



## **1000 Friends of Florida endorses Lake County's land conservation ballot measure**

Florida's leading nonprofit advocate of planning for sustainable communities, 1000 Friends of Florida, urges general election voters in Lake County to approve funding to acquire and improve land in the county to protect drinking water sources and surface water quality, preserve natural areas and wildlife habitat, and expand parks and trails by voting YES FOR BONDS on their November 5<sup>th</sup> ballot.

This ballot measure would authorize Lake County to issue general obligation bonds worth up to \$50 million to renew the county's land conservation program. These funds would be used to purchase land from willing sellers to be protected from development, or to buy development rights on working farms and forests or other land that would remain on the tax rolls in private ownership and management. Both approaches respect landowners and property rights.

With voter approval of the ballot measure, the bonds would be retired through existing property taxes. The average property owner would pay \$21 a year, or just \$1.75 a month. A citizen oversight committee for the program would be created, all expenditures would be publicly disclosed, and annual audits would be conducted to ensure an open and accountable process.

Funding for the county's land conservation program was last approved by 71% of voters in 2004. The funds authorized under that previous approval were used to acquire Green Mountain Scenic Overlook and Ferndale Preserve, among other prized properties. Approval of the measure on the November ballot would replenish funding for the program and maintain its property tax support. It would not raise taxes.

Lake County is under increasing development pressure from growth spreading west from Orlando as well as rapidly growing areas within the county. The county's population has increased by 87,000 residents, or 28%, just since 2010. Its high quality of life is threatened by the loss of natural areas and their valuable benefits for water quality, wildlife and recreation. With real estate prices escalating, it's urgent for county voters to renew funding for conservation land acquisition, before more critical natural areas are lost forever to development.

In recent years, the Florida Legislature has made sizable investments in land conservation. However, competition is fierce among Florida communities for those dollars. Local governments that raise their own funds for conservation are in the best position to leverage matching money from state, as well as federal and private sources. They also have the resources to continue protecting land regardless of politics in Tallahassee and Washington. Recognizing this reality, forward-thinking communities across Florida have created local land conservation programs, often through voter approval. Lake County needs to keep pace.

1000 Friends' strong support for Lake County's ballot measure is based on our decades of promoting conservation and responsible growth throughout Florida. When critical natural lands are protected from development, more growth is directed toward already developed areas with the infrastructure to support it. This smarter approach not only reduces the impact of development on vulnerable lands, waters and wildlife; it also cushions the blow to taxpayers, who don't get stuck with the bill for stretching public services to distant areas.

We urge Lake County voters to make a timely investment in their waters, natural lands, lands for future trails, quality of life and economy by voting YES FOR BONDS on their November 5<sup>th</sup> ballot.