

Florida's Natural Assets

Investing in Nature is Key to Our Prosperity



Photo courtesy VISIT FLORIDA

One of the biggest returns on our investment in nature is a state tourism industry that generates \$63 billion annually — 20 percent of the state's economy — and provides nearly 1 million jobs.



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Protection of natural Florida is paying off.

Through the state's hugely successful land conservation programs, lawmakers have provided natural assets for generations to come by setting aside 4.8 million acres of lands and waterways, restoring crucial areas, protecting water resources and creating an award-winning system of public parks, beaches, forests, rivers, springs, lakes and wildlife preserves. **The long-term land preservation planning and investment strategy is working, and we are already enjoying a considerable return.**

Florida has shrewdly invested in its most biologically significant landscapes, using innovative acquisition and easement programs coupled with sound science to identify important lands with resources of environmental value and public benefit that are fundamental to a healthy state economy.

Through Florida Forever, the state's premier land-buying and restoration program, 2.5 million acres have been acquired from willing sellers since 1990. Other successful programs take a cost-saving approach

Florida's natural areas are vital to the economy of the state's rural areas.

by negotiating agreements with landowners. Working with ranchers, for example, the state has secured conservation easements where traditional sources of livelihood continue and new ecotourism and recreational enterprise opportunities arise. And in the Everglades, water managers are collaborating with landowners to improve water storage, water quality and habitat — restoration projects that provide ecological and economic returns.

By preserving critical lands and waterways to create lasting parks and beachfronts, protecting cattle ranches and other working lands and restoring vast ecosystems like the Everglades, Florida is building a secure and sustainable economic future. These conserved areas provide irreplaceable natural resources and functions that contribute significantly to the Sunshine State's bottom line and quality of life.

The Payoff: Revenue and Jobs

Investment in Florida's wild assets, which include important conservation areas, 160 state parks and a vast coastline with more than 100 miles of public beaches, has added up to a valuable network of protected lands. These natural attractions provide residents and visitors with unique scenic beauty and outstanding recreational opportunities and help make Florida the top destination for family vacations in the country and for tourists from around the world. Consider these facts about some of the exceptional returns protecting and restoring natural Florida bring to the state's economy:

- Florida attracts 82 million visitors a year (20 million to state parks alone), including eight million from nearby Georgia and 1.5 million from Brazil and Mexico.
- One of the biggest returns on our investment in nature is a state tourism industry that generates \$63 billion annually—20 percent of the state's

economy—and provides nearly 1 million jobs.

- The fish and wildlife resources enhanced by protecting lands and waters bring \$20 billion and 250,000 jobs to Florida. Boating contributes another \$18 billion and 200,000 jobs a year.
- Excursions primarily to see Florida's diverse flora and fauna account for \$5.6 billion in spending a year—\$600 million by the 1 million wildlife watchers who come from outside the state — and more than 51,000 jobs.
- Florida's natural areas are vital to the economy of



the state's rural areas. Florida families touring our parks and beaches and tourists from out-of-state observing our wildlife support retailers, outfitters, land managers, wholesalers and other services based largely in rural communities adjacent to protected lands.

- Restoration efforts benefit not only recreation and tourism but also make commercial fishing, agriculture, real estate and other industries stronger and more sustainable. Projections on the planned restoration of the Everglades, for example, predict that an investment of \$11.5 billion will result in over \$46.5 billion in gains to Florida's economy — at least \$4 on the dollar. It will also create more than 440,000 jobs over the next 50 years.



Photo courtesy Carlton Ward, Jr. / Carltonward.com

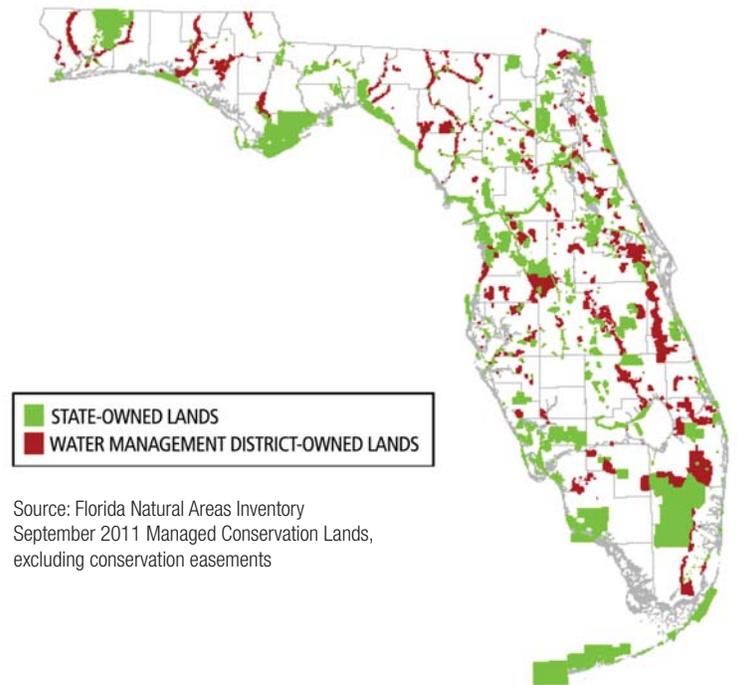
The Bonus: Cost Savings through Ecosystem Services

Florida's system of open areas and waterways also provides a number of indirect benefits to the state's residents. By preserving public lands and waters and maintaining or restoring their health and natural processes, Floridians enjoy the flow of free "ecosystem services" provided by Mother Nature.

These services include a supply of clean water and air, flood and erosion control, crop pollination by native birds and insects, carbon sequestration and climate regulation, genetic resources and recreation.

Economists and biologists studying conservation lands in Florida have assessed the value of ecosystem services. Their findings underscore just how valuable natural landscapes are to us:

- The average annual value of the ecosystem services provided by Florida's conservation lands is \$5,000 per acre.
- In just four northeast Florida counties, aquatic habitats (marshes, lakes, rivers, estuaries, wetlands, and low-lying forests) generate more than \$3 billion per year in ecosystem services such as flood protection and water filtration.



Source: Florida Natural Areas Inventory
September 2011 Managed Conservation Lands,
excluding conservation easements

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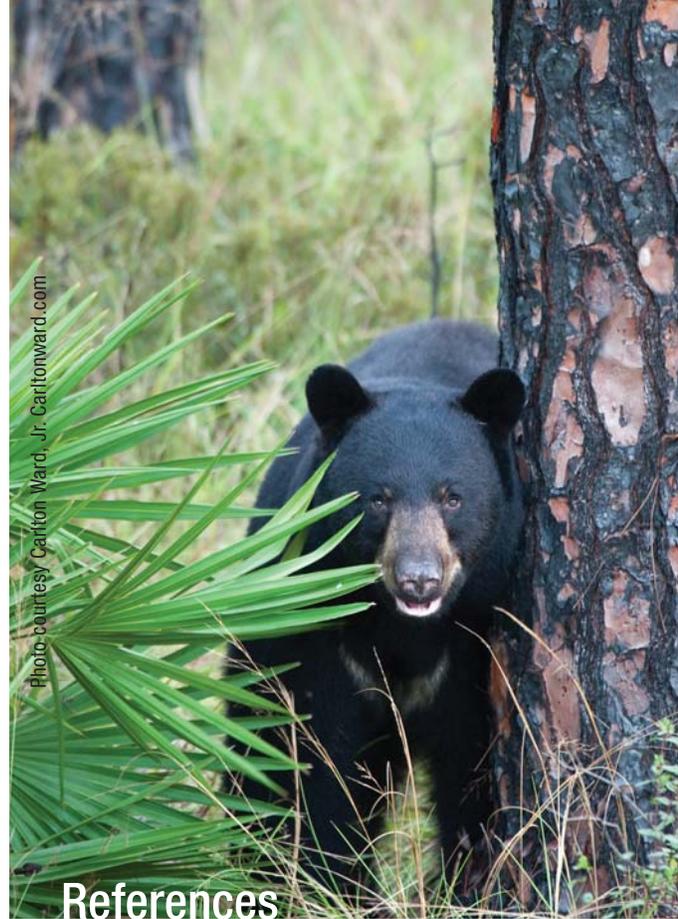
- Everglades restoration is expected to increase property values in all 16 counties within the South Florida Water Management District due to the increased quality and availability of drinking water and increased proximity to clean recreational waters. As a result, 35 percent of the conservatively projected \$46.5 billion in economic gains from large-scale restoration will be in the real estate sector.

In these tough economic times, Florida's leaders face real challenges. But by recognizing that the state's natural assets are economic drivers and sticking to the proven, science-backed, long-term investment strategy of land acquisition, protection and restoration, **our lawmakers can safeguard our resources and secure our future. And our valuable conservation lands will continue to provide exceptional returns to Florida's economy and quality of life.**



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Defenders of Wildlife is a national, non-profit membership organization dedicated to the protection of all native wild animals and plants in their natural communities. With more than 1 million members and activists, Defenders of Wildlife is a leading advocate for innovative solutions to safeguard our wildlife heritage for generations to come. For more information, visit www.defenders.org.



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