

1000 Friends of Florida Endorses St. Johns County Land Acquisition and Management Program (LAMP)

Vote Yes, For Bonds

St. Johns County is one of the fastest growing counties in Florida, increasing pressure for development on its natural and agricultural lands. But only 22% of land in the county is permanently protected from development, significantly less than the 32% average among Florida counties.

That's why 1000 Friends of Florida urges St. Johns County voters to support a measure on the November ballot that would authorize up to \$100 million in bond funding for land protection through the county's Land Acquisition and Management Program (LAMP).

Protecting high-priority natural and agricultural land protects water quality, wildlife habitat, working farms and forests. It expands outdoor recreational opportunities like hiking, horseback riding, hunting, fishing and kayaking that enhance the quality of life for residents and attract visitors.

The county established LAMP in 2021, but annual funding for it has ranged only from \$500,000 to \$2 million. That's not nearly enough to keep up with the need and rising land values amid the increasing development pressure.

This past August, the St. Johns County Commission voted to put this land conservation measure on the November ballot. If voters approve the measure:

- The county can issue up to \$100 million in general obligation bonds, repaid within 20 years, for LAMP to buy land from willing sellers.
- Land protection can grow in scope and pace, and the county is better positioned to win matching funds from federal, state, and private sources, including Florida Forever and the Rural and Family Lands Protection Program.
- Property taxes rise by up to 0.15 mills, or \$15 per \$100,000 in assessed property values after all exemptions. For the average homeowner, that's about \$3.91 a month, or \$47 a year
- This modest investment goes to acquiring and managing lands to protect water quality; conserving wildlife habitats, natural areas, farms and forests; providing outdoor recreation; and reducing flooding.
- A citizens' oversight committee ranks and prioritizes properties nominated by the public, with final decisions made by the County Commission.
- All program spending to be publicly disclosed, and subject to annual independent audits.

St. Johns County includes 6,000 acres of 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. St. Johns commissioners voted to place the land conservation measure on the ballot at the urging of conservation and planning organizations, including 1000 Friends of Florida, and after years of appeals from residents concerned about the negative environmental and economic impacts of losing land to development.

We urge residents committed to a healthy, prosperous future in the county to vote Yes, For Bonds.