

**Southwest Florida RCC 2021 Conservation Priorities – proposed for Audubon Assembly, October, 2020:**

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.

A primary means of protection is public land acquisition and management through programs such as Florida Forever, Rural and Family Lands Protection, Lee County's Conservation 20/20, and Conservation Collier. Bitter disappointment with the Legislature's past refusal to fund Florida Forever led the Southwest Florida Audubon organizations to pursue an active campaign to advocate local delegation support for buying highly ranked local Florida Forever and Rural and Family Lands projects and federal projects that benefit the Greater Everglades Ecosystem and Western Everglades' Big Cypress and Corkscrew Swamps.

Additionally, southwest Florida local governments have suffered from widespread denial of increasing climate change risks to human and natural communities. The region hosts significant coastal habitats which will disappear unless better planning for resource-oriented adaptation and mitigation occur.

Regarding the vitally important issue of equity, diversity and inclusion, Audubon and its chapters recognize the underrepresentation of diverse communities of color 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.

***Therefore be it resolved:***

***The five local Audubon organizations in the Southwest Florida Region, using sound science, professional policy guidance, and in complement to Audubon Florida's statewide conservation priorities, will mobilize volunteer and staff leadership, member, allies, community leaders, elected officials, and government agencies to cooperatively advance three regional priorities:***

- 1. LESSEN HARMFUL ALGAL BLOOM (HAB) CRISES IN SOUTHWEST FLORIDA BY ADVANCING NUTRIENT SOURCE CONTROL, WATERSHED RESTORATION, WETLAND PRESERVATION, AND EDUCATING THE PUBLIC AND POLICY MAKERS ON HAB SCIENCE FROM RELIABLE SOURCES.***
- 2. ADVOCATE THAT OUR LEGISLATIVE DELEGATIONS SUPPORT 2020 SESSION BUDGETS TO FUND PURCHASE OF HIGH PRIORITY LOCAL FLORIDA FOREVER AND RURAL AND FAMILY LANDS PROJECTS, AND SUPPORT PROTECTION OF CONNECTED, VITAL WETLANDS AND HABITATS IN THE SOUTHWEST/CENTRAL FLORIDA M-CORES CONNECTOR STUDY AREA.***
- 3. PROMOTE REGIONAL AND LOCAL SEA LEVEL RISE/CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION AND MITIGATION PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION, INCLUDING ESPECIALLY ADVOCATING FOR THE SOUTHWEST FLORIDA REGIONAL RESILIENCY COMPACT AND APPROVAL BY THE REMAINING LOCAL GOVERNMENTS YET TO JOIN, AND TO SUPPORT INVOLVEMENT OF UNIVERSITIES, BUSINESSES, AND CIVIC ORGANIZATIONS, WITH SUPPORT FOR EFFECTIVE ADMINISTRATION AND IMPLEMENTATION.***

**4. PURSUE STRATEGIES WHICH AIM TO BROADEN THE DIVERSE PARTICIPATION IN, AND BENEFITS FROM ALL OUR CHAPTERS' CONSERVATION WORK AND PROGRAMS IN ORDER TO BETTER REFLECT THE VITAL DIVERSITY OF THE COMMUNITIES IN WHICH WE ALL LIVE AND ULTIMATELY BETTER ACHIEVE OUR COMMON OBJECTIVES.**

Implementation actions include engaging legislative delegation members; advocating for wetland preservation and restoration on a watershed scale; coastal bird habitat protection; engagement in the FDOT M-CORES study; promotion of local renewable energy generation and efficiency; participation and use of the Collier SLR model and adaptation planning regionally; and creative public outreach. A Southwest Florida Climate Change Compact would fold several of these strategies into a coordinated plan. Equity, Diversity and Inclusion objectives may continue to be achieved through conscious planning and integration into all the work of our organizations, including seeking the input and participation directly of people from local communities of color, young people, and others missing from our ranks.