

2024-2025 ANNUAL REPORT



Old Florida Vibes (Hunter Turner)

FROM THE PRESIDENT

Florida's communities run the gamut from major metropolises to rural towns to coastal villages. Since our founding in 1986, 1000 Friends of Florida has been committed to defending and strengthening a growth-planning process for our state's communities that reflects the specific needs and values of their residents. One size does not fit all, especially in Florida.

In the past year, we were reminded of Florida's diversity as we conducted workshops on future land development in three counties in Florida's Big Bend: Taylor, Levy and Dixie. Unlike others where we have held workshops, these rural, fiscally constrained counties are not expecting substantial population growth in the next few decades. But that gives them a greater opportunity to preserve their natural and agricultural lands, which produce valuable benefits for each county's environment, economy and quality of life.

Using scenarios in each county for future development prepared by our project partners at the University of Florida's Center for Landscape Conservation Planning (CLCP), we recommended policies to promote land conservation and direct growth toward developed areas with the infrastructure to accommodate it. This approach would best preserve the character of these counties, while still leaving plenty of space to create jobs and encourage investment — goals we heard consistently from the residents we surveyed.

Also in the past year, we returned to Martin County, an area of special interest for us since our inception. In another joint effort with the CLCP — this one

sponsored by the Guardians of Martin County — we analyzed future development scenarios, with a focus on the county's largely undeveloped western lands. We confirmed that the overwhelming majority of those lands are environmentally valuable and priorities for conservation. Our analysis also found that the county could fully absorb its projected population growth by 2040 within its existing urban services districts with only a modest increase in development density, and preserve its cherished western lands.



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These are just a few of our activities from a busy and productive year. More details are included in this report. We are hopeful that our engagement in communities across Florida will steer them to growth policies that protect their environment, character and quality of life. But some recent misguided decisions from state lawmakers could prevent local governments from prioritizing sustainable development. With your continuing support, we will keep pushing to restore and enhance every community's right to choose its future.



Paul Owens

Paul Owens
President



2024-2025 MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

SAVING SPECIAL PLACES

- **Safeguarding state parks** — Worked with allies to force withdrawal of plan for incompatible development in nine state parks, and spearheaded successful campaign to pass strong legislation to stop future development plans
- **Maintaining Florida agriculture** — Led effort that defeated proposal to expose vulnerable farmland to development, and helped secure \$250 million to preserve working farms
- **Improving water quality** — With partners, secured \$1.5 billion for Everglades restoration and water quality improvements throughout Florida
- **Boosting local land protection** — Endorsed and promoted successful passage of ballot initiatives to preserve valuable natural land in Clay, Lake, Martin and Osceola counties
- **Strengthening policies to prevent sprawl** — With partners, promoted successful passage of ballot measures that enhance local governments' ability to protect rural land from premature development in Orange and Seminole counties
- **Protecting conservation land** — With allies, blocked proposed swaps of conservation land in Guana River Wildlife Management Area and Withlacoochee State Forest
- **Preserving Brevard's Barrier Island** — Continued to work with local allies to fulfill state law protecting the Brevard Barrier Island from incompatible development
- **Uniting for Florida's environment** — Maintained efforts with coalitions to protect the Everglades, natural springs, Florida's coasts, the Ocklawaha River, and more

Featured Photography

Old Florida Vibes is the work of drone photographer, illustrator, author, and Florida native D. Hunter Turner. Inspired by preserving and protecting wild spaces and public places for the next generation of explorers and native flora and fauna, Turner focuses his artistic endeavors on shedding light on the changing landscape and the clashes the natural world is experiencing with human forces. He serves as a communications advisory board member to the Florida Springs Council, where he hopes to lead others to the importance of advocating for the protection of Florida Springs. His work can be found at OldFloridaVibes.com

BUILDING BETTER COMMUNITIES

- **Leading in Martin County** — Presented public workshop to highlight forecasts for sustainable development, and advised leaders and citizens on strengthening county's growth plan
- **Advocating for Palm Beach County** — Maintained efforts to oppose incompatible development in the County's Agricultural Reserve
- **Informing plans in St. Johns County** — Participated in planning focus group to reinforce urban growth boundary as an important tool to prevent sprawl
- **Holding the Line in Miami-Dade** — As fiscal sponsor of coalition dedicated to smart growth and environmental protection in Florida's largest county, continued to organize opposition to development outside Miami-Dade's urban development boundary
- **Envisioning the Big Bend's future** — Conducted workshops and delivered presentations to local decision makers to promote sustainable growth and development policies in Taylor, Levy and Dixie counties
- **Promoting inclusive planning in Leon County** — Mobilized public participation and advocated for a year-long refinement process to improve major updates to the Tallahassee-Leon County Comprehensive Plan.
- **Securing planning resources** — Led successful effort to defeat legislative proposals to abolish regional planning councils and community redevelopment areas
- **Expanding workforce housing** — With coalition allies, secured full funding from state's affordable housing trust funds
- **Improving community resilience** — Helped obtain \$170 million from state lawmakers to fortify communities against flooding, sea-level rise and other climate impacts
- **Upholding Florida history** — Helped pass legislation to raise fine for demolishing historic buildings
- **Warning renters about flooding** — Supported legislation passed to expand state's flood disclosure requirement to rental properties



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CONNECTING PEOPLE WITH PLANNING

- **Empowering citizens and professionals** – In free Dr. John M. DeGrove webinar series, presented thousands of attendees with valuable information and free continuing education credits on cutting-edge planning topics, including the Live Local and Bert J. Harris acts
- **Protecting the Florida Wildlife Corridor** – Conducted second series of four webinars, and developed online curriculum for local government leaders and planners, on planning to protect the Florida Wildlife Corridor
- **Keeping watch on Tallahassee** – Provided status and analysis online for scores of key bills in planning, resilience, conservation, water quality and transportation during 2025 legislative session
- **Highlighting planning's economic benefits** – Released study demonstrating the advantages for taxpayers of compact urban development compared with low-density sprawl
- **Promoting better biosolids management** – Completed report and online StoryMap on the environmental impacts and societal costs of land application of sewage sludge in Florida
- **Enhancing land preservation** – Published land-use expert's paper showing there is no constitutional or statutory right to develop rural or agricultural land
- **Guiding local planning** – Advised citizens in multiple counties undergoing updates in their growth plans
- **Reaching out to communities** – Delivered presentations to diverse audiences across Florida, and attended public exhibitions, to share the benefits of responsible, citizen-driven smart growth
- **Educating Floridians on planning** – Awarded American Planning Association (APA) Florida's Award of Excellence for Grassroots Initiatives for our educational efforts

Tribute to Legacy Donors: **J. Gwynne and Frances W. Thorsen**

Earlier this year, we were honored to receive an extraordinary gift from the estate of J. Gwynne Thorsen and his wife, Frances Thorsen, a couple whose lives quietly but powerfully shaped the world around them. Mr. Thorsen, a renowned home designer, passed away in 2024, several years after his beloved wife in 2018. Together, they lived lives marked by beauty, devotion, and generosity.

For decades, they split their time between two coastal communities — Nantucket and Hobe Sound. Their Florida story began on the water in Hobe Sound, living aboard a boat they affectionately named *Private Lives*, a nod to their quiet, deeply connected world. Eventually, they settled into a nearby house, though the sea never left their hearts. “They loved their proximity to the water in both communities,” recalled their niece, Mimi McFall.

Private and thoughtful, they poured their love into one another, into friendships, and into causes they believed in. Their estate tells that story — a legacy carefully composed, with generous bequests made to nonprofits across both Florida and Massachusetts. From charitable healthcare to child welfare, from the arts to conservation, their giving reflected their values and vision for a better world.

“They were very thoughtful about their choices, about all the things they did,” their niece shared. “The fact that they selected 1000 Friends — obviously, they felt very strongly about it.”

We are profoundly grateful to be among the organizations chosen to carry their legacy forward. Their gift will help us protect Florida's special places and build stronger, more resilient communities — a lasting tribute to a couple who cherished beauty, connection, and quiet impact.



~THANK YOU~

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Donations of \$1,000 and greater for the period from July 1, 2024 to June 30, 2025

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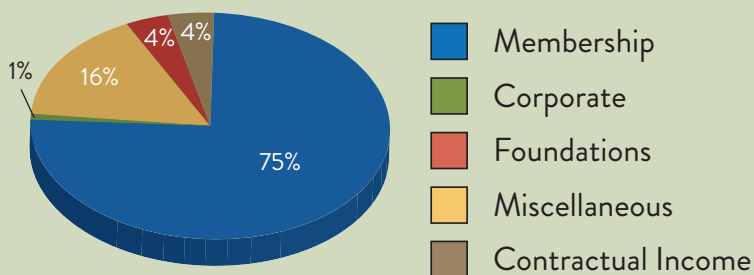
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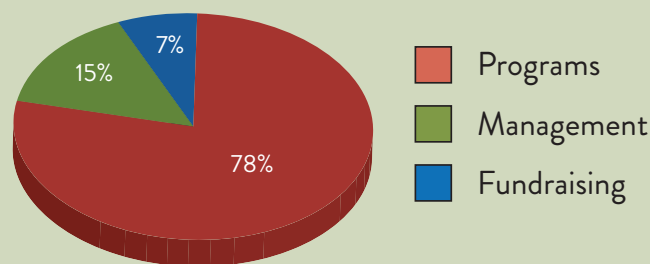
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