



1000 Friends of Florida, our state's leading nonprofit advocate of planning for sustainable communities, urges general election voters in Martin County to protect their water quality, wildlife habitat, outdoor recreation and unique natural heritage by voting YES for land conservation on their November 5th ballot.

If approved by voters, this ballot measure — Martin County Forever — would add a half-penny to the sales tax in the county for 10 years, with the proceeds used to permanently protect vulnerable natural lands which might otherwise be lost forever to development. This additional tax would not apply to groceries, prescription medications or school supplies, or to the portion of any purchases over \$5,000. The sales tax increase from the current 6.5 cents to 7 cents a dollar could raise \$18.3 million a year, or \$183 million over the 10-year term of the tax. More than a third of the total (37.5%) would be paid by people who don't live in Martin County.

Funds would be available to purchase lands outright from willing sellers to protect them from development, or to buy permanent conservation easements to help sustain working farms, which would remain on the tax rolls in private ownership and management. Both options respect landowners and property rights.

The dollars raised locally could leverage matching funds from federal, state and private land conservation programs, maximizing investments in land conservation. Those investments would be targeted to four high-priority areas for conservation totaling almost 46,000 acres in the county: Blueways, Indian River Lagoon South, Loxahatchee and St. Lucie Headwaters, and Pal-Mar. Land purchased or protected would be under county control, insulating it from state initiatives like the one that would have turned environmentally sensitive property in Jonathan Dickinson State Park into golf courses.

Additional provisions to ensure the wise investment of funds would include creation of a citizens' environmental lands oversight committee tasked with screening proposed purchases and serving as a primary advisory panel for the Martin County Board of County Commissioners, and an annual audit of land and properties purchased.

In addition to the many environmental benefits, protecting high-priority natural and agricultural land from development would deliver considerable economic benefits: increasing property values, promoting more efficient development patterns and public services, enhancing ecotourism and supporting agriculture.

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, communities across Florida have created local land conservation programs, often through voter approval. It's vital for Martin County to keep pace.

1000 Friends' strong support for Martin County's ballot measure is based on our decades of promoting conservation and responsible growth throughout Florida. Our efforts have included special attention to

Martin County, the home of our revered co-founder, Nathaniel Reed. He knew that 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 fragile land, water and wildlife; it also cushions the blow to taxpayers, who don't get stuck with the bill for stretching public services to distant areas.

Martin County residents are acutely aware that their communities are facing increasing development pressure. Voting YES for land conservation on their November 5th ballot is a great way to protect their environment, economy and quality of life for generations to come.

For more information on Martin County Forever, visit <https://www.martincountyforever.com/>