



Audubon of Southwest Florida | Audubon of the Western Everglades

Hendry-Glades Audubon Society | Peace River Audubon Society | Sanibel-Captiva Audubon Society

REGIONAL CONSERVATION PRIORITIES: SOUTHWEST FLORIDA 2020

The Regional Conservation Committee of five southwest Florida Audubon's meets quarterly.

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.

Therefore be it resolved: The five local Audubon organizations in the Southwest Florida Region will 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 OUR LEGISLATIVE DELEGATIONS SUPPORT A 2020 BUDGET WHICH CAN 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 ADVANCING A POSSIBLE SOUTHWEST FLORIDA REGIONAL CLIMATE CHANGE COMPACT OF LOCAL GOVERNMENTS AND AGENCIES.**

Implementation actions include engaging Legislative delegation members; advocating 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.