



## 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**.

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## 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.

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### 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*

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- 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.
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## 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.
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## 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.

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## 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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