



FNPS Policy and Legislation Committee Statement of Priority Issues for 2019

1. Restore Funding for Land Conservation Through Florida Forever

Historically, Florida invested \$300 million annually for land conservation, including a 10-year interval through the Preservation 2000 Program, and then through its successor program, Florida Forever. After funding all but ended with the onset of the recession of 2008, FNPS members and millions of other Floridians expressed our strong support for the restoration of land conservation funding through passage of the Water and Land Conservation Amendment (Amendment 1) in 2014. Amendment 1 required that 33 percent of annual excise taxes (aka, documentary stamp taxes) collected on real estate transactions must be dedicated to land conservation and other natural resource protection needs. That amounts to an estimated \$800-\$900 million per year. Funding for land conservation still has not been restored, despite the Legislature's welcomed approval of a one-year allotment of \$100.8 million to Florida Forever in 2018. **FNPS considers land protection through Florida Forever purchases to be the single most effective mechanism for advancing our mission and will advocate for – at a minimum – the full restoration of historic funding levels of \$300 million annually through the 30-year lifetime of Amendment 1.**

The Florida Forever Act established a formula (259.105(3), FS) which directs how Florida Forever funds are to be distributed among the state's various land protection programs. The formula provides 35% to DEP for the purchase of lands prioritized in the Florida Forever Work Plan; 30% to the water management districts for their priority projects; 22% to the Florida Communities Trust Program, which grants matching funds to local governments for the purchase of parkland; 1.5% each to DEP, the Florida Forest Service, and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission for the purchase of inholdings in existing state parks, state forests and wildlife management areas; 3.5% to the Florida Department of Agriculture for the purchase of conservation easements that protect agricultural lands through the Rural and Family Lands (RFP) Program; 1.5% to DEP's Greenways and Trails Program; 2% to fund DEP's Recreational Development and Assistance Program grants; and 2.5% to the Stan Mayfield Working Waterfronts Program.

This distribution formula allows Florida Forever funding to address a wide range of resource conservation needs while placing a priority on protection of the project areas identified in DEP's Florida Forever Work Plan, which are generally the largest, most environmentally significant projects in the state. **FNPS supports the current formula for the distribution of Florida Forever funding and the priority it places on protection of Florida Forever Work Plan projects as identified and ranked by the Acquisition and Restoration Council (ARC).**

The purchase of conservation easements through RFL is intended primarily to conserve lands with high agricultural value and thereby preserve the economic and other societal benefits that derive from maintaining a vibrant agricultural industry and rural landscape. However, many of the lands targeted for RFL purchases have other conservation values, including the protection of habitat for native flora and fauna; preservation of greenways and wildlife corridors that help maintain connectivity among adjoining or nearby conservation lands; and various water management benefits (e.g., protection of sensitive recharge areas, floodplains, riparian areas and wetlands). The current statutory formula for the distribution of funding to the Florida Forever programs includes a 3.5% share to RFL. **FNPS supports the current share of Florida Forever funding that goes to RFL and may advocate for higher levels of RFL funding provided it is not generated through reductions in funding to other natural lands conservation programs.**

2. Responsible Management of Existing Conservation Lands

The land Florida has already conserved represents a substantial investment, and proper management is necessary to protect that investment. Management shouldn't be short-changed by inadequate staffing or funding. Funding should be sufficient to implement the management plans adopted for each property. **FNPS will place a priority on management actions necessary to maintain or restore natural ecosystem functions and the natural systems they support.** These include the maintenance or restoration of hydrologic function, prescribed burning of fire-maintained habitats, control of invasive nonnative flora and fauna, restoration of altered habitats, and the protection of imperiled flora and fauna.

3. Comprehensive and Holistic Protection of Water Resources

A comprehensive approach to protection of our water resources must be implemented. Connections between groundwater and surface waters must be accounted for, and both water quantity and water quality considerations must be addressed. **FNPS considers nutrient pollution, and its impacts on both groundwater and surface water systems (springs, rivers, estuaries and wetlands), to be the top water resource priority** and will support regulatory (e.g., limitations on fertilizer usage and science-backed BMPs), engineered (shift from on-site sewage treatment to advanced wastewater treatment) and natural (filter marshes and wetland restoration) approaches.

Preserving, conserving and restoring the native plants and native plant communities of Florida

4. Recognition of Florida's Extreme Vulnerability to Sea Level Rise

Sea level rise must be recognized as an immediate and long-term threat to our environment, economy and groundwater resources. It demands a comprehensive statewide response to conserve our beaches, coastal wetlands and seagrasses, and the fisheries and uplands that depend on them. Florida must implement policies that address both mitigation (reductions in greenhouse gas emissions) and adaptation (strategies to minimize unavoidable impacts) measures. FNPS will place a priority on adaptation measures designed to conserve natural coastlines and functional estuarine systems over the long-term, in the face of continuing sea level rise.

5. Research to Evaluate the Threat of Texas Phoenix Palm Decline

Texas Phoenix Palm Decline (TPPD) may pose a devastating threat to Florida's native cabbage palm, and other native palm species. Its presence has been confirmed across large portions the state and is causing high levels of mortality among nonnative palms commonly used in landscaping, including especially date palms belonging to the genus Phoenix. There is evidence to suggest that native palms in the wild may also be susceptible to the TPPD. Palms generate an economic impact in excess of \$100 million annually across Florida's nursery and landscaping industries. The potential impact of the disease on native palms in the wild remains largely unknown. FNPS will work jointly with the Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) and the Florida Nursery Growers and Landscape Association (FNGLA) to support research and any necessary mitigation or control measures to contain the economic and environmental damage that may result from TPPD.

6. Funding for Endangered Plant Research

Funding to support research on endangered and threatened plants, and to evaluate species for potential listing, has historically been funded through an annual appropriation of approximately \$250,000. This funding is routinely eliminated or reduced by the legislature every year, and is restored before the end of the session in response to lobbying. FNPS is typically the only organization that stands up in defense of the funding, which provides essential support to researchers at universities, Bok Tower and Archbold Biological Station. FNPS is committed to continuing this important role