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TAKING ACTION FOR FLORIDA

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2017-2018 Position Statement Regarding Land Conservation Funding

Through Florida's Preservation 2000 and Florida Forever land conservation programs the state has spent approximately 6.3 billion dollars to protect almost 2.5 million acres of environmentally sensitive land. However, during the recent economic recession beginning in 2007, Florida's legacy of funding land acquisition programs to protect critical natural resources, encourage outdoor recreation, and honor the state's cultural heritage via fee-simple purchases and conservation easements was upended. When rapid growth returned to Florida, but funding for land conservation programs did not, Florida voters passed the 2014 Water and Land Conservation Amendment for the primary purpose of restoring funding for conservation and recreation land acquisition.

The Legislature should follow the will of the voters and build on Florida's rich conservation commitment by passing legislation during the 2018 session that:

Annually dedicates the largest share of funds in the Land Acquisition Trust Fund (LATF) to the acquisition of natural areas, working farms and ranches, and close-to-home recreation opportunities through the Acquisition and Restoration Council's scientifically-ranked Florida Forever Priority List, the Rural and Family Lands Protection Program, and the Florida Communities Trust.

To implement that legislation, the Legislature should appropriate funds from the LATF for these land conservation programs. Funding these scientifically-driven programs, rather than funding individual land acquisition projects, will ensure tax-payer dollars are expended effectively, protecting lands with the greatest conservation value.

The conservation of Florida's natural areas and recreational lands is one of the most important things we can do to protect Florida's environment and economy for present and future generations. Due to the pressures of population growth and development it is necessary to conserve critical lands now lest we further imperil our water supply, jeopardize our agricultural and tourism industries, lose habitat necessary to sustain and recover native wildlife populations, suffer increasing losses from flooding, and diminish the quality of life of Floridians. If we continue to fail to fund land conservation programs, over the next 50 years, an additional 5 million acres of natural and working landscapes will be lost to development.