

1000 Friends of Florida Endorses Continuation of Conservation Charlotte

Vote Yes, For Bonds

Charlotte County is one of the fastest-growing places in the country. Its population grew nearly 20% from 2020 to 2025, more than twice the statewide rate, and the Punta Gorda metro area ranked among the five fastest-growing metro areas in the nation last year. That growth puts the county's remaining natural lands, and the water they protect, under heavy pressure.

That's why 1000 Friends of Florida urges Charlotte County voters to support a measure on the November ballot that would continue the county's voter-approved land conservation program, Conservation Charlotte, for another 20 years.

Protecting environmentally sensitive land protects the county's drinking water sources, including Shell Creek, Prairie Creek and the Peace River, and keeps polluted runoff out of Charlotte Harbor, the heart of the local economy and fishing. Wetlands, floodplains and mangroves store floodwater that would otherwise end up in neighborhoods. And preserves give residents and visitors places to hike, paddle, fish and watch wildlife.

Voters created Conservation Charlotte in 2006. Since then it has protected more than 2,500 acres in five preserves: Bill Coy, Peace River, Prairie Creek, Shell Creek and Thornton Key. But the program's money is nearly spent, and the 0.20 mill tax voters approved expires at the end of 2026.

The Charlotte County Commission voted to put this land conservation measure on the November ballot. If voters approve the measure:

- The county continues the existing 0.20 mill property tax and can issue up to \$70 million in general obligation bonds, repaid within 20 years, to buy land from willing sellers when it comes on the market, at today's prices.
- This is not a new tax or a rate increase. For the median homesteaded property, the cost is about \$31 a year, or about \$2.58 a month.
- The money is restricted to buying, improving and managing environmentally sensitive lands to protect drinking water and water quality, preserve fish and wildlife habitat, reduce flooding and provide nature-based parks.
- A seven-member citizen oversight committee reviews every nominated property against published scientific criteria, with final decisions made by the County Commission in public meetings.
- Annual public audits are written into the ballot question, and all spending is publicly disclosed.

Eastern Charlotte County lies within the Florida Wildlife Corridor, a statewide network of natural and agricultural land recognized by state lawmakers for its critical importance in sustaining wildlife and protecting water quality. Continuing Conservation Charlotte will help secure missing links in the corridor, including habitat for the endangered Florida panther.

We urge residents committed to clean water, a healthy Charlotte Harbor and a prosperous future for the county to vote Yes, For Bonds.