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## 2010 AUDUBON STATEWIDE CONSERVATION PRIORITIES

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The Public Policy Committee recommends focusing on three major conservation initiatives in 2010:

- Climate Change
- Coastal Conservation
- Greater Everglades Ecosystem

**Background** - The alignment of Florida Audubon and National Audubon in 1999 brought a commitment to set annual policy priorities at the Audubon Assembly. Each year the policy committee recommends statewide priorities and the regional conservation committees recommend regional priorities. State and regional priorities are expressed as resolutions approved at the Assembly and by the board. Priorities are backed by workplans and resource allocations.

Audubon of Florida looks for synchronicity with the National Audubon benchmarks but will continue to use a framework of five general policy areas for conservation:

- Climate Change and Energy Policy
- Growth Management and Transportation
- Public Land Protection and Management
- Water Resource Protection
- Wildlife Policy

For 2010 the Policy Committee recommends the following priorities:

**Climate Change** – The world’s most important emerging issue has led us to rally our base and take aggressive stands on a range of policies to meet reduced greenhouse gas emission targets. Audubon of Florida is now in a policy leadership role on renewable energy in Florida, on cap and trade nationally and is moving toward adaptation policies.

**Coastal Conservation** – From our existing strategic plan process we increased our policy and communications focus on coastal areas. Research in the coastal Everglades and coastal islands, management of colonial bird nesting areas, greatly expanded chapter work on shorebirds, program expansion in NW and NE Florida has positioned Audubon for a unified coastal conservation strategy.

**Greater Everglades Ecosystem** – Our keystone issue unifies our South Florida programs from Corkscrew Swamp to the Keys and up to our Lake Okeechobee and Central Florida programs. Every state and federal policy has implications for the Everglades and our work on restoration issues illustrates the value for Audubon’s science, policy and grassroots.

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## CLIMATE CHANGE

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The world's scientific community has reached consensus that global warming is taking place and that greenhouse gas emissions from human use of fossil fuels, are a primary cause of climate change.

Florida, along with its bird species, wildlife, and natural lands is especially vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, including sea level rise, more intense storms and storm surges, severe droughts and wildfires.

Increased concentrations of CO<sub>2</sub> are likely make the oceans more acidic and interfere with complex systems of marine life.

These impacts, along with other stresses on natural environments, place birds and wildlife at greater risk of extinction. Many bird species because of long-evolved strategies for migration and specialized habitat, nesting and foraging needs will be significantly affected by climate change and shifting seasons.

Florida residents are threatened with property loss and expenses related to storms and coastal erosion, loss of fresh water supplies and declining agricultural production. The state may generally be affected by population loss and adverse budget impacts. The public is affected because most coastal lands (beaches, marshes, mangrove forests) are owned by the public.

*Therefore be it resolved:*

*Audubon of Florida, deploying professional staff and expertise and using information derived from sound science in alignment with the volunteer leadership of local Audubon Societies (chapters) will call on our members and grassroots networks, and work with conservation allies, business and community leaders and public officials to:*

### **Mitigate the causes and impacts of global warming:**

Promote local, state and federal laws, policies and actions to set specific, enforceable greenhouse gas emission reduction goals and targets at levels that stabilize the climate and avoid the most severe impacts of global warming.

Promote conservation, energy efficiency, green building standards, compact development and other energy efficiency technologies, programs and policies.

Implement a renewable portfolio standard so that electric power utilities and their customers can harness sustainable solar, biomass and other energy generation technologies.

Influence and support the adoption of strong vehicle emissions standards to significantly reduce the greenhouse gas emissions from the transportation sector.

Oppose transportation projects such as new roads that increase Florida's dependence on single passenger vehicles and support alternative transportation strategies.

Oppose drilling for oil and gas in nearshore and offshore Florida waters, which would extend our nation's dependence on fossil fuels that contribute to climate change.

Encourage policies that support conversion of Florida to a clean energy economy.

**Promote ecologically sound climate change adaptation strategies:**

Identify, propose, and support ecologically sound adaptation strategies and policies to minimize risks to coastal areas posed by rising sea levels and other impacts of global warming.

Block ecologically harmful and expensive adaptation strategies;

Oppose beach armoring, sea walls and other practices that marginalize coastal habitat.

**Educate and encourage our members and the public:**

To practice energy conservation and live more sustainable lifestyles in order to reduce or offset personal contributions of greenhouse gases.



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## FLORIDA COASTAL CONSERVATION

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Florida's coasts are home a remarkable diversity of special habitats, birds and other wildlife. Coastal areas are shared with a growing human presence that is using and altering shorelines and waterways in ways that are often incompatible with the health and functioning of coastal ecosystems.

Marshes, seagrass meadows, maritime hammocks and scrub, beaches and shoals, mangroves constitute a complex and rich mosaic of living systems that have evolved in response to climate and geophysical events.

Florida's shorebirds and seabirds depend on our coastal habitats for breeding, wintering and migratory habitat. Of the twenty-three shore-dependent birds considered by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission to be "species of greatest conservation need," only two are "abundant," three are "stable" or "increasing," and *thirteen* meet the standard of "unknown or low, unknown or declining."

Florida's beaches and other coastal habitats are also important recreation destinations, including birdwatching, are major sources of the state's economic vitality and are reason many people choose our unique Florida lifestyle.

The ability of shorebirds and seabirds to survive and prosper in Florida's coastal habitats is jeopardized by a range of human activities including beach management, construction, coastal armoring, dredging and filling, beach grooming and recreational disturbance.

Sea levels are predicted to rise in response to global warming. Impacts from sea level rise include shoreline erosion and migration, and seawater intrusion into aquifers and freshwater streams.

Drainage and mismanagement of freshwater ecosystems contributes to the decline of coastal habitats by altering the timing, quality and quantity of freshwater flows.

Proposals to end the ban on oil and gas exploration and production in Florida's coastal waters pose a newly emerging threat.

Audubon has long conducted research from its Tavernier and Coastal Islands Sanctuaries science research centers. Many Audubon chapters are actively involved in coastal conservation, science and education projects. A new NE office at the Coastal Policy Center in Marineland has extended Audubon's coastal conservation work.

Audubon is uniquely positioned to provide leadership in a range of science, education, public involvement and policy work to push solutions to the conservation challenges facing Florida's coastal resources and to mobilize our members to be coastal habitat stewards.

*Therefore be it resolved:*

*Audubon of Florida, deploying professional staff and expertise and using information derived from sound science, will call on the volunteer leadership of local Audubon societies (chapters), members and grassroots networks, and work with conservation allies, business and community leaders, public officials and agencies to:*

- Use coastal birdlife as a way to connect people to nature and get them excited about and involved with protection of Florida's natural coastal systems.
- Protect coastal birds through habitat management and insist that recreational demands not compromise the viability of imperiled populations.
- Advocate for the acquisition of coastal conservation lands, as well as wise land and recreation management on those properties.
- Focus growth and transportation plans away from conversion of native coastal habitats.
- Promote appropriate shoreline retreat, rather than armoring, in the face of climate change.
- Advocate for water quality standards and for freshwater management plans that maintain healthy estuarine habitats.
- Protect coastal habitats from attempts to protect structures with coastal armoring.
- Promote habitat protection strategies to provide routes for coastal habitats and wildlife to migrate upslope ahead of sea level rise.
- Advocate for the value of coastal habitats for natural protection from the effects of climate change (eg: carbon sequestration and wave attenuation value of marshes and shoals).
- Oppose proposals to open Florida waters to oil and gas exploration.
- Raise public awareness and increase advocacy on behalf of Florida's coastal resources and encourage people and encourage people to use coastal areas in ways that are compatible with abundant wildlife.



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## SOUTHEAST FLORIDA - EVERGLADES ECOSYSTEM

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The Greater Everglades Ecosystem encompasses three million acres of human and natural habitat, vast wetlands and Florida's most productive estuaries. The Everglades' slow-moving and fresh water once flowed continuously from the upper Kissimmee River south to Lake Okeechobee, through sawgrass marshes and tree islands to the coastal wetlands and seagrasses of Florida, Biscayne, and Rookery Bays.

The Everglades is a unique international wildlife treasure and is home to more than 350 species of birds including the Wood Stork, Everglades Kite and Roseate Spoonbill. The greater ecosystem also provides refuge for other important wildlife, including the Florida panther and Key deer. Additionally, the Everglades provides services for the people and economy of South Florida by recharging water supplies, absorbing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, providing a world-class tourist destination, and making available a backyard wilderness accessible to urban residents.

For decades, this magnificent system has been ditched, drained, polluted, invaded by exotic species, and paved over for buildings and roads. As a result, many species are jeopardized, and the wading bird super-colonies that once symbolized the ecosystem have seriously declined. Birdlife still serves as an indicator of ecological health, and the best measure of success for the Everglades restoration is the return of abundant bird populations.

Now, due in part to Audubon's advocacy, a number of restoration and protection projects are underway. These include the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP), Modified Water Delivery, the Everglades Construction Project, the Lake Okeechobee Protection Plan, Kissimmee River Restoration.

Restoration is hindered by inadequate funding and faltering government commitment to full restoration as well as growth-related competition for land and water. Restoration takes place acre by acre, project by project, and place by place. It involves many individual projects. Audubon is focusing on those projects that have the greatest promise to improve ecological conditions.

*Therefore be it resolved:*

*Audubon of Florida, deploying professional staff and expertise and using information derived from sound science in alignment with the volunteer leadership of local Audubon Societies (chapters) will call on our members and grassroots networks, and work with conservation allies, business and community leaders and public officials to focus on the following:*

**Everglades Agricultural Area (EAA):** To promote and implement a comprehensive sustainability plan for the EAA that focuses on Everglades restoration, sustainable agriculture, and sustainable growth within and around existing communities.

- Advocate for the Governor Crist's River of Grass Initiative and secure land needed for restoration;
- Use ecological conditions and outcomes and indicator species data to advance the debate and decisions on water storage, conveyance and treatment in the EAA;

- Lobby for and influence decisions on use of state funding for restoration;
- Secure commitments to at least 1.5 million acre feet of water storage;
- Oppose Inland Port proposals that would compromise restoration;
- Improve quality of water entering the Everglades through the expansion of Stormwater Treatment Areas and improvement of on-farm Best Management Practices (BMPs);
- Emphasize water storage, water treatment, habitat restoration, and water retention as essential ecological functions that should be recreated in the EAA;
- Assure the long-term land use of the EAA is consistent with Everglades restoration; and
- Promote the *Vision for a Sustainable Everglades Agricultural Area*.

#### Climate Change: Establishing Everglades Restoration as a method for adaptation to climate change impacts

- Promote prioritization of CERP projects that will provide a fresh-water head to prevent salt water intrusion and sea level rise.
- Advocate for retention and restoration of natural lands, and policy to reduce GHG emissions from agricultural lands, especially as natural lands, including wetlands and forests, are important carbon sinks and buffer zones for climate impacts.
- Advocate for restoration methods that will allow the greatest extent of peat buildup throughout the Everglades, which can serve as a defense against sea level rise.
- Communicate the importance of Everglades restoration for climate change adaptation to the extent that funds allocated through cap and trade legislation to be used for adaptation can be dedicated to Everglades restoration efforts.

#### Southern Everglades & Florida Bay

- Secure action on first phase of Tamiami Trail and complete Mod Waters as defined by Congress;
- Secure movement on next phase of Tamiami Trail improvements as an Everglades restoration project;
- Make progress on C-111 design and operation and on all components of Decompartmentalization;
- Encourage SFWMD land acquisition and wetlands protection;
- Educate the public and policy makers about ecological benefits to Florida Bay;
- Continue to advance water reservations for the environment;
- Work with scientists to build the case and advocate to remove barriers to sheetflow in Water Conservation Areas (WCAs) and Everglades National Park (ENP);
- Advocate for strong seepage management design and implementation

#### Lake Okeechobee

- Release science-based report on phosphorus (P) pollution and strategies to achieve P balance in Lake Okeechobee and Everglades;
- Reinitiate Lake Okeechobee sub-basin planning;
- Influence Lake Okeechobee watershed local government land use plans;
- Improve U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE) water regulation schedule;
- Secure state funds for specific Lake Okeechobee water quality projects and programs; and
- Push to implement or improve residential fertilizer rule and eliminate land disposal of sewage sludge;
- Gain approval of a new statewide stormwater rule to limit nutrients from urban area.

Northern Everglades

- Advocate implementation of a plan of dispersed/distributed storage to retain 800,000 to 1,300,000 acre feet of water in the Kissimmee basin;
- Lobby to require enforcement of statutory provisions restricting sewage sludge dumping in Northern Everglades;
- Present science based recommendations to improve best management practices and other pollution source controls in the Northern Everglades;
- Develop cooperative relationships with landowners in the Northern Everglades and promote solutions that retain land in agriculture through concepts such as “payment for environmental services” and “water farming.”

Sustainable Development

- Advocate for and shape smart-growth regional development limits;
- Protect Urban Development Boundary line in Miami-Dade County;
- Prevent development that compromises greater Everglades protection and restoration;
- Continue campaign against federal wetland permits in Cocohatchee Slough;
- Push advocacy and science to achieve new rules and/or laws to eliminate or constrict the use of melaleuca removal for mitigation of wetlands loss; and
- Oppose destructive road projects.

Wildlife

- Protect and expand habitat for the Florida Panther;
- Reestablish wading bird super colonies as the measure of success for Everglades restoration.