excellent time to call their district office and set up a brief meeting with them and their staff.



Organize a Field Trip

Invite your Senators and Representatives to accompany you and other members of your chapter on a field trip to a unique or favorite native plant habitat. Invite their staff and their family out for a relaxing day out.

Suggestions for Field Trips:

- Invite your legislator personally, by telephone or email either directly or through staff, depending on how well you know the legislator and their availability.
- Check out the [Email Invite Template](#) in the Appendix.
- Follow-up with a thank-you letter to your legislator after the visit. Stay in touch... send photos of the outing and keep the legislator and staff informed about issues important to FNPS.



Attend a Town Hall

Town hall meetings are often held at a local gathering place such as a county auditorium. Attending one will give you the opportunity to ask questions of your elected officials and voice your opinions on issues. You can find out about meetings by checking the legislator's website or by following them on social media.



Additional Suggestions

When you invite your elected representative to speak to your chapter or go on a field trip, let them know who will be in attendance. Brief attendees about the legislator ahead of time and stay on schedule. Prepare a one-page handout about your local chapter, FNPS issues, and the native plants and conservation land in your policymaker's district.

Delegation Meetings

Every county has a Legislative Delegation comprised of the state Representatives and Senators whose districts are located, in whole or in part, within that county. Many legislators are members of more than one delegation because district boundaries often cross county lines.

Each Legislative Delegation hosts at least one public meeting per year. These meetings are typically scheduled for the months prior to the beginning of the annual Legislative Session. The meetings may be announced in the newspaper, on-line, and/or in FNPS Action Alerts. Typically, you are able to speak for only 3 minutes, on either formal **agenda items** or during “**public comment**” at the end of the meeting.

Document!
Document!
Document!

If an FNPS member advocates in a vacuum and no one is around to take a photo or video, did it really happen?

This is important work for your chapter. Your members and the public should know how well **you’re doing it.**

Here are some tips on timing:

Introduce yourself and your interest in native plant issues in less than 30 seconds

Make your supporting points quickly—aim for 90 seconds.

Ask for specific actions or next steps in the last 30-60 seconds



Other Ways to Take Action

Use whichever medium is most comfortable and convenient for you. Whether you visit in- person, call or write, be sure to always give your legislator your name, address and telephone number, so they know you are one of their constituents (it makes a huge difference). Be brief in telling them about an **issue you'd like** them to support or oppose.

Share information!

Share information. It is very important to relay any information you receive from your legislator to your local chapter so you know what work remains to be done. Also share on social media or in letters-to-the-editor the great things your legislator has done for native plant conservation at the Capitol.



Keep in Mind (legal caveats)

We believe the knowledge and passion of FNPS members, and the economic, recreational and ecological values of natural areas can be conveyed most effectively by taking your legislator on a guided field trip through a local conservation area like a nearby State Park, Forest, or similar preserved area, but there are some legal implications you must know in advance of planning your field trips:

As a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, FNPS and its Chapters are prohibited from **“electioneering”**, meaning we cannot support or oppose candidates running for elected office or contribute to political campaigns. However, we can advocate for public policy, like *Florida Forever*, when it advances the mission of our organization. As an individual, you *can* support or oppose any candidate you choose and donate to their campaign.

The Legislature must comply with open meeting requirements that prohibit them from conducting official meetings in private. A fieldtrip will not trigger an open meeting requirement if it does not include scheduled speakers or organized discussions of public business, even if attended by more than one sitting legislator. So, compliance is easy – just keep your field trip informal and feel free to invite more than one legislator. The most populous counties encompass **multiple legislative districts and we’d like our message of support for Florida Forever to reach as many legislators as possible.**

The law limits the ability of legislators to accept gifts (e.g., all-expense paid vacations, meals, FNPS memberships). By all means, provide your legislator(s) with a membership application and let them know you would welcome them as members, but limit gift memberships to your friends, the local library, etc. If you plan a long field trip that will include a lunch break, think about collecting \$5/person to cover the cost of a communal lunch and avoid the complications that may arise from gift-giving to an elected official.

If you invite an elected official to speak at a Chapter meeting or other event, be conscious of the rules governing non-profits like FNPS. While it is perfectly acceptable for them to discuss policies, legislation, ordinances, or any other issues of interest to your chapter, IRS rules that govern 501(c)3 nonprofits like FNPS and our chapters prohibit us from supporting – or opposing – candidates for office. So we cannot allow active campaigning at official FNPS events unless any opposing candidate is afforded the same opportunity. During election season, it is better to simply inform any elected official appearing at your events to refrain from actively campaigning. If you inform them **of the prohibition and they still try to “jockey” for votes, you** will have protected yourselves and will know better than to provide them similar opportunities to address your members in the future!

Appendices: Tools & Resources

Creating your Message

When you know that you will be talking with an elected official or their staff, writing a set of bullet points is a means of thinking through the issue at hand. These talking points are a set of clear, easy-to-remember phrases that outline a proposal or idea. They can make a conversation with an elected official or staff member run smoothly **and help ensure you don't forget an important point**. Remember to leave behind a copy of your talking points to help them remember and allow follow-up.

Use 'BEST PRACTICES'

- Keep it short and simple. Talking points should be short and contain only the most relevant information. We suggest using “bullet” points to help condense and organize information. Remember, bullet points do not have to be complete sentences. Speak in plain language, not science or conservation jargon.
- Capture the main point or points. **People won't remember every word in a presentation**, so make sure that you clearly articulate and emphasize your main points. **End your communication with an “ask”, i.e., “Will you please support full funding for the Florida Forever land conservation program?”**.
- Think about your audience. Who is the audience? How much do they know about the subject matter? How much background should you give? How do they feel about the view or argument that you are expressing?
- Consider what may be the worst-case scenario. What is the best argument you can think of against your position? Prepare for how you would defend your position against that argument.
- **Remember the “Rule of Three”**. Don't bog down your audience with too much information. **Don't** try to put too much information in a single bullet point. **Don't** allow your main point to be hidden or clouded behind secondary concerns.



FNPS TALKING POINTS

Effective messaging supports effective advocacy



Florida Conservation Lands

Florida's conservation lands offer critical services to its citizens, including flood control, recharge of our drinking water, clean air and water and plentiful open space for humans and nature.

These services will only become more valuable as our freshwater resources come under greater pressure from increased population, and threats posed by climate change.

Conservation lands are key to our economic and environmental resiliency, preserving water for people and nature, protection from flooding, and preserving our biodiversity in the face of development and other threats.



There are few things more enduring than the **widespread commitment of Florida's voters** to the public acquisition and preservation of environmental lands. Since 1963, Floridians have consistently voted at both the state and local levels to increase public funding for the acquisition and management of conservation land, even when it increased taxes.

Our citizens understand that the preservation of these precious spaces is critical to the maintenance of our **state's** character, its natural resources, its most vital industries, and its economic future.

Connecting Policy Issues to Conservation Land

Depending on your local community, different issues might resonate more with your legislator. Whether it be public health, economic development, recreational opportunities or community cohesion, there is almost always a way to link it back to the importance of conserving land and protecting our environment.

Here are some useful talking points to help you connect different issues to conservation lands. You can also find more Florida Native Plant Society Conservation talking points at https://fnps.org/assets/pdf/pubs/cpr_policy_final_10_27_2014.pdf.

Health

Conserving land is the natural way to protect our communities from pollution and associated risks. If we fail to conserve critical land and water areas, we risk increasing pollution of our land, air and water and leaving Floridians without open space for recreation. Pollution increases respiratory illnesses and degrades our water, and the loss of open space can lead to such health issues such as obesity, depression and heart disease.

Economic Development

Florida's ecotourism-based economy depends on the wellbeing of our pristine unique ecosystems like the Everglades, the Florida Keys and the world's largest Springs. The billions of dollars in tourism generated by beach-going, nature viewing, hunting, boating and fishing sustain Florida's economy. By investing in land conservation, we are investing in the long-term economic stability of our state.

Community

Florida's communities rally around their local state parks, community gardens, beaches and other environmental treasures. By conserving land and protecting our existing parks and preserves, we help build stronger bonds within the community through shared environmental and recreational treasures.

Requesting a meeting - Template

Good Afternoon/Morning [INSERT REP'S NAME HERE]:

My name is _____, and I live at (Address) in (City).

I would like to request a time to meet with you or a member of your staff to discuss [insert specific issue or policy concern] and how this affects our local community.

I'm very interested in and knowledgeable about how preserving our native plants through state land conservation and other programs helps our economy and environment. I look forward to the opportunity to meet with you in person to share information about the importance of [insert specific issue or policy concern].

I know you have many demands on your time and I am able to be flexible with both the time and place of the meeting, based on your schedule. I would be happy to have a meeting in your district office. I hope your scheduler will follow up with me to arrange a meeting.

Please contact me at your convenience at [Your phone number & email address].

Sincerely, [Name]



BEFORE THE MEETING: ROLE PLAYING

- 1** Build Confidence. Role playing allows you to explore different scenarios. It provides a safe environment to work through these scenarios, which builds confidence.
- 2** Develop Listening Skills. Good role playing requires good listening skills. Not only should you be actively listening to what the other person is saying, but you should also pay attention to body language. Try to develop these skills, or at least be conscious of them, before meeting with a legislator or their staff.
- 3** Creative Problem-Solving. Role playing will help you, or your Chapter's team gain experience in handling unexpected or difficult situations before your meeting. Through role play your creative problem-solving skills will develop, so that you can more comfortably handle any situation you may face.



Before the Meeting: Role Playing

While it may seem daunting to role play a legislative office visit or field visit, there are a lot of easy ways to start out. Here are a few tips for doing it yourself:

Use Actual Locations

While you will probably not be able to role play in a legislative office, it is important to replicate the surroundings as close as possible.

Try to anticipate the number of people who will be at the meeting so that you can practice in a similar-sized room with a similar number of people in it.

This prevents you from getting distracted by the surroundings and crowd, or lack thereof.

If you're planning a field trip or meeting outside, scout the location ahead of time and make sure you're prepared for the weather. Bring the policymaker extra water.



Roleplay Everything

While it may seem silly to introduce yourself during a roleplaying exercise, it **helps to ensure that you're used to introducing yourself and anyone accompanying you. You won't get a redo** of this meeting so take this opportunity and make the most of it.

Film the Roleplay

Filming participants with your phone in a role play can be an extremely effective teaching tool. It allows participants to see their strengths and weaknesses. It also helps build confidence and improve your comfort level in the moment.

Before the Meeting: Preparation

There is no substitute for the opportunity to communicate face-to-face with your legislators. They get to hear your story, unfiltered and direct from you, and gain a sense of your dedication to issues important to you and others within your Chapter or community. **Don't be intimidated!** Your representatives need to hear from you in order to effectively serve you.

Three Weeks Ahead

- Request a meeting at least three weeks in advance, but a month is better. For a congressperson, use the meeting request form **on their official website**, if you don't already have a personal relationship with staff. County Commissioners, State Legislators, and other governing board members can be reached for meetings via their staff or official email address. If you can, avoid requests that are last minute (anything less than a week).
- **Don't hesitate to meet with staff if the elected official is unavailable, and don't be offended if only staff are present at your meeting.** *You're beginning the process of building trust. Have a good meeting with staff, learn their names, and provide them with accurate and useful additional information after the meeting if they ask for it, and you will be more likely to get the legislator the next time.*
- **Let the legislator's office know who will be coming with you and their role or interest in the discussion.** *They don't like surprises.*
- Follow-up by phone to be sure your request was received.
- Do your homework. Effective advocacy means knowing basic information about your legislator before meeting with them. Know which committees they serve on and whether they play a leadership role (i.e., Chair or Vice Chair). Look for areas of commonality, such as having same-aged children or grandchildren, being alumni of the same schools, or sharing a fondness for gardening or other outdoor activities.
- **Pick your "ask" and select supporting points or stories you want to share.** It is better to focus your meeting on one issue than to bombard them with multiple requests.
- Show up ten minutes early. **Never be late, but don't be offended if the policymaker is.** Respect their time and end the meeting when scheduled.



During the Meeting

- Always address your legislator as “Senator” or “Representative” even if you already know them personally.
- Ask for something concrete. For example, “Please sign on as a cosponsor to House Bill 113” is better than “Please support conservation policies.”
- Tell them a little about yourself and why you personally care about the issue.
- Answer questions members or staff may have. If you aren’t sure of the answer, tell them that you’ll find it and get back to them. Never provide inaccurate information.
- Leave them a one-page information sheet (see tips below) on the issues you discuss.
- If you are acting on behalf of your Chapter, invite them to an event or a site visit so they can see firsthand what you and the Florida Native Plant Society are all about.
- Thank them for their time and ask what you can do for them.

After the Meeting

- Always send a brief thank you within a day or two of your meeting.
- In the same letter or email, offer to answer any questions and be a resource for them.
- Send the documents you provided during the meeting if you weren't able to send them before the meeting. Electronic documents are better because staff and lawmakers can use your words and more easily make a point in debate if they are supporting your issue.



HANDOUTS: TIPS, IDEAS, AND CONCEPTS

Handouts allow you to provide more detailed information than you could share in a short meeting or presentation

Handouts provide a physical take-away for the legislator or staffer to review later.

What to include. Use your talking points as a guide for what to include in your handout. Feel free to expand on your talking points and include information that will provide a more complete explanation. You will want to keep your handout well organized and to the point. You can also include information not covered in your talking points as long as it supports your main points.

Give your Handout a professional look. Pay attention to quality and design. Use a simple, readable font. Organize and break out dense information into charts, graphs, or other illustrations. Make sure colors print out clearly. Make sure your handout is appealing to the eye and is uncluttered. Make sure your main points stand out on the paper, and any other information is concise and organized.

Cite your sources. You will be taken more seriously if you cite credible sources.

Field Trip Invitation Email - Template

Good Afternoon/Morning [INSERT REP'S STAFFER NAME HERE]:

My name is _____, and I live at [address]

Our local [Insert Chapter Name] Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society would like to invite you and your staff to an in-district field trip to [Insert Location Here] as your schedule permits. Our chapter members and volunteers are excited to give you a tour of our beautiful Florida lands and explain the work that our organization does in the area.

The [local] Chapter of FNPS represents [Insert number of] members from across the district, and our mission is to promote the preservation, conservation, and restoration of the native plants and native plant communities of Florida.

Our members and I look forward to the opportunity to host you, your family and staff at [location] and will be flexible to fit on your schedule.

I will follow-up with your scheduler in a few days to discuss further. In the meantime, **if you have any questions or if I can be of service, please don't** hesitate to contact me at your convenience [Your phone number & email address].

Sincerely, [Name]



Call Script - Template

INTRO: My name is _____ and I live at _____.

MAIN IDEA: I am calling you because I'm very concerned about _____ (Ex: lack of funding for the *Florida Forever* Program).

WHY: **Florida's conservation lands offer critical** benefits to all citizens, including flood protection, food security, pollinator habitat, recharge of drinking water sources, and safe, healthy open space for our citizens and visitors to enjoy.

SOLUTION: As our representative for this area, I want to know you are doing everything in your power to vote yes/no, support/stand against/attend XYZ, etc.

OPTIONAL: I'd like to set up a meeting with the representative or a staff member. Could we possibly meet sometime next week to discuss in detail?

THANK YOU





Society logo or chapter logo only if you're representing your chapter

AGENDA

BOTANY BILL (H.R. 1572/S. 2384) MEETING

Date: May 11, 2020, 12:30 PM - 3:30 PM

Meeting Location:

Meeting Room #101

Polk County Library Cooperative

2150 South Broadway Avenue Bartow, FL 33830

WIFI Service Set Identifier: polklib_open, no password, captive portal

Contact Info:

Juliet Rynear, Executive Director, Florida Native Plant Society

Phone:

Address:

Email:

Invitees/Attendees:

☐ Valerie Anderson, ☐ Susan Carr, ☐ Juliet Rynear, ☐ Representative Darren Soto, ☐ Ed Murawski

Post Meeting Summary and Follow Up: To be done by Juliet Rynear

Items for Discussion:

1) Introductions and Attendance

2) Botany Bill overview, disproportional benefits for Florida

3) Botany Bill history in the House

4) Botany Bill information Campaign – Coordination with Native Plant Conservation Campaign

5) Discussion – strategy to attract other co-sponsors

6) 4 PM - 5 PM, Adjourn-to Wildflower Happy Hour for anyone interested.

Florida Native Plant Society

Legislator Letter - Template

Dear Representative _____,

Native Florida plants and natural communities like beautiful ____ (insert plant/natural community type) _____ right here in _____ county are incredibly important contributors to our local quality of life, environmental sustainability and economy (Our organization takes pride in supporting the long-term viability of these plants and their habitats through community projects, education and support for public land conservation programs that preserve our area. Since 1963, Floridians have consistently voted at both the state and local levels to increase public funding for the purchase and management of conservation land, even when such programs increase our taxes.

Perhaps that is why Florida leads the nation through its land conservation program, *Florida Forever*. Our citizens understand that the preservation of **Florida's** precious places is critical to the maintenance of our **state's** character, natural resources, and its most vital industries and economic future.

The most recent evidence of the public's widespread support for conservation land acquisition came in 2014, when 75% of Florida's voters approved "**Amendment One**" to the state constitution, which obliged the legislature to channel 1/3 of net revenues from the existing doc stamp tax to "**acquire, restore, improve, and manage conservation lands**".

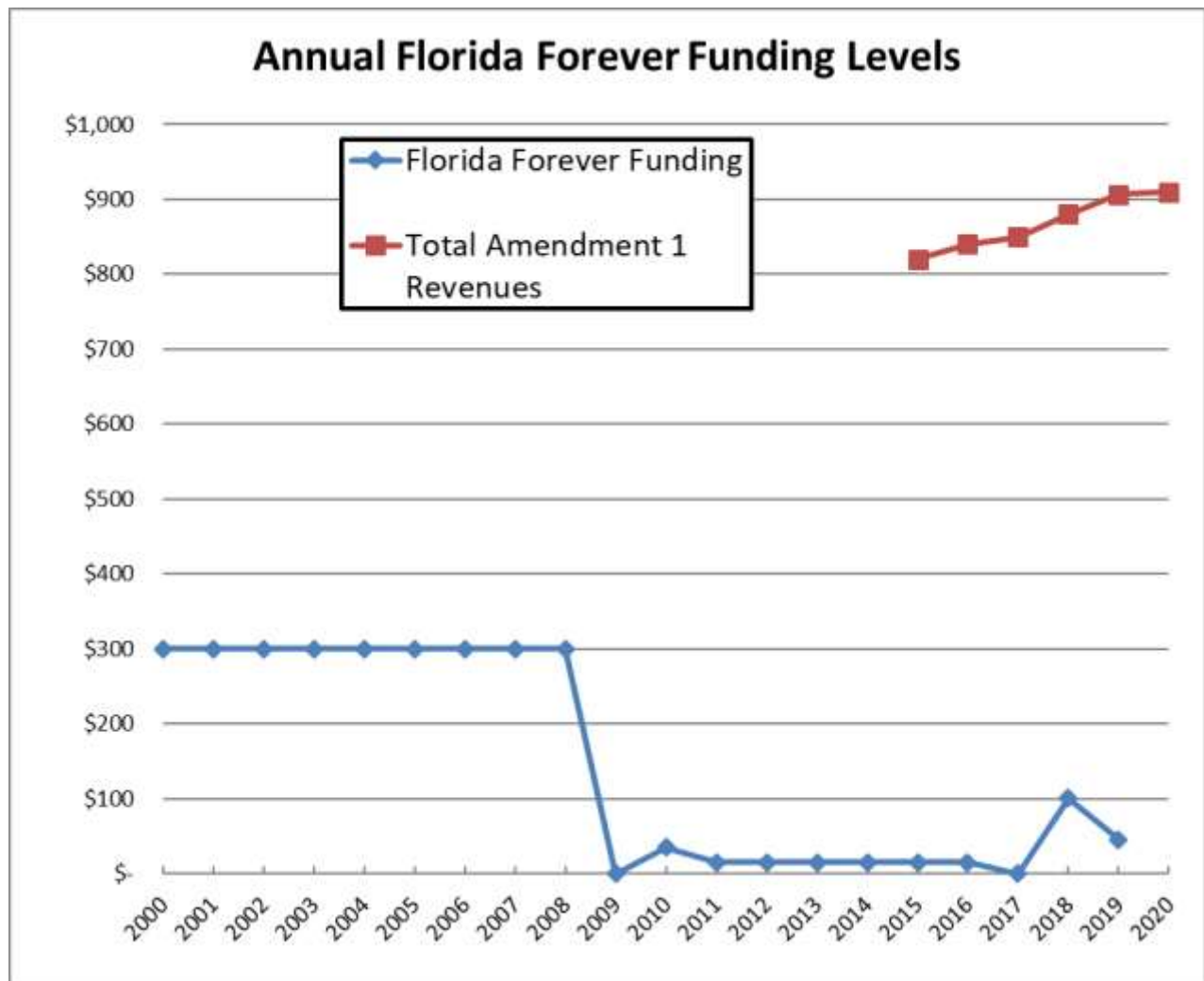
The Legislature has not yet fulfilled that obligation. The 2019 Session provided only \$13 million to *Florida Forever*, despite more than \$900 million being generated for conservation under Amendment 1.

We hope that in the 2020 legislative session, you will help this critical program receive the funding it needs by voting to appropriate \$300 million to *Florida Forever*. That traditional funding level **is what's needed to fulfill Florida's commitment to sustainability as the country's third-largest and fastest growing state.**

Support the will of **Florida's** voters by fully funding *Florida Forever*.

About Florida Forever

Funding for Florida Forever Over Time



The Florida Forever program is Florida's unparalleled conservation and recreation land acquisition program. It was created in 2001 as a successor to the Preservation 2000 program.

Florida Forever bonds finance acquisition and improvement of lands, water areas and related property interests and resources for restoration, conservation, recreation, water resource development and historical preservation. Funding for the program comes from documentary stamp taxes levied on real estate transactions. Florida historically has led the nation in land conservation, and for good reason. Only an ambitious approach to land conservation can sustain a state that continues to grow as rapidly as Florida.

Land conservation is the most effective mechanism for maintaining a balance between land lost to development and land necessary for the protection of the natural resources we depend upon. It's the most cost effective way to preserve our biological diversity, drinking water supplies, clean air and recreational open space.

Why Florida Forever is Critical

Florida Forever is far more than just an environmental land acquisition mechanism; it is the program responsible for ensuring the state's resiliency in the face of an uncertain future. Priority conservation lands are identified using a rigorous scientific analysis that distinguishes those lands deemed most critical to the preservation of critical plant and animal habitat, sensitive surface waters, groundwater recharge, flood protection, etc. These “**natural**” services provided by maintaining healthy, functional ecosystems will only become more critical as our population increases.

Without adequate land conservation, the cumulative pressures exerted by extensive land development will threaten our quality of life and the natural resources we depend on.

 Florida Department of Environmental Protection 2018 Florida Forever Five-Year Plan

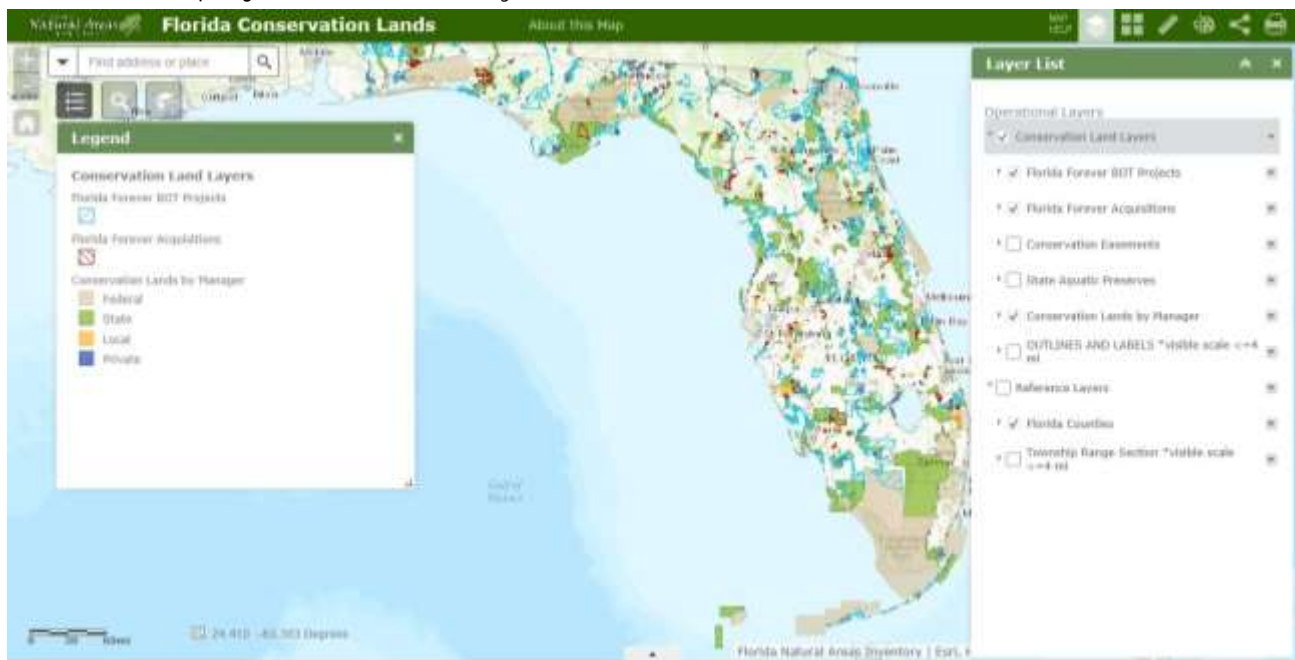
Statewide Distribution of Florida Forever Land Acquisition Projects, January 2018



It's difficult to be a knowledgeable advocate for Florida Forever if you don't know what it, and its predecessor Preservation 2000, may have accomplished in your area and what lands have been proposed for protection.

The scientists at the [Florida Natural Areas Inventory](#) have spent many years compiling the data and conducting the analyses that have helped Florida identify the most critically important lands for conservation.

The [Interactive Conservation Lands Map](#) is a great tool for illustrating the accomplishments of Florida Forever, the results of FNAI's work and the approved conservation projects identified in your area.



Screen shot of Florida Natural Areas Inventory's Interactive Conservation Lands Map, with legend and layers list opened.

Upon opening the map, click on the Legend icon near the upper left corner to display the legend, and click on the Layer List icon near the upper right corner to open the layer list. The drop down arrow at the left of each operational layer in the Layer List will provide the options pictured above.

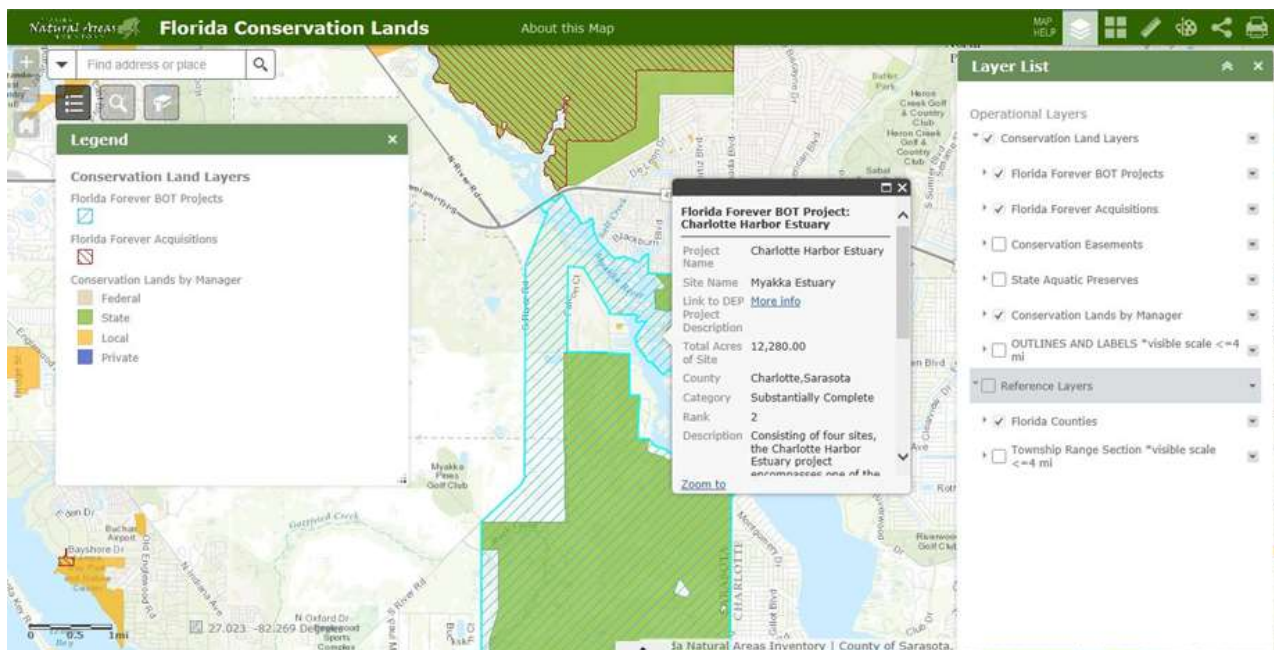
Check the box for each layer you want to appear on the map and in the legend. Use the +/- buttons to zoom in or out. You can also shift the view by placing the cursor on the map, depressing the mouse button and panning across the view.

If you click on a project area – whether an existing conservation area, a Florida Forever Acquisition, or a Florida Forever BOT project (area already reviewed and approved for purchase), a window with information about the area will open as illustrated in the

following screen shot. These windows include active links that will take you to the comprehensive project descriptions included in the Florida Forever Five Year Plan. If the link doesn't work, you may have to download the entire Plan:

(http://publicfiles.dep.state.fl.us/DSL/OESWeb/FF2017/FLDEP_DSL_SOLI_2018FloridaForever5YrPlan_20180706.pdf) and sift through it for the correct project.

It isn't necessary that you delve too deeply into the voluminous research and analysis conducted to identify and evaluate Florida Forever project areas. The interactive map should provide access to sufficient information for your purposes. However, if you want explore in greater depth, there are many sources of information available at <http://fnai.org/FIForever.cfm>



Interactive map zoomed to the Charlotte Harbor Estuary Florida Forever Project with the Identify window for Myakka Estuary open. Clicking on the active link opens the Florida Forever Five Year Plan report for the project area.

Take Action

Ample conservation land and a clean and abundant supply of freshwater are critical for our citizens, our local industries, and our overall economic wellbeing. We are already feeling the squeeze on our water resources, and it will only intensify.

Officials in the St. Johns River Water Management District have already noted that water withdrawals in the Orlando area are reaching the limits of sustainability, with only about 50 million gallons per day remaining (The city currently pumps 800 million gallons/day).

The Department of Environmental Protection recently estimated that the real estate documentary taxes used to replenish the land acquisition trust fund will generate around \$900 million next fiscal year. We can easily afford to restore historic Florida Forever funding levels, which customarily were set at \$300 million annually.

The state has identified **2 million additional acres** as “high-priority” areas for acquisition based on the scientific analysis conducted through the Florida Forever Needs Assessment. Land protection is popular, critical to the preservation of state resources, and helps to reduce state spending in the long-run by conserving what we already have.

Use the tips, talking points, electronic links and other resources we have provided in this handbook to make a difference for your part of Florida.

There is no other place quite as unique and fragile as Florida, and if people like us **don't do our best** to advocate for this state to remain as beautiful, resilient and exceptional as she is, then who will?

