



For nature, for people, for Florida.
Together, we find a way

2023 FLORIDA IMPACT REPORT



Letter from the Executive Director

I'M PLEASED TO SHARE within these pages the impact of your collective generosity. It is your gifts and support that fuel The Nature Conservancy's (TNC) critical work of protecting Florida's lands, waters, and oceans.

In this report, we celebrate the successful conclusion of the *Our Florida, Our World* campaign, which raised more than \$100 million for conservation. These dollars set in motion projects and partnerships that made a tangible difference for nature.

Throughout this report, you'll see highlights of *Campaign Impact* that — thanks to your investments — we achieved over the last five years. You'll read stories surrounding a few of our many accomplishments from fiscal year 2023, and learn about our path forward and the strategies that will guide our efforts into the future. Considering our state's shifting climate and surging population, our work is more critical than ever.

As a Florida native, avid outdoor enthusiast, and cyclist, I'm a fan of "Real Florida," its diverse landscapes and natural beauty. I am passionate about conservation and our work to scale our successes in Florida throughout North America and beyond. There should be no geopolitical or cultural boundaries when it comes to protecting nature. At TNC in Florida, we're sharing our science-based solutions and expertise with partners across the U.S. and around the world. Our work is truly global, and it needs to be.

As we strive to turn the tide on climate change and biodiversity loss, stories like those presented in this report encourage and inspire us. Thank you for empowering our work with your generosity. For nature, for people, for Florida, together we find a way.

With sincere gratitude,

Greg Knecht

The mission of The Nature Conservancy is to conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends.

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Our Florida, Our World CAMPAIGN

July 1, 2018 – June 30, 2023

WHEN TNC STARTED the *Our Florida, Our World* campaign, we asked you, our donors and friends, to take a stand and to join us on our journey. And you did.

Our goal: To raise \$100 million by July 2023 to tackle the biggest land, water, and wildlife conservation challenges throughout Florida. We set out to:

- Protect 37,000 acres of land for the Florida Wildlife Corridor
- Transform TNC’s Florida preserves into state-of-the-art campuses for conservation education, public outreach, and scientific exploration
- Restore 364,500 acres of forest, including longleaf pine
- Enable sustainable management of Florida’s fish populations
- Revitalize Florida’s panhandle estuaries and ensure resilient coastlines
- Improve the health of our lands and restore springs, lakes, streams, and rivers
- Ensure smart land use in one of the fastest growing areas of Florida (Metro Orlando) and develop urban conservation programs that benefit people and nature

Together, we accomplished so much more than this. Look for the *Campaign Impacts* that your support helped us achieve throughout this report. Thank you for partnering with us for nature.



Download and share a digital copy of this report

CAMPAIGN REVENUE



\$113,961,517

Thanks to your philanthropy, TNC **exceeded its campaign goal by 14%**

DOLLARS LEVERAGED



\$148,293,100

For every dollar raised for the *Our Florida, Our World* campaign, TNC leveraged an additional \$1.30 from public and private partners — that’s **a 130% match**

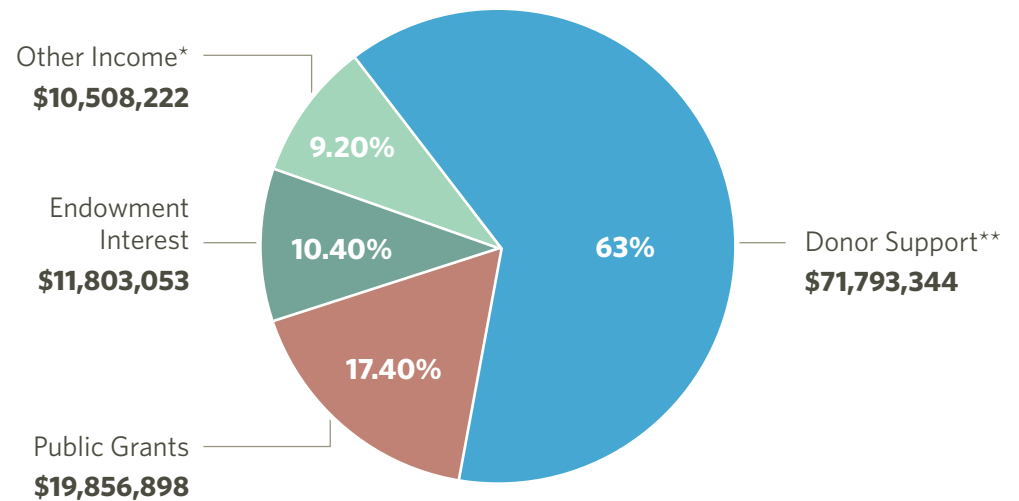
PLANNED GIFT COMMITMENTS



\$90,262,522

Many donors choose to continue their support of TNC with a deferred gift from their estate. Their generosity helped TNC **surpass its goal for planned gift commitments by 125%**

Campaign Revenue Sources



*Includes private contracts, lease and fee revenue, gain/loss of sale of assets, program support/transfer from other TNC chapters and TNC global

**Includes funds raised from Florida donors in support of North America and global goals.

Land PROTECTION



Campaign Impact

July 1, 2018 - June 30, 2023

74,822

acres protected, safeguarding multiple rare and threatened plants and animals, like the longleaf pine, Florida panther, Marian's marsh wren, gopher tortoise, and Florida pine snake.



Explore TNC's land protection work.

One Patch at a Time

Creating connected, protected lands and waters

FROM A 30,000-FOOT VIEW, the nearly 18 million acres of Florida's Wildlife Corridor appear as a patchwork of odd-shaped, randomly placed green spaces. Thanks to donors like you, The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is helping to link these spaces to create a path of green — or connected, protected landscapes — that weaves throughout the state to allow nature to thrive.



Funded in part by TNC's Panther Fund, in 2023, TNC helped add 661 acres of the Hendrie Ranch in Highlands County to the corridor's connected ecosystems.

Linking protected lands and waters with strategically located farm and ranch lands is a conservation strategy that maximizes benefits for nature. Connected landscapes give wildlife room to roam and breed, safeguard biodiversity and habitat, create natural spaces for people, and help mitigate climate change.

In 2021, TNC's shared vision of connecting Florida's habitats and working lands was recognized by the Florida Legislature as the Florida Wildlife Corridor. Today, the corridor includes nearly 10 million conserved acres that are home to many of Florida's rare and endangered plants and animals. Another 8 million acres have been identified for corridor protection and TNC and its partners are working diligently to protect these lands. The Hendrie Ranch perpetual conservation easement is an example of this work.

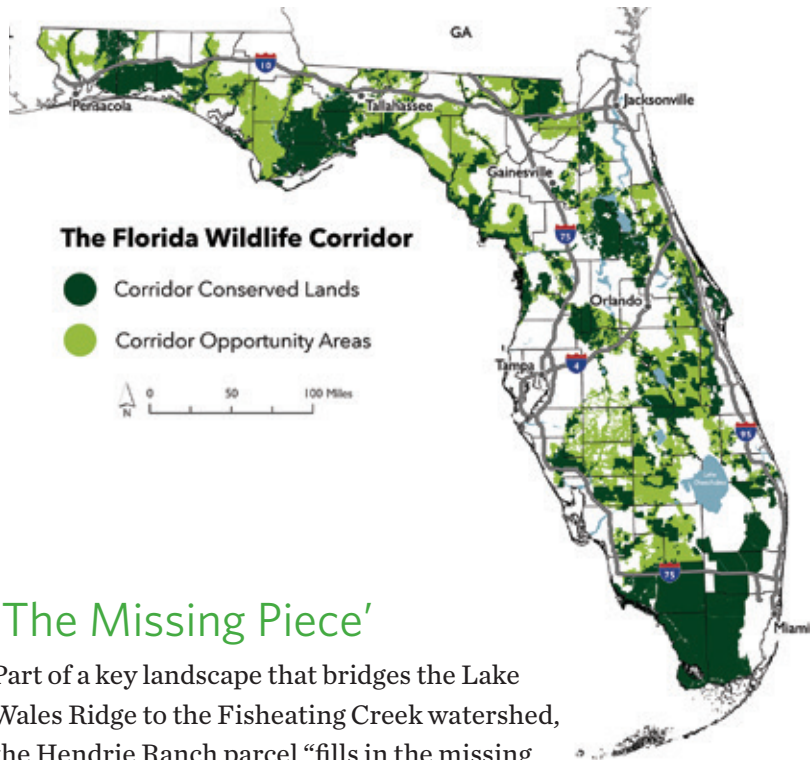
TNC's advocacy work also contributed to the state's largest-ever budget appropriation for land protection — \$900 million — approved by the Florida Legislature in 2023. (See story p. 8)



...
“Our land protection work rarely happens quickly but its enduring impact for wildlife and people is well worth the investment in time, money, and effort.”

...
Wendy Mathews
TNC senior conservation projects manager

THIS PAGE LEFT TO RIGHT Illustration © iStock; Florida black bear © Carlton Ward Jr.; Wendy Mathews © Carlton Ward Jr. OPPOSITE PAGE LEFT TO RIGHT The Florida Wildlife Corridor map vision is the Florida Ecological Greenways Network Priorities 1-3, developed and maintained by the University of Florida Center for Landscape Conservation Planning; Conserved Lands, Florida Natural Areas Inventory, 12/22. © Archbold Biological Station, A. Meeks; TNC and partners are working to repopulate the Florida panther north of the Caloosahatchee River © Carlton Ward Jr.



'The Missing Piece'

Part of a key landscape that bridges the Lake Wales Ridge to the Fisheating Creek watershed, the Hendrie Ranch parcel “fills in the missing piece of an over 50,000-acre block of contiguous conserved lands,” says Joshua Daskin, director of conservation for Archbold Biological Station, a TNC partner located adjacent to Hendrie Ranch. “It is also within the highest priority of lands in the Florida Ecological Greenways Network, meaning it is identified as among the most important locations needed to secure a statewide network of connected wildlife habitats — the Florida Wildlife Corridor.”

The conservation easement will allow the landowner to conduct agricultural activities on the property but will protect the land from future development. Adjacent to Fisheating Creek, a tributary to Lake Okeechobee, Hendrie Ranch and its environs are habitat for several state and federally listed species, including the Florida panther, Florida black bear, bald eagle, gopher tortoise, and Florida scrub jay.





Protecting Waters Through Nutrient Stewardship

TNC is also working with agriculture producers to safeguard Florida’s waters. Its 4R Nutrient Stewardship program, supported by The Mosaic Company, helps farmers maximize crop yields while keeping nutrients out of Florida’s freshwaters and estuaries.

“We’re working with ag producers and landowners to transform their current practices to improve and protect water quality,” says David Royal, who leads TNC’s 4R program.

The 4R program provides a best management practices framework for farmers to apply the “Right source” of fertilizer, at the “Right rate” for crop needs, at the “Right time” in the production cycle, and at the “Right place” where crops can use them.

Marlon Pendergrass, who operates The Groves at Peace River, an 860-acre citrus grove near Zolfo Springs, Florida, says conservation is important to him and participating in TNC’s 4R program benefits both his citrus operation and the environment.

The Power of Partnerships

An example of the power of partnerships, funds from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and TNC contributed to securing the Hendrie Ranch easement.

“Protecting this parcel of the Hendrie Ranch is a landmark accomplishment for TNC, its partners, and conservation — and one that took decades to achieve,” says Wendy Mathews, TNC senior conservation projects manager. “Our land protection work rarely happens quickly but its enduring impact for wildlife and people is well worth the investment in time, money, and effort.”



...
“I feel compelled to do what I can to help. If we don’t conserve now, then who will?”

...
Marlon Pendergrass
Operator of The Groves
at Peace River



Water Management Is Key

Pendergrass engineered a water management system for The Groves that consists of control gates, and canals. These canals link to the farm's wells to help control flooding and nutrient runoff, while also providing irrigation. He uses soil moisture probes to prevent overwatering, which also reduces nutrient runoff.

“We’re at the headwaters of a contributory creek to the Peace River,” Pendergrass says. “We have to manage those waters to make sure that our nutrients are not poured into the canals, and they go into the river and cause contamination.”

The Peace River flows for 105 miles from northern Polk County to the Charlotte Harbor estuary, Florida’s second largest bay.

“If we don’t have farmers that are concerned with conserving our resources and being good stewards, then farming dies,” Pendergrass says. “We’ve got to conserve, preserve and produce the best we can with just what it takes to produce and not waste our resources.”

4R Practices Pay Dividends for Nature

Pendergrass, who follows 4R practices, has dramatically reduced chemical inputs at The Groves as well. He uses organic compounds to augment nutrient and herbicide absorption and meticulously “spoon feeds” the trees liquid fertilizer. Deploying individual protection covers on young trees – to combat the Asian Citrus Psyllid, an insect responsible for the devastating “greening” virus – is also paying dividends for his grove and the environment.

“We were spending \$2,000 an acre to produce oranges. We’ve lowered that cost to \$1,000 to \$1,200 an acre, even though the chemical and fertilizer prices have gone up tremendously,” Pendergrass says.

But aside from the cost-savings, he says 4R practices are just the right thing to do. “I feel compelled to do what I can to help. If we don’t conserve now, then who will? As farmers, it’s in our DNA to conserve and try our best to be good stewards with what God has blessed us with.” ●



LEGISLATIVE Wins



Campaign Impact

July 1, 2018 - June 30, 2023

TNC's advocacy and policy work contributed to the Florida Legislature's approval of
\$1,902,800,000
in land protection funds.



Read more about
TNC's government
relations work.

The 'Voice for Nature' TNC advocates for conservation policy and funding gains

THE NATURE CONSERVANCY'S (TNC) government relations work operates behind the scenes and often goes unnoticed, but its importance cannot be overstated. TNC is the voice for nature at the State Capitol – meeting with lawmakers and advocating for policy changes and investments that benefit nature and people in Florida and beyond.

“When donors support our policy work, they support a greener, more sustainable and resilient future for Florida,” says Garrett Wallace, government relations director for TNC in Florida.

Matt Posner, executive director of the

Pensacola and Perdido Bays Estuary Program, a TNC conservation partner, agrees. “Whether in Tallahassee or Washington D.C., the policy work of The Nature Conservancy assists in appropriations and policy successes that can help ensure fishable and swimmable waters for all to enjoy,” he says. “By restoring our waters, protecting biodiversity, and supporting communities, people and their livelihoods, The Nature Conservancy aids our policy work for the benefit of all.”

The spring 2023 legislative session and the state's approved fiscal year 2023-24 budget are prime examples of TNC's ongoing government relations work come to fruition.



...

“When donors support our policy work, they support a greener, more sustainable and resilient future for Florida.”

...

Garrett Wallace
Government relations
director for TNC
in Florida

Land Protection

A groundbreaking session for conservation, the leadership of the Florida Senate and House of Representatives approved \$900 million in appropriations for land protection — the largest in Florida’s history.

“These appropriations will greatly expand the successful Florida Forever program and the Florida Wildlife Corridor, protecting the habitat of the Florida panther and other rare and threatened wildlife and native plant species,” says Greg Knecht, executive director of TNC in Florida.

The Legislature also allocated \$100 million in recurring funds for the Florida Forever Program to protect Florida’s vital land and water resources on an ongoing basis. These funds will continue TNC’s critical work of building the Wildlife Corridor.

Water Quality

Under House Bill (HB) 407, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection can now allocate up to \$5 million annually for the next five years to assist the City of Apalachicola with projects that improve water quality within the Apalachicola Bay. These funds will assist with projects such as the construction of stormwater management and central sewage collection and treatment facilities, protecting the bay from pollutants and nutrients — giving its now decimated oyster reefs a chance to revive.

Additionally, the state’s 2023-24 budget provides \$1.2 billion for various water quality improvement measures across the state.

Climate

This year’s budget also allocates \$300 million toward efforts to combat rising sea levels, a nod to the effects of climate change.

Additionally, HB 111 expands the requirement for public entities to conduct Sea-Level Impact Projection (SLIP) studies before constructing certain



state-financed structures in areas deemed at risk to sea level rise. The bill also expands the Resilient Florida Grant Program to provide funding to municipalities and counties for feasibility studies and permitting costs for nature-based solutions — pioneered and demonstrated by TNC — that reduce the impact of flooding and sea level rise; and to water management districts to support local government climate adaptation planning.



state-financed structures in areas deemed at risk to sea level rise. The bill also expands the Resilient Florida Grant Program to provide funding to municipalities and counties

“I’ve seen firsthand how The Nature Conservancy — in concert with our partners — continues to find innovative ways to reach legislators to address climate change and sustain healthy lands, oceans, and waters,” says Lynetta Usher Griner, chair of the Government Relations Trustee Committee for TNC in Florida. “Our government relations work is integral to making systemic and lasting changes that benefit nature.” ●

Land STEWARDSHIP



Campaign Impact

July 1, 2018 - June 30, 2023

473,151

acres prescribe burned

38,225

acres treated for
invasive plants

11,358

acres of longleaf pine
forest restored



A Village for Conservation

An inaugural gift from The Spurlino Foundation funds first bunkhouse at Tiger Creek

ECOSYSTEM RESTORATION is a hallmark of conservation and an area in which The Nature Conservancy (TNC) in Florida excels.

“TNC’s mission is not just to protect more land, it’s to make existing protected lands better so nature can thrive,” says Greg Knecht, executive director of TNC in Florida.

But restoring land degraded by development or unsustainable agriculture to its native state is time-and-labor-intensive work. It involves strategic planning and application of prescribed

fire, precision treatment of non-native invasive plant species, seed harvesting and planting, and freshwater systems restoration.

TNC land stewardship teams perform this critical work at TNC’s preserves as part of the Center for Conservation Initiatives (CCI), and at other protected lands managed by conservation partners, like the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Florida Park Service, Florida Forest Service, and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, to name a few.



Learn more
about the
Center for
Conservation
Initiatives

THIS PAGE LEFT TO RIGHT Illustration © iStock; Conservation steward Lydia Engh prepares for the annual wiregrass seed harvest at TNC’s preserve in north Florida. © Brad Keegan OPPOSITE PAGE LEFT TO RIGHT Greg Knecht © Nick Doll Photography; Jeff Rosier, manager of TNC’s Sycan Marsh Preserve in Oregon, participates in Florida’s One Conservancy Fire Learning Exchange. Here, he learns to safely burn around a tree that is home to an eagle’s nest. © Brian Pinson

Stewardship Village

To facilitate restoration, research, and other conservation action, TNC is establishing a Stewardship Village to provide flexible housing for seasonal ecosystem restoration teams, visiting scientists, interns, and fellows.

“Conveniently located, affordable housing is very hard to come by for our hard-working restoration crew members, so our goal is to provide it for them,” says Chris Bergh, field program director for TNC in Florida.

Thanks to a significant initial gift from The Spurlino Foundation, TNC has begun to develop the Stewardship Village at its Tiger Creek Preserve. Located on the eastern edge of the Lake Wales Ridge in south central Florida, the preserve’s 4,980 acres sit on peninsular Florida’s oldest and highest landmass.

“The Foundation wants to see research and science advance to protect the habitat and biodiversity of Florida landscapes and hopes these housing units will allow professionals to better serve this purpose,” says Joanne Spurlino of The Spurlino Foundation.

The Spurlino Foundation gift will establish the infrastructure for the village and install the first tiny home/bunkhouse. Contributions are being sought to fund additional bunkhouses to complete Phase I of the village. Sponsorships and naming opportunities are available. *Email Floridaupdates@tnc.org for more information.*

“The Lake Wales Ridge is a national hotspot of biological diversity, supporting threatened and endangered species of plants and animals that have evolved there since the ridge was the sandy shoreline of the Florida that existed 2.5 million years ago,” Bergh says. “By creating a hub for ecosystem restoration and research activity at Tiger Creek, we help to ensure these species’ continued survival.” ●



...

“TNC’s mission is not just to protect more land, it’s to make existing protected lands better so nature can thrive.”

...

Greg Knecht
Executive director
of TNC in Florida



A Legacy of Giving



Campaign Impact

July 1, 2018 - June 30, 2023

\$90 million

In planned gift commitments were made to TNC for the *Our Florida, Our World* campaign.



You can be a part of the solution.

nature.org/legacy



...

“If you save the land – the plants, the animals, the insects, the snakes, and everything else comes along with that.”

...

Ned Kuehn
Second-generation supporter of The Nature Conservancy

A Family Tradition

Ned and Lisa Kuehn continue and grow the cycle of support for TNC

NED KUEHN IS A LIFELONG nature lover and a second-generation supporter of The Nature Conservancy (TNC). He’s particularly fond of birds, and now that he’s retired, he’s indulging in his favorite pastimes: bird watching and nature photography.

One of his favorite images (pictured below) captures a pair of Florida scrub jays, a federally threatened bird that mates for life. “The Florida

scrub jay is my favorite bird,” Ned says. “It’s the only indigenous bird to the state that lives nowhere else. They live in the scrub lands with the scrub oaks. These are upland, high sandy soils, perfect for building homes, and they’re [scrub jays] being pushed out of existence.”

A retired veterinarian, Ned has supported TNC with annual gifts for decades. In 2015, he and his wife, Lisa, deepened their commitment,



adding TNC in Florida as a beneficiary of their estate and officially joining TNC's Legacy Club.

Recognizing the urgent conservation needs of today, Ned also made a \$100,000 multi-year commitment. In addition to his legacy and annual gifts, Ned shares TNC's mission with like-minded peers and friends. He's also invited TNC representatives to speak at his local Audubon chapter.

'The Earth needs a lot of help'

As a child, Ned learned about philanthropy from his father, who appreciated wildlife and gave regularly to TNC. "I always found it to be just really a fascinating organization," Ned says. "And the Earth needs a lot of help."

A lifetime birder, Ned says he's witnessed a dramatic decline in avian diversity in the Sunshine State. "I used to be able to go out and within a couple days easily see 150 different species of birds. You can't do that anymore ... they just aren't around."

Through his giving to TNC, Ned is a part of the solution. TNC's work to conserve and restore lands to their native condition and to bridge existing protected lands with responsibly managed farm and ranch lands safeguards habitat and creates wildlife corridors that allow nature to thrive.

"You can't save the species if you don't save the land," Ned says. "If you save the land — the plants, the animals, the insects, the snakes, and everything else comes along with that." ●

A Tribute to Georgia Elmes Welles

Oct. 30, 1930 – Aug. 3, 2023

In August, The Nature Conservancy (TNC) lost a longtime friend and supporter with the passing of Georgia Welles.



"A true global citizen, conservation champion and a force for nature, Georgia was a dedicated conservationist and philanthropist who gave tirelessly of her time, talent, and treasure in support of TNC's mission," says Temperince Morgan, director of TNC's Southern U.S. Division and former executive director for the Florida Chapter, where she worked closely with Welles. "Her contributions to the organization set a standard for selfless giving that few have achieved in TNC's 71-year history. She will be sorely missed."

Welles served on the global board for TNC, as well as TNC's boards for Ohio (Trustee Emeritus), the Caribbean, and Argentina (founding member).

She had homes in Ohio, Florida, Canada, and the Caribbean. She didn't just live in these places, though, she became entrenched in her communities and created deep connections there to benefit nature as well as her other passions: the arts and education.

"Georgia's life is a testament to the difference one person can make in the world," Morgan says.



TOWARD A GREENER Future



...

“The Nature Conservancy’s path forward is ambitious, but it is critical that we achieve our objectives for nature, for people, for Florida.”

...

Greg Knecht

Executive director
of TNC in Florida



Learn more about
TNC’s global 2030 goals

‘Our Path Forward’

IN 2022, AN AVERAGE OF 1,000 PEOPLE moved to Florida every day. As natural spaces fast become tomorrow’s housing developments and strip malls, a real threat exists for nature in Florida. Couple this with the fact that the Sunshine State is already experiencing the impacts of climate change, and the situation becomes even more dire.

“What we do between now and 2030 will determine whether we slow global warming enough to avoid the worst impacts of climate change and whether we can halt nature loss,” says Greg Knecht, executive director of The Nature Conservancy (TNC) in Florida.

“Influenced by our campaign projects and achievements, five core strategies (listed, right) will guide our conservation work in Florida through 2026 and set us on a path toward achieving our 2030 goals.”



Building a Sustainable Florida

Collaborating with governments, business, and private entities to guide smart land use that preserves biodiversity, and protects water quality and quantity while encouraging economic growth, environmentally friendly, resilient, and equitable communities.



Transforming Marine Management

Creating more sustainable Florida fisheries through stakeholder partnerships, new and revised policies, modernization of fisheries data collection and management systems, and pilot projects to improve fishing practices — efforts that will collectively enhance ocean health.



Conserving Resilient Lands, Oceans & Waters

Conserving a network of resilient and connected lands, oceans, and waters — critical for carbon sequestration and for preserving biodiversity — by creating connected landscapes for wildlife to move and adapt to a changing climate.



Inspiring Climate Action

Developing and supporting projects, policies, and coalitions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and promote co-benefits such as economic opportunity and energy resilience.



Center for Conservation Initiatives

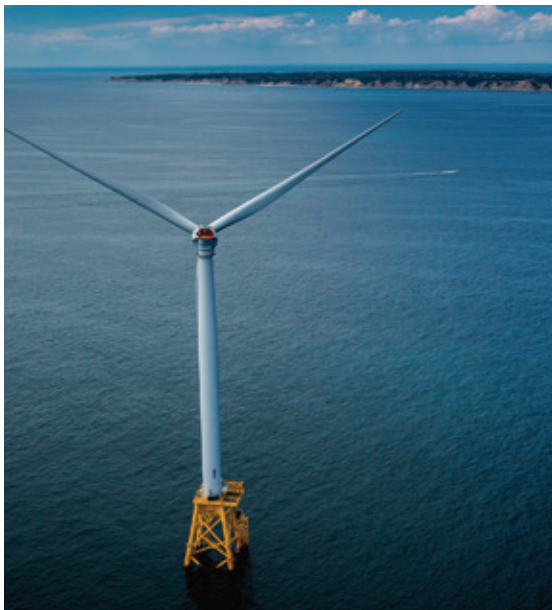
Developing the next generation of conservationists through education, training, and outreach while advancing conservation science, research, stewardship, and volunteerism.

Waters & Oceans

FLORIDA'S OCEANS AND COASTS

are facing increasing and multi-pronged pressures such as sea-level and water temperature rise, threats to the health of fisheries, and renewable energy siting that demands informed decisions. Fish see no boundary lines and neither does TNC in its unified approach to these challenges.

TNC in Florida's freshwater and marine strategies and its partnership with TNC's Ocean and Coasts Network (OCN) – which works across coastlines from Virginia to Texas – are collaborating to ensure healthy springs, rivers, estuaries, and oceans.



Marine Siting and Climate Mitigation

As offshore wind energy expands into the Southeast and Gulf of Mexico, the OCN team is providing ecological information to assist with siting through operations, says Mary Conley, southeast director of marine conservation.

The Southeast Marine Mapping Tool, released in January 2023 by the OCN, has been invaluable to this effort. The comprehensive online database allows users to access critical marine management and project planning information.

“The tool is being used to inform siting of conservation and ocean use activities, such as wind energy,” Conley says. Moving forward, the goal is to expand the tool to the Gulf of Mexico and beyond.

Given the potential for coastal and ocean systems to store carbon, protecting the environment from the effects of climate change, the OCN is also working to “quantify, maintain, and enhance the carbon sequestered in coastal systems,” Conley says.

Fisheries

Healthy oceans depend on healthy fisheries, and fisheries need healthy oceans to thrive. TNC is working with partners across the globe to advance climate-ready fisheries. Over the



past year, TNC collaborated with regional fisheries management councils along the Atlantic Coast on a climate change scenario planning initiative. The finished plan will identify actions to help ensure sustainable fisheries persist and thrive despite climate impacts, and will inform TNC’s future practices.

In Florida, David Moss, fisheries project manager, is working with local communities, partner agencies, and anglers through TNC’s Deck to Depths program to inform anglers about the benefits of descending devices. These simple-to-use and affordable devices protect snapper and grouper species released back to the sea from the effects of barotrauma, which leads to death.

The Discovery Channel’s *The Fish Guyz* TV series recently featured Moss, providing him a

national platform to share the importance of using such devices with recreational anglers.

Moss and the OCN team are also working with anglers and partners to modernize fishery data collection to ensure fish populations remain healthy – supporting fisheries, local economies, and people’s livelihoods.

Oyster Restoration

TNC in Florida’s innovative approach to restoring oyster reefs is establishing a model for estuaries around the world.

Oysters, which provide habitat and a natural water filtration system for estuaries, besides being an economic driver for communities and people’s livelihoods, have declined by 85% globally over the past few decades.

...
“*The marine mapping tool is being used to inform siting of conservation and ocean use activities, such as wind energy.*”



Learn how TNC is partnering with recreational anglers.

...
Mary Conley
Southeast director
of marine conservation

In concert with the Pensacola & Perdido Bays Estuary Program (PPBEP), TNC in Florida’s ocean and coasts strategy director Anne Birch developed a comprehensive Pensacola Bay System (PBS) oyster restoration plan that incorporates oyster habitat, harvest, and aquaculture, and economic and educational considerations. The plan is being used by multiple partners to advance the PBS Oyster Restoration Initiative. In 2023, NOAA awarded \$11 million to the PPBEP to launch the initiative’s 10-year vision to restore 600-hectares of oysters for habitat and fisheries. TNC in Florida is a sub-awardee on the grant.

“Together, with our partners, TNC is transforming marine management and conserving resilient oceans and waters for people and nature today – and tomorrow,” says Greg Knecht, executive director of TNC in Florida.



Three of 33 restored oyster reefs that were completed in 2022 as part of the oyster restoration plan for Pensacola’s East and Blackwater Bays. © Russell C. Mick

Lands and Biodiversity

AT THE HEART OF TNC'S MISSION is a simple yet challenging premise: to conserve the lands and waters, and the biodiversity they hold. Guided by a connected, ecosystem approach, TNC is protecting and restoring Florida's flora and fauna while focusing on building natural resilience to a changing climate.

Expanding Wildlife Corridors

"In light of climate change, it's imperative that wildlife have the ability to migrate to adapt to the changing Florida environment," says Greg Knecht, executive director of TNC in Florida.

Considering the Florida Legislature's largest-ever appropriation for land protection — \$900 million in the fiscal year 2024 budget (see story, p. 8) — TNC stands ready to assist the state in the acquisition of key properties for the wildlife corridor.

"Our vision is to ultimately expand and connect the Florida Wildlife Corridor with other state wildlife corridors to create a chain of protected lands that starts in the Everglades and connects to the Appalachian Mountains, which extend from Georgia to Canada," Knecht says.

Restoring Lands

To ensure Florida's biodiversity, TNC also works to maintain and restore lands to their natural states.

"Land management practices are key to restoring and maintaining natural habitat for native plants

and wildlife," says Chris Bergh, field program director for TNC in Florida.

Many plant species, including the longleaf pine, rely on frequent, low-intensity fires for growth and regeneration. At one time, longleaf pine forests blanketed 90 million acres across Florida and the rest of the southeastern coastal plain. Today, those forests have dwindled to 5.2 million acres.

"Longleaf pine forests are one of the Earth's most biologically diverse natural communities," Bergh says. "The Florida Chapter's forest restoration efforts bring back the trees, the wildlife that live in and among them, and the groundcover species. And the vital fire on our campus preserves and our partners' lands helps to turn the tide of longleaf pine forest loss and degradation."

To this end, in 2023, the Center for Conservation Initiatives (CCI) launched the One Conservancy Fire Learning Exchange program.

The program welcomes TNC and partner staff from across the country to participate in hands-on, prescribed burning training sessions.

"Our Exchanges push prescribed fire professionals to the edge of their comfort zones and provide solid experiential training," says Florida fire program director and North America fire specialist David Printiss.

Through this program and others, TNC's CCI is equipping conservationists and land stewards for tomorrow — benefiting natural areas and protecting biodiversity across the U.S.



Building Sustainable Communities

With Florida's population surging and development on the rise, the threat to the Sunshine State's natural biodiversity is ever present.

"This threat renews the intensity of our work to transform development patterns and practices to focus on sustainable growth, urban conservation, ecological health, biodiversity, protection of water quality and quantity, community resiliency, equity, and social justice," Knecht says.

By building strong and diverse coalitions, working with governments, businesses, and communities, and advocating for smart growth management policies, TNC can help secure a healthy future for nature and people in Florida. ●

CLIMATE Q&A



Campaign Impact

July 1, 2018 - June 30, 2023

TNC in Florida pioneered the use of nature-based solutions (NBS) for coastal resilience with demonstration projects at Brittany Bay Park in Miami Beach and Lake Worth Lagoon in Palm Beach County. TNC also launched NBS projects at Picnic Island Park in Tampa Bay and Morningside Park in Miami. Our leadership in this area helped make NBS a central priority for the Resilient Florida Grant Program, which awarded **\$275 million to 75 resilience projects in 2023.**

On the Frontline with Climate Expert Morgan Higman

GIVEN ITS VULNERABILITY TO SEA LEVEL RISE, more frequent and intense tropical storms, and hurricanes, Florida has been called “ground zero” for climate change. Morgan Higman, climate strategy director for The Nature Conservancy (TNC) in Florida, is laser focused on finding and implementing solutions to Florida’s climate change challenges. We spoke with Higman about her climate action work for TNC.

How does TNC tackle a problem as big as climate change?

Community-centered collaboration is key. We partner with local governments, industry, other nonprofits, and policy makers. We need all the stakeholders at the table to achieve a meaningful impact.

We target specific social and environmental challenges and identify technologies or innovations, and policy solutions that can help address those challenges and enable them to be adopted to scale. We then demonstrate the effectiveness of these approaches with on-the-ground projects and use those projects to educate people and policymakers about solutions available for our state.

Climate change is a very broad challenge, it affects the whole globe, and it operates on a 50-year timescale. In our work, we try to show the immediate and local impacts of climate change. And we try to get people to understand how climate action provides tangible benefits for the things they care about, like clean air, cooler cities, lower

energy costs, and resilience. If we don’t make climate action an immediate and urgent priority, we’ll continue to miss opportunities to make our communities and our environment better.

How do you measure the success of TNC’s climate action efforts?

The short answer is reduced emissions. Starting at home, TNC is measuring its own emissions footprint. We’re taking steps to ensure our operations in Florida are net zero by 2030, but we’re also measuring the impact of our work with local partners and state policymakers in terms of the success of our collaborations and in the federal dollars we’re bringing to the state to support climate action. We’re also collecting polling data on the public perception of climate action. Hopefully, through education and outreach, we’ll see improvements in that data over time.



What is TNC's most valuable resource for making systemic change?

Now, with unprecedented policy and funding support at the national level for addressing climate change, there is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to capitalize on and leverage federal dollars and policy support. This, combined with education, communication, and outreach, can make the greatest difference for Florida, resulting in energy resilience and cost savings for residents as well as environmental benefits.

What climate-action projects are currently in the works?

We're working with frontline communities across the state, like the Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida, Miami-Dade County, and the Emerald Coast, to develop innovative solar energy projects that will help reduce emissions and increase energy resilience.

We will also be engaging rural and farming communities in agrovoltaics projects to demonstrate the benefits of growing low-lying crops adjacent to and under solar energy arrays. And we continue to work to influence climate-friendly policies for the state and to maximize the efforts of eight Florida climate compacts. These compacts — local government partnerships that collaborate with regional stakeholders and TNC — work to advance climate change solutions that benefit people and nature. ●



...
“Climate change is a very broad challenge, it affects the whole globe, and it operates on a 50-year timescale.”
...

Morgan Higman
TNC climate strategy
director in Florida



Learn more about
TNC in Florida's
Climate Strategy.





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LEFT TO RIGHT Natural beauty at Fisheating Creek Outpost © Ralph Pace; Great Egret in Bloom © Jeff Jones/TNC Photo Contest 2022



HELP US REACH OUR NEXT CONSERVATION MILESTONE

Sixty-two years ago, a group of people like you – passionate about protecting Florida’s lands, waters, and wildlife – united to save them. Those early volunteers established The Nature Conservancy in Florida.

Since then, you have been at the center of our story.

You helped us protect and preserve 1.3 million acres of Florida’s natural lands and waters; places that provide vital habitat for wildlife and supply us with fresh air, clean water, and joy.

Help us reach our next conservation milestone.

Learn more about ways you can support our most pressing priorities in Florida and be a part of our next critical conservation win!

For more information, email: floridaupdates@tnc.org