



Why Florida Forever Matters Now More Than Ever

Florida is the third most populous state in the nation—and still growing fast. As thousands of new residents arrive every month, the pressures on land, water, wildlife, and agriculture continue to intensify.

For decades, Floridians have supported land conservation as smart public policy; however, funding instability now threatens Florida's most effective land protection program - **Florida Forever**.

Florida's Two Primary Land Protection Programs

Florida relies on two **voluntary programs** with **distinct missions and approaches**.

Florida Forever (administered by FDEP)

- Florida's **flagship, science-based conservation program**
- Protects **environmentally significant lands and waters**
- Has conserved **over 2.6 million acres**, including state parks, forests, and wildlife management areas
- **Only state program authorized to acquire conservation land in both fee title and less-than-fee conservation easements**
- Promotes:
 - Habitat management and restoration
 - Public access and recreation
 - Expansion and connection of public lands
- Accountable to the public with multiple opportunities for public participation.

Rural and Family Lands Protection Program (administered by FDACS)

- Protects **working agricultural lands** from development
- Keeps ranches, timberlands, and family farms **in private ownership and production**
- Purchases **agricultural easements only**

Preserving, conserving and restoring the native plants and native plant communities of Florida

- Conservation benefits are **secondary** to sustaining agriculture
- Agricultural easements **allow conversion of natural lands**, and timber and ranchlands, to **more intensive agriculture**, including irrigated row crops.
- There is no public access to lands protected by agricultural easements.
- The process for easement purchases excludes public participation.

Complementary — Not Competitive

- Florida Forever and RFLPP:
 - Protect **different types of land**
 - Use **different conservation tools**
 - Serve **different public purposes**
- The programs are **not interchangeable**
- **Florida needs to fund both programs** to grow responsibly and sustainably.

Funding Imbalance & Risk

- Florida Forever historically received **stable funding** (often over \$300 million/year)
- Funding became volatile after 2008
- **2025 appropriations:**
 - Florida Forever: **\$18 million**
 - RFLPP: **\$250 million**
- This imbalance weakens Florida's ability to:
 - Protect natural systems
 - Expand the public's recreational access to protected natural areas
 - Use the full range of conservation tools

Other risks include proposals to surplus conservation lands and bypass the public participation and science-based reviews of the Florida Forever process.

The Bottom Line:

Florida does not need to choose between protecting **working lands or natural lands**. We must protect both – and Florida Forever is the state's most effective tool for protecting vulnerable natural areas and building the Florida Wildlife Corridor.

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