

# foresight

The Newsletter of 1000 Friends of Florida



SPRING 2025 VOLUME 38 NUMBER 1

1000  
FRIENDS  
of FLORIDA

BUILDING BETTER COMMUNITIES • SAVING SPECIAL PLACES

## From the President

National and state leaders alike have been talking a lot lately about the need to carefully evaluate the return on government spending and to make government more efficient. These are not just worthy goals; they are also strong arguments for two of 1000 Friends' longtime priorities: conserving land and fighting sprawl.

There's no question that investments in conserving high-priority natural and agricultural land generate a high return. Buying such property outright or purchasing its development rights protects land where Florida's aquifers — the source of drinking water for about 90 percent of Floridians — can be recharged. It maintains land where stormwater is stored, diminishing flooding risks for communities, and naturally purified, reducing pollution in nearby waterways. It provides habitat for wildlife, including endangered species like the iconic Florida panther. It preserves land for outdoor recreation and enjoyment, a core element in Florida's quality of life for residents and a magnet for tourists who pump billions of dollars into the state's economy. And it sustains Florida agriculture, another pillar of Florida's economy and rural character in communities throughout the state.

These and other benefits from protecting land are known as ecosystem services. In an analysis commissioned by 1000 Friends and our partners at the University of Florida's Center for Landscape Conservation Planning (CLCP) and the Live Wildly Foundation, the geo-accounting firm Urban3 conservatively estimated the value of ecosystem services of protected land at \$852 per acre. At that rate, preserving just a few thousand acres generates millions of dollars in returns. Protecting the remaining 8 million unprotected acres in the Florida Wildlife Corridor would generate billions of dollars in returns.

Meanwhile, fighting sprawl — low-density suburban development — enhances government efficiency. In another analysis commissioned by 1000 Friends, the CLCP, and Live Wildly, Urban3 showed that the tax revenue generated by sprawl does not cover the costs of the infrastructure — including water, sewer, stormwater, roads, schools, police and fire protection — that must be extended to serve it. As detailed by Special Projects Director Vivian Young in an article in this newsletter, sprawl is a fiscally insolvent development pattern, and a bad deal for taxpayers.

These examples show that 1000 Friends' longtime policy priorities remain as relevant and urgent as ever. With your support, we will continue to fight and win battles for them in Tallahassee and communities throughout Florida.

*Paul Owens*

Paul Owens  
President



Paul Owens



Egret among the cypress

Photo Courtesy of Erich Martin

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**Foresight** is published by 1000 Friends of Florida, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit membership organization founded in 1986. 1000 Friends of Florida works to save special places and build better communities.



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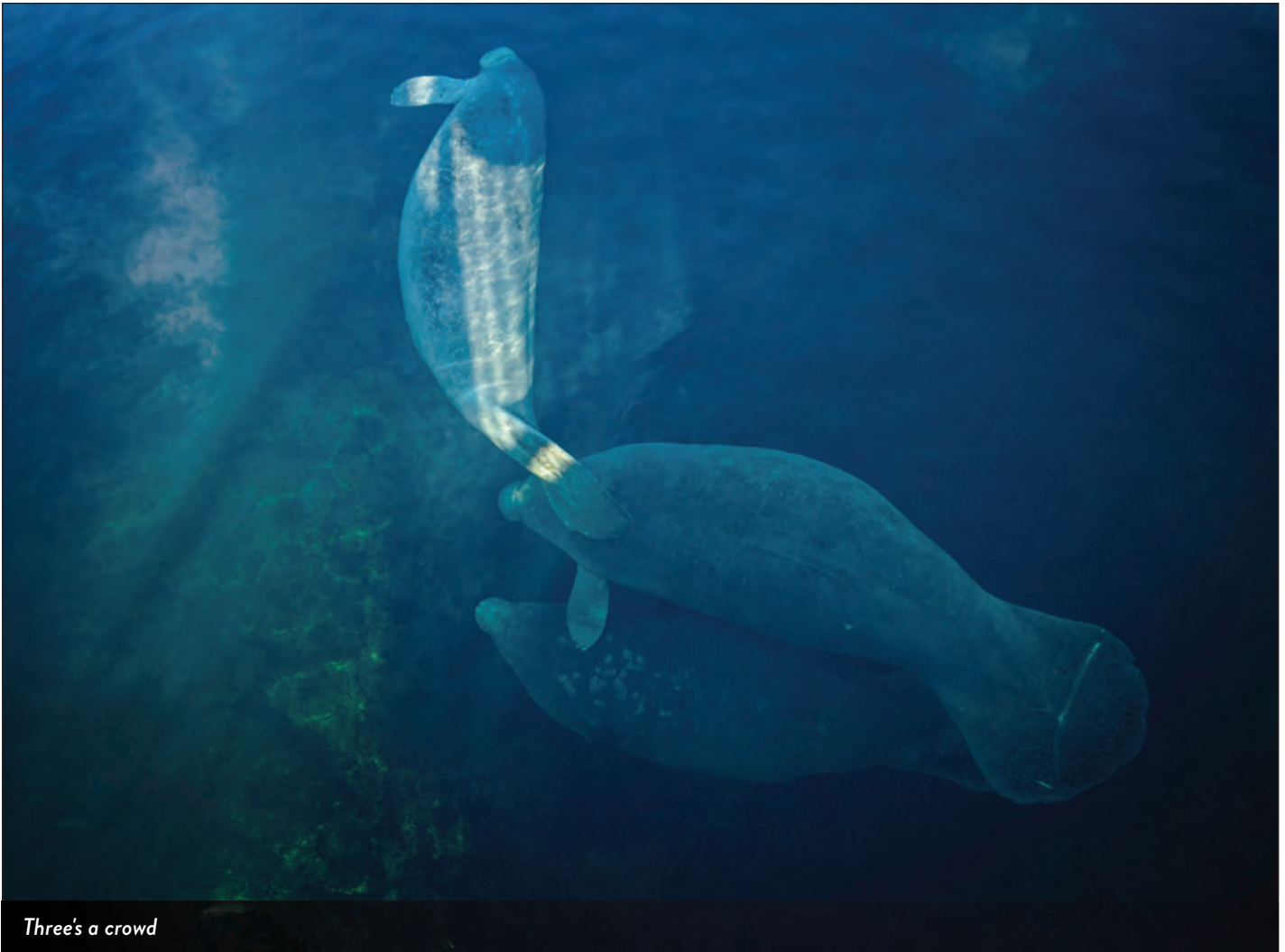


Photo Courtesy of Erich Martin

Three's a crowd

## PHOTOGRAPHER in FOCUS: Erich Martin

Based in Tallahassee, photographer Erich Martin is passionate about capturing a lesser-seen side of the South, especially Florida, as well as connecting with people and telling unique stories through his images. When he's not behind the camera, you can often find him fighting a losing battle with a crossword puzzle, making folks groan with bad puns, or working his way through a dozen oysters at one of the many dives along the Forgotten Coast - sometimes all at once. His photography has been featured commercially for Visit Tallahassee, Whataburger, The Nature Conservancy, the FSU



Erich Martin

Photo Courtesy of Erich Martin

Alumni Association, and more. His editorial work has appeared in The New York Times, NPR, Reader's Digest, Flamingo Magazine, and A24's "Florida!" travel guide.

Erich is available for both commercial and editorial photography work—if you have a project in mind, reach out to him at <https://www.erichmartin.com/contact>

Check out more of his recent work and projects on his website : <https://www.erichmartin.com>

## 2025 Legislative Update

The regular 2025 session of the Florida Legislature officially kicked off on March 4, but the state House and Senate met in a special session on January 27 at the behest of Governor DeSantis, who asked them to tackle immigration, condominium regulations and relief for storm-battered agricultural communities prior to their general session. After some political wrangling, the Legislature passed, and the governor signed, a package of new laws dealing with immigration enforcement, leaving other issues to address in the regular session. Lawmakers are scheduled to meet during that session for 60 days, through May 2.

Although they rejected the directive to tackle agricultural assistance during the special session, they have made it a priority during their regular session, so far. Notably, Senate Bill 110 has been dubbed the “Rural Renaissance Bill”, and is intended to provide planning and financial resources to fiscally challenged communities to improve transportation networks, communications connectivity, health care and more. Having recently conducted workshops on future growth and development in three counties that would be provided resources under SB 110, we are especially interested in promoting positive outcomes that would expand opportunities in these areas while preserving their character and quality of life.

Meanwhile, 1000 Friends of Florida is also actively engaged on other issues at the Capitol, continuing to advocate for policies that promote environmentally and fiscally sustainable communities and preservation of our agricultural and natural areas, including state parks and the Florida Wildlife Corridor, as well as adequate funding for affordable housing, historic preservation, and water and environmental restoration projects. As always, we are working against policies that support irresponsible development in high-hazard, flood-prone areas and encourage sprawl.

Senate Bill 80 and House Bill 209, similar measures sponsored by two legislators whose districts include Martin County – Senator Gayle Harrell and Representative John Snyder – would increase public notifications and help prevent incompatible development in state parks to ensure that proposals like those we helped to defeat this past summer – to

add golf courses, pickleball courts and lodges in 9 state parks – won't return. Before the regular session began, we were among 70 groups who urged the Legislature to strengthen the bills to specifically prohibit certain types of development, remove ambiguous language that would make enforcement difficult and include other state conservation lands, like state forests and wildlife management areas.

Alternatively, we're fighting bills that would require local governments to approve development regardless of conflicts with their local growth plans, and squash opportunities for citizens to weigh in on decisions about local land use within their communities. Other troublesome bills would eliminate local ability to implement important programs such as Community Redevelopment Areas and dismantle regional planning councils, which among other services, provide planning support for many rural communities.

We will be staying on top of these and other issues throughout the session, and alerting our followers when they can reinforce our efforts by contacting their elected representatives in Tallahassee. Working together, we can advance good public policy to build better communities and save special places throughout Florida.



Swamp stealth

Photo Courtesy of Erni Martin

# Implementing the Brevard Barrier Island Protection Act

In 2023, 1000 Friends of Florida, the Sea Turtle Conservancy, and the Brevard Barrier Island Protection Alliance drafted legislation to establish the Brevard Barrier Island Area of Critical State Concern. Unanimously passed by the Legislature and signed into law by Governor DeSantis, the law strengthens protections against incompatible development in unincorporated Brevard County south of Melbourne Beach to Sebastian Inlet. It created Florida's first new Area of Critical State Concern in decades, reviving a strategy that could be used in other environmentally sensitive areas.

The designation was granted because the island contains some of North America's most fragile coastal ecosystems and the world's largest nesting

aggregation of loggerhead sea turtles. It requires local government to adopt comprehensive plan policies protecting this critical habitat, with the Florida Department of Commerce reviewing development projects for compliance.

We remain engaged with allies to uphold the law's intent. For example, we identified shortcomings in county staff's proposed development guidelines, a concern echoed by Florida Commerce. We will continue working with county staff, Florida Commerce, and partners to ensure adopted policies provide maximum protection for the endangered dune system and nesting sea turtles in this unique, environmentally sensitive area.

## 2024 Local Land Conservation Ballot Results

In an otherwise sharply divided electorate, Florida united behind at least one priority on last November's ballots: preserving environmentally valuable land. Voters in four counties — Clay, Lake, Osceola and Martin — overwhelmingly gave their approval to fund local land conservation programs. We were pleased to endorse all four, and thrilled to celebrate these results:

- **Protect Clay County:** Authorized up to \$45 million in bonds, repaid through a small property tax increase, to establish a local conservation program. The measure was approved 73-27.
- **Lake Forever:** Renewed Lake County's conservation program with up to \$50 million in bonds, funded through existing property taxes. The proposal scored a resounding victory, 80-20.
- **SAVE Osceola:** Secured \$70 million in bonds for the Environmental Lands Conservation Program, without raising current property taxes. Voters said yes by an astounding margin of 84-16.
- **Martin County Forever:** Added a half-penny to the county sales tax for 10 years to raise \$183

million for land conservation, of which a significant portion will come from visitors rather than residents. Voters approved, 64-36.

Passage of these proposals will open the flow of much-needed investments in preserving ecologically sensitive lands, benefiting water quality, wildlife, and recreation in these counties. These initiatives also will attract federal, state, and private matching funds, multiplying local taxpayers' investments.

Adding to these victories for conservation in last year's election, voters in Seminole County approved two measures to protect conservation land and strengthen limits on development within the county's designated rural area, and voters in neighboring Orange County created their own rural area. We also endorsed these proposals, and they also passed overwhelmingly.

Thanks to the vision of the leaders behind these ballot measures and the wisdom of voters in supporting them, six counties in Florida took action to advance their prospects for clean water, abundant wildlife habitat and accessible outdoor spaces for generations to come.

## The Economics of Development in Florida

Some Floridians follow the mantra that any growth is good growth. After all, new suburban development and strip shopping centers bring an influx of construction jobs and short-term revenue to often cash-strapped communities. Growth is viewed as a way to fill local government coffers quickly and often is approved without much if any fiscal evaluation.

While new development does generate new property and sales tax revenue, does this offset the short- and long-term costs of new development? If the new development is low-density, the answer is no.

The geo-accounting firm Urban3 helps governments understand their communities' fiscal health by considering the potency of different development patterns from a property-tax value perspective. As we compare automobiles based on the miles they can travel per gallon, Urban3 compares the revenue generated per acre of development with what a community's taxpayers need to pay for the infrastructure to support the development.

In its *Economics of Development in Florida* report, Urban3 concludes:

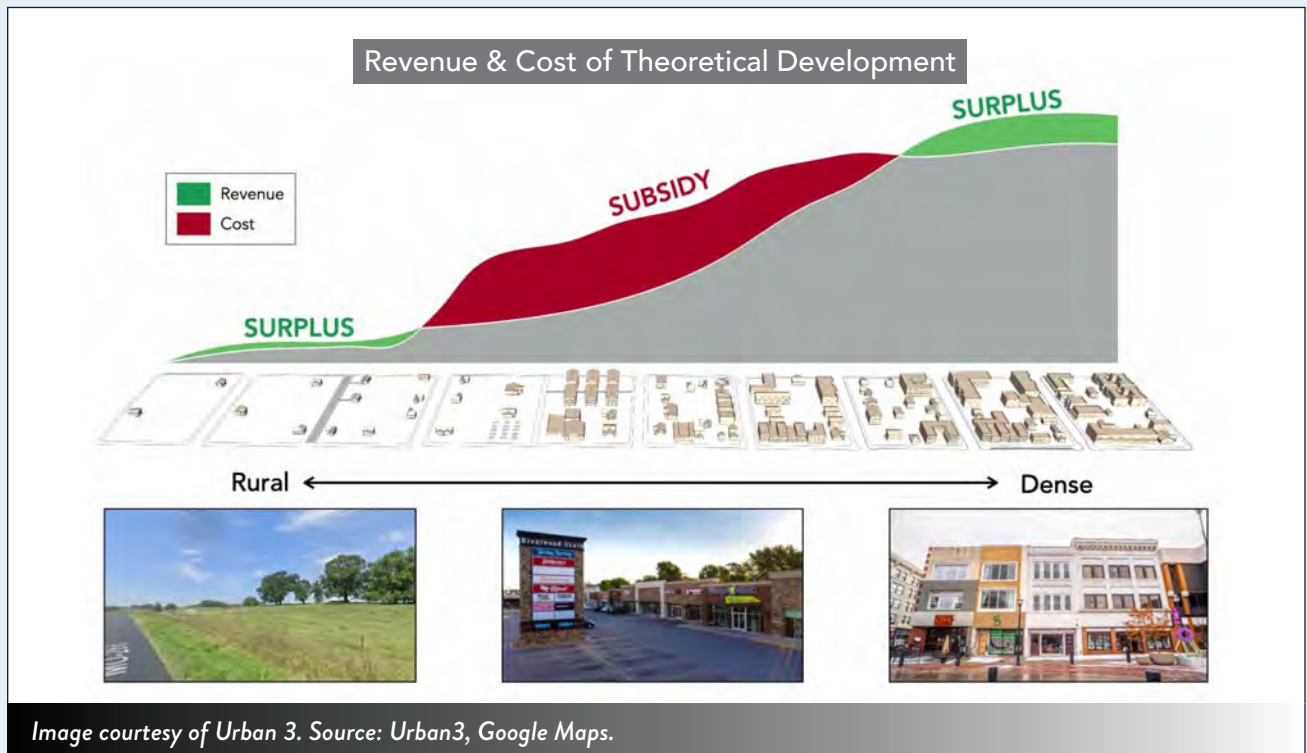
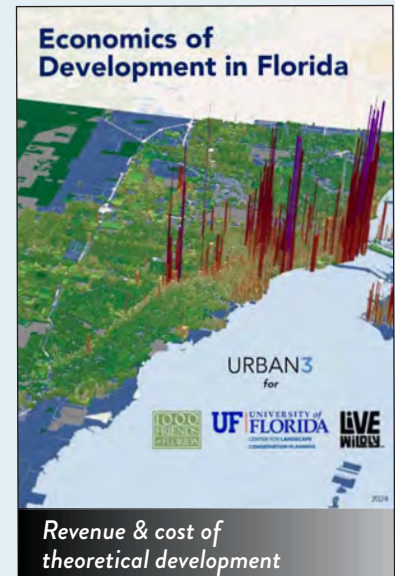
- Low-density suburban development does not produce enough tax revenue per acre to pay for its

infrastructure liabilities. This form of development is fiscally insolvent over the long term.

- By contrast, denser, walkable, mixed-use development patterns produce far more tax revenue per acre than is needed to pay for their associated infrastructure.

In other words, denser areas subsidize sprawling suburban development.

Property tax accounts for a significant share of revenue for Florida's local governments, and denser development generates more property tax per acre. In



### Expense & Revenue Per Acre by Land Use: Wimauma, Florida

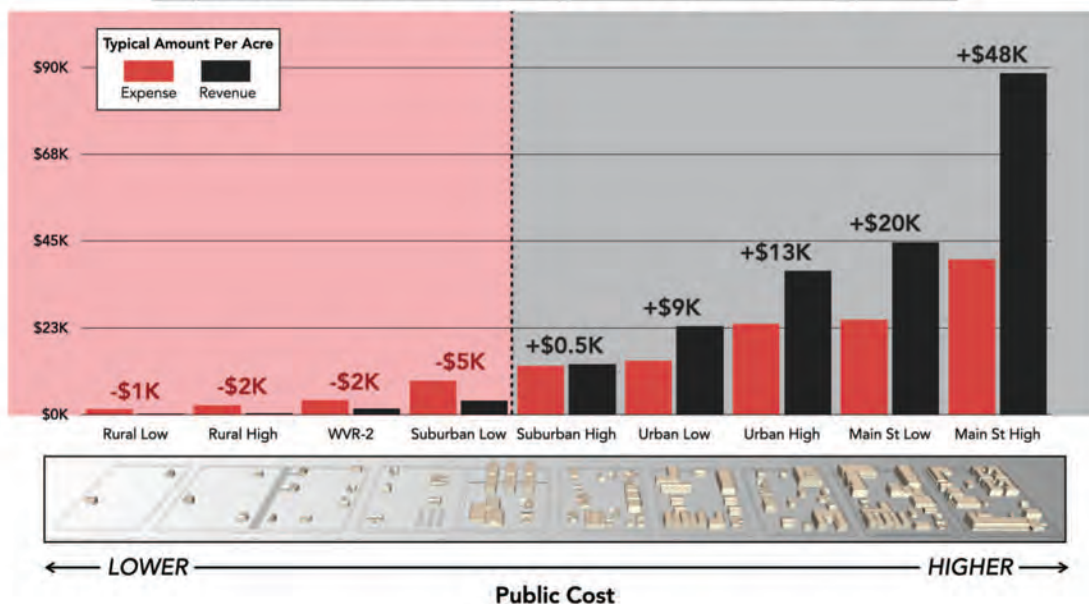


Image courtesy of Urban3. Source: Hillsborough County FL Assessor, Urban3 Estimates.

Nassau County, the compact 83-acre Amelia Park generates \$2.6 million per acre in property tax, while a comparably sized area in the sprawling Will Hardee Road Neighborhood generates only \$1.5 million per acre. Comparing sales tax revenue, downtown Gainesville in Alachua County generates \$94,000 in sales tax per acre, while outlying areas only average \$48,000 per acre. These patterns are repeated in community after community.

Looking at the cost side of the ledger, Urban3 finds that low-density suburban development does not generate enough tax revenue to cover the costs for its roads, water, sewer, stormwater, and other infrastructure and services extending miles out into the country. Simply put, less infrastructure is less expensive. And the longer-term costs of maintenance, repair, and eventual replacement of infrastructure must be included.

The bottom line is that Florida's local governments need to "do the math" and understand the short- and long-term fiscal consequences of development decisions they make. After all, it's the taxpayers who will foot the bill.

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Last citrus stand before the state line

Photo Courtesy of Erich Martin

## 2040 County Workshops

This past fall, 1000 Friends of Florida hosted community workshops in Taylor, Levy, Dixie, and Martin counties, engaging residents, local officials, and agricultural stakeholders in discussions about growth, conservation, and economic resilience. These workshops built upon the findings of our Agriculture 2040/2070 Report, which examines how Florida's rural lands can be protected while also accommodating future population growth.

### Taylor, Levy, and Dixie Counties: Addressing Rural Growth and Economic Challenges

Hurricane impacts, economic shifts, and land-use changes present significant challenges for many of Florida's Big Bend rural counties. During our workshops, residents emphasized the importance of sustaining local industries and agricultural practices, and protecting rural quality of life, while also preparing for future environmental changes.

Taylor County's timber industry has long been a pillar of the local economy, but sawmill closures last year have left uncertainty about its future. Workshop discussions centered on replanting timber crops, supporting landowners, and integrating conservation with economic opportunities such as eco-tourism and outdoor recreation. With most growth expected in Perry and surrounding urban areas, strategies like infill development and conservation easements were recommended to protect rural landscapes.



Levy County faces growing development pressure, with projections showing a 20% population increase by 2040 and an additional 22% by 2070. With over 224,000 acres of unprotected land in the Florida Wildlife Corridor, workshop discussions highlighted the need for conservation incentives, compact growth in urban centers like Bronson, Chiefland, and Williston, and updated land-development policies to adapt to changing conditions, including rising sea levels projected to inundate nearly 50,000 acres of coastal land.



### Martin County 2040: Safeguarding Rural Lands and Everglades Heritage

In Martin County, development pressures vary significantly between its urbanized eastern communities and its rural western



lands. While the eastern coastline is home to dense development and higher property values, the western region remains largely agricultural and ecologically significant, serving as a gateway to the Everglades. With support from the Guardians of Martin County and the University of Florida's Center for Landscape Conservation Planning, 1000 Friends analyzed two 2040 land development scenarios: one following current growth patterns, and another directing growth toward urban service districts while preserving the county's largely undeveloped western lands. Workshop discussions reinforced the importance of proactive planning to maintain Martin's high quality of life while strengthening environmental protections.

1000 Friends of Florida remains committed to working alongside local communities to shape policies that support sustainable development, conservation, and economic resilience. Stay updated on this work at [1000fof.org](http://1000fof.org).

With three hurricanes striking Dixie County in the past year, resilience planning and rebuilding was a key focus of our December workshop. Residents expressed a strong desire to maintain the county's rural nature while expanding economic opportunities. Concerns about infrastructure limitations, housing affordability, and land-use pressures led to recommendations such as expanding conservation easements, promoting sustainable business development, and strengthening local planning capacity to prepare for long-term growth.







## Highlights from Our 2024-2025 WEBINAR SERIES

This season, 1000 Friends of Florida hosted two impactful webinar series, engaging thousands of participants in presentations about Florida's land-use policies, conservation efforts, and legislative updates. Our regular John M. DeGrove Webinar

Series explored critical planning and policy issues, while the Planning to Protect the Florida Wildlife Corridor 2.0 series focused on balancing conservation and agriculture amid development pressures in our rapidly growing state.

### John M. DeGrove WEBINAR SERIES

This year's DeGrove webinars covered a range of planning and policy topics, attracting hundreds of participants per session:

- **Governor Bob Graham's Planning Legacy (Sept. 25)** – A tribute to Governor Graham's leadership in shaping Florida's growth management laws.
- **Maximizing Conservation Funding for Local Governments (Oct. 23)** – A deep dive into securing funding for land conservation efforts.
- **Florida's Bert Harris Act: Property Rights Unbalanced? (Nov. 13)** – A legal analysis of how the Bert Harris Act affects local planning.
- **Live Local vs. Local Planning (Dec. 11)** – Examining the Live Local Act's impact on local zoning and affordable housing.
- **2025 Florida Legislative Webinars (Feb. 19, April 2, May 14)** – Keeping planners and advocates informed on key bills and budget decisions affecting conservation, water protection, transportation, and community planning.

### Planning to Protect the Florida Wildlife Corridor

In partnership with the University of Florida's Center for Landscape Conservation Planning, this series explored the critical role of land-use planning in protecting the Florida Wildlife Corridor:

- **What's Sprawl Got to Do with It? (Jan. 22)** – How compact urban growth can reduce sprawl and protect rural lands.
- **Challenges and Opportunities for Florida's Agricultural Lands (Feb. 12)** – Exploring the intersections of agriculture and conservation in the Corridor.
- **The Urban/Rural Interface (March 5)** – Addressing land-use conflicts where development meets natural lands.
- **Building Bridges (April 17)** – A roundtable discussion on fostering cooperation among farmers, conservationists, and planners to protect Florida's natural and agricultural lands.

*All webinars were recorded and are available for viewing at [1000fof.org/past-webinar-broadcasts/](https://1000fof.org/past-webinar-broadcasts/). Visit our website to access the full archives and stay informed on Florida's most pressing planning and conservation issues.*

## Welcome Chadwick Leonard!

1000 Friends of Florida is excited to welcome Chadwick Leonard as our new Conservation & Planning Advocacy Coordinator. In this role, Chadwick will track and analyze state and local policy proposals impacting community planning and conservation, helping to advance 1000 Friends' advocacy and outreach efforts. He will work closely with our team to engage policymakers, partners, and citizens in supporting smart growth, protecting Florida's natural resources, and strengthening public participation in planning decisions.

"Chadwick brings valuable experience and a deep commitment to Florida's future," said 1000 Friends of Florida President Paul Owens. "We are excited for him to contribute to our mission of building better communities and saving special places throughout the state."

With a strong background in policy advocacy and grassroots organizing, Chadwick most recently served as a



Chadwick Leonard

Grassroots Political Organizer with the Florida Education Association, mobilizing advocates for legislative efforts. Previously, as Florida State Coordinator for the Fair Elections Center's Campus Vote Project, he led civic engagement initiatives and trained student organizers.

Chadwick earned a Bachelor of Arts in Mass Communications from Bethune-Cookman University, with a minor in Public Relations and Advertising, and is a Certified Nonprofit Professional through the Nonprofit Leadership Alliance.

We are grateful to the River Branch Foundation, a longtime supporter of 1000 Friends, for providing a generous grant to allow us to strengthen our advocacy by adding Chadwick to our team. We are thrilled to have him on board and look forward to his contributions. Please join us in welcoming him to 1000 Friends of Florida.



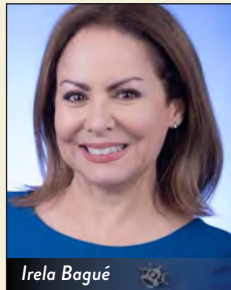
Canopy roads

Photo Courtesy of Erich Martin

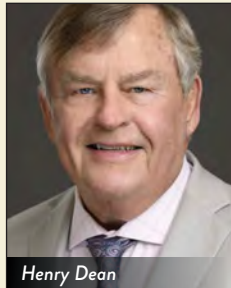
# 1000 Friends of Florida Welcomes Four New Board Members

We are pleased to welcome four distinguished professionals to our Board of Directors.

**Irela Bagué** (Coral Gables) is the Director of Governments and Water Resilience for Florida and the Caribbean at Black & Veatch. As Miami-Dade County's first Chief Bay Officer, she secured over \$70 million in state and federal funding for Biscayne Bay restoration and chaired the Biscayne Bay Task Force, leading long-term recovery strategies. She also served as Vice-Chair of the South Florida Water Management District, advancing key water resource policies.



**Henry Dean** (St. Augustine Beach) has decades of experience in environmental leadership, serving 17 years as Executive Director of the St. Johns River Water Management District, where he helped restore 200,000 acres of St. Johns River marshland. He also led the South Florida Water Management District, overseeing the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan, and later served two terms on the St. Johns County Commission.



**Carlos Lacasa** (Coral Gables) is an attorney and executive with expertise in insurance and healthcare law. He chaired the Board of Governors for Citizens Property Insurance Corporation and served as Senior Vice President and General Counsel for MCNA Health Care Holdings. As a former state legislator, he chaired the Florida House Appropriations Committee, shaping state fiscal policy.



**Bryon White** (New Smyrna Beach) is an entrepreneur, conservationist, and business leader, co-founding Yaupon Brothers Tea and co-owning Eagle's Nest Farms, Florida's oldest organic farm. A lifelong advocate for land preservation, he established the Wild Florida Conservation PAC and serves on the SXSW board of advisors. His background includes service as a Volusia County Public Protection Captain in law enforcement, EMT services, and ocean rescue.



We are excited to have Irela, Henry, Carlos, and Bryon join us in shaping a more sustainable future for Florida! Learn more about our new Board Members here: <https://1000fof.org/about/board/>



## DONOR HIGHLIGHTS

### ~~ We Thank Our Donors ~~

At 1000 Friends of Florida, we are both fortunate and grateful to receive contributions from a variety of sources, including individuals, foundations, businesses and nonprofit allies. Together these sources power our activities and make possible our accomplishments.

We venerate our longtime contributors, including many of you who have loyally and generously supported us for decades. But we also celebrate every new donor who makes an investment, no matter the amount, in our organization and its mission of building better

communities and saving special places throughout the state we love.

We strive every day to prove worthy of your trust. We truly couldn't do it without you. With your indispensable contributions, we'll keep doing all we can amid Florida's relentless growth to protect our environment and quality of life for generations to come.

Many thanks to all our supporters for helping us to achieve a better, brighter future for Florida.

## Make 1000 Friends of Florida Part of Your Charitable Giving Plans this Year!

### ~~ Protect Florida Today ~~

Please Consider Gifts of: **Cash - Stock - IRA Distributions**

Our members are crucial in helping to ensure that our state's unique ecosystems and communities thrive in harmony. Please help us in our efforts to positively impact our state's landscapes for years to come.

## Protect Florida Tomorrow

### Please Consider Legacy Gifts

Making a gift through a charitable bequest designating 1000 Friends of Florida as the beneficiary of assets such as insurance policies, retirement funds and financial accounts is one of the simplest yet most enduring ways to support our mission. Your estate gift will help 1000 Friends continue the critical work of saving special places and building better communities to ensure a healthy future for Florida. By including 1000 Friends of Florida in your estate plan today you will create a legacy of protecting Florida for generations to come.\*

For more information on ways to support 1000 Friends, please contact Toni Russell at [trussell@1000fof.org](mailto:trussell@1000fof.org)

\*Consult your attorney or financial advisor when considering your gift planning options.





# THANK YOU to Our Donors Who Contributed During the Period from October 1, 2024 to February 15, 2025.



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### Estus Whitfield

**F**or decades, Estus Whitfield of Tallahassee has been a leader on environmental policy in Florida.

From 1979 to 1999, he served as chief environmental advisor and policy coordinator to four Florida governors. After retiring from state service in 1999, he became an environmental consultant. In 2011 he and former Governor Bob Graham created the Florida Conservation Coalition, representing more than 40 organizations, including 1000 Friends of Florida. Excerpts from his responses to our questions are below. To read the full transcript, visit [1000fof.org/about/donor-spotlight/](http://1000fof.org/about/donor-spotlight/)

“I choose to support 1000 Friends because it effectively and uniquely advocates for a broad spectrum of protections and safeguards for Florida — for planned, rational development and growth; protection of water quality and natural systems; and land conservation ...

“Florida has never had better and more effective advocates for Florida and its environment than Bob Graham and Nat Reed — they were extraordinary ...



*Estus Whitfield*

There are not enough words to describe Nat’s influence and achievements on behalf of Florida and the U.S. environment. ...

“I consider the greatest challenges to Florida to be balancing inevitable growth with planned, rational development; protecting the quality and quantity of our natural water — rivers, streams, springs, lakes and coastal waters, and remediation of impaired waters; conserving water, especially ground water, and limiting development and growth according to safe use;

protecting the best of Florida’s land through purchase and less-than-fee purchase; and better educating the public as to the benefits of a clean and orderly state through an environmental education program including the public school system starting in kindergarten. ...

“My best hope for Florida’s future would be to see a happy, successful resolution of the challenges above, and that will require the all-out efforts of our future leaders who will be as dedicated as were Bob Graham, Reubin Askew, and Nat Reed.”