



Audubon OF FLORIDA 2010 Conservation Priorities

SOUTHWEST FLORIDA ECOSYSTEMS

Southwest Florida, particularly inland areas, is one of the fastest growing areas of the nation. Audubon of Florida and its five southwest Florida chapters are engaged in a plan for protection and restoration of its ecosystems. Audubon has a long history in the region beginning with hiring wardens to protect wading bird colonies from plume hunters, later creating the Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary, and helping to secure federal and state public lands.

The area has six signature species that help the public identify with the need to protect and restore land and waters: Florida panthers, which require large unrestricted territories, nesting Wood Storks, which depend on seasonal wetlands for forage, Snail Kites, which depend on good water management for lakes and wetlands, endemic Scrub Jays and Gopher Tortoises, which require protection and management of scrub and uplands, and juvenile Snook, which require healthy estuarine environments. These six species serve vital roles as indicator species, helping gauge the effectiveness of ecosystem-wide protection and restoration efforts.

Working from the science and policy base of the Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary and advocacy resources statewide, Audubon's strategy is to minimize the impact of this growth on specific components of the region, while proactively leveraging it for broad conservation achievements:

- Protect the Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed (CREW), including the greater Corkscrew Swamp, in order to assure the abundance of birds and other wildlife and to provide a model ecosystem for people to visit and learn about nature.
- Restore the health of the Caloosahatchee River, its estuaries, and the near shore of the Gulf of Mexico, which all require increasing water storage and treatment all around Lake Okeechobee and upstream watersheds. Seek funding for necessary land acquisition and projects to achieve this restoration, including the US Sugar purchase, West Caloosahatchee (Berry Grove) Reservoir, and water quality treatment projects.
- Defend the Charlotte Harbor and Peace River watershed from any further mining and other land use impacts.
- Assure implementation of appropriate management plans for Babcock Ranch Preserve, Big Cypress National Pres., lands under conservation easements, and other conservation lands to maintain and improve wildlife habitat while allowing compatible human use for public lands.
- Promote restoration by working with the Everglades local communities to direct development away from needed conservation lands, historical and archaeological resources in such a way that both economic and ecological sustainability are achieved.

- Southwest Florida coastal and inland habitat is along migratory flyways, provides critical shorebird nesting areas, and requires protection and management for the benefit of birds and other wildlife.
- Using innovative tools, incentives and regulations, work to retain ranching and other low impact agricultural uses in Southwest Florida while working with landowners to reduce drainage and nutrient impacts to watersheds and retain or increase habitat values.

Therefore be it resolved:

Audubon of Florida, deploying professional staff and expertise in alignment with the volunteer leadership of local Audubon chapters will work with conservation allies, business and community leaders and public officials to:

Conserve Sites and Landscapes, Including Coastal Environments:

Develop public and political support to protect and restore critical components of the Big Cypress, Corkscrew, Caloosahatchee, Fisheating Creek, and Charlotte Harbor ecosystems.

Support state, local, water management district and regional land acquisition, management and protection necessary for essential habitat preservation, restoration, and water management.

Initiate and support innovative approaches to land use planning, complementing land acquisition, that take advantage of transfer of development rights, conservation easements, and other land use-based approaches to setting aside conservation areas and direct incompatible land uses away from conservation areas. Be involved directly in the land use planning, infrastructure development, and regulatory decisions that will shape the future of the region.

Support stronger policies and more effective actions to protect water resources including strict interpretation and enforcement of wetland and water quality laws, and proactively amending the exotics/seasonal wetland biases in permitting.

Conserve Birds and Other Wildlife (Indicators of Conservation Success):

Advocate regionally-based and proactive wildlife protection policies, to complement land acquisition and planning efforts, at every level of government, but focused particularly on local policies and comprehensive plans.

Reduce Greenhouse Gas Emissions, and Adapt to Coming Changes:

Advocate and facilitate aggressive greenhouse gas pollution reduction commitments and actions at all levels of government and community, focusing on renewable energy sources, conservation and efficiency. Additionally, advocate adaptive community and conservation strategies.

Engage People, Build Field Capacity (including Science) and Build Financial Capacity:

Encourage, foster and support appropriate research and science, including accurate resource and land use mapping, to advance good policy and planning outcomes for Southwest Florida.

Increase the human and financial resources of Audubon in southwest Florida in a realistic effort to accomplish these vital and daunting conservation priorities.