

1000 Friends of Florida Endorses Sarasota County's Environmentally Sensitive Lands and Parkland Program

Vote Yes on Question 1 and Question 2

For more than two decades in fast-growing Sarasota County, the Environmentally Sensitive Lands Protection Program (ESLPP) and the Neighborhood Parkland Acquisition Program (NPP) have protected natural areas, clean water, wildlife habitat and other green spaces before they could be lost forever to development.

That's why 1000 Friends of Florida urges Sarasota County voters to sustain those programs for another 20 years by voting Yes on Question 1 and Question 2 on their November ballots.

The ESLPP has protected more than 42,000 acres through purchases of land and conservation easements from willing sellers. The NPP has acquired 31 properties totaling 143 acres, also from willing sellers, to expand neighborhood parks and improve connections to trails, waterways and beaches.

Both programs are still urgently needed. There is more environmentally sensitive land to protect, and the demand for parks will keep growing with the county's population. With land values rising, properties that can be protected now may be unaffordable later. There is no time to waste.

This past April, the Sarasota County Commission voted unanimously to put both questions on the November ballot. If voters approve them:

- Question 1 extends the current ad valorem tax of up to 0.25 mills for another 20 years, through 2049, to keep the ESLPP and NPP operating.
- Question 2 authorizes the county to utilize the tax proceeds to issue up to \$250 million in bonds to buy and manage environmentally sensitive lands and parklands.
- The tax rate doesn't go up. The current tax costs the median homesteaded homeowner about \$4.25 a month, or \$51 a year.
- That modest investment helps store and purify water, reduce flooding, provide wildlife habitat, preserve agriculture and rural character, and expand outdoor recreational opportunities.
- County dollars can leverage as much or more in matching funds from state, federal and private land conservation and parks programs.
- Citizen advisory committees review properties nominated for protection and make recommendations to county commissioners.
- All spending is publicly disclosed and audited, and the money can't be diverted to unrelated government spending.

Sarasota County voters have a long record of investing in conservation. They first approved the ESLPP in 1999. In 2005, with more than 80% of the vote, they reauthorized it and added the NPP. We urge them to maintain that proud history by voting Yes for continuation of the ad valorem tax on Question 1, and Yes for bonds on Question 2.