

# Conservation Opportunities on Private Lands



June 2014

Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission  
Division of Habitat and Species Conservation



Good afternoon Mr. Chairman and Commissioners. I am **Scott Sanders, Director of the Office of Conservation Planning Services, and I am** excited about the opportunity to participate in a strategic discussion with you today regarding how we can most effectively partner with Florida's private landowners to secure a bright future for Florida's fish and wildlife resources.

**We would like to approach this issue from a local, state, and national level. At the local level,** Mr. Luis Gonzales administers FWC's team of Landowner Assistance Program biologists in SW Florida. Luis will be providing a "boots on the ground" presentation highlighting a few of the programs and activities we are engaged in with private landowners here in SW Florida. Next, **from a statewide level,** I will provide you with an overview of our agency's efforts to work with private landowners **across Florida**, including a brief history of these efforts, current landownership demographics, and some of the new initiatives we are working on. **Our keynote speaker today,** Mr. Jim Stone, a Montana rancher who is passionate about promoting conservation partnerships, **will provide you a national perspective.**

# Working with Private Landowners to Conserve Florida's Natural Resources

- Florida's Landownership Demographics
- Conservation-Compatible Land Uses
- Leveraging Resources
- Increasing the Value of Wildlife Habitat



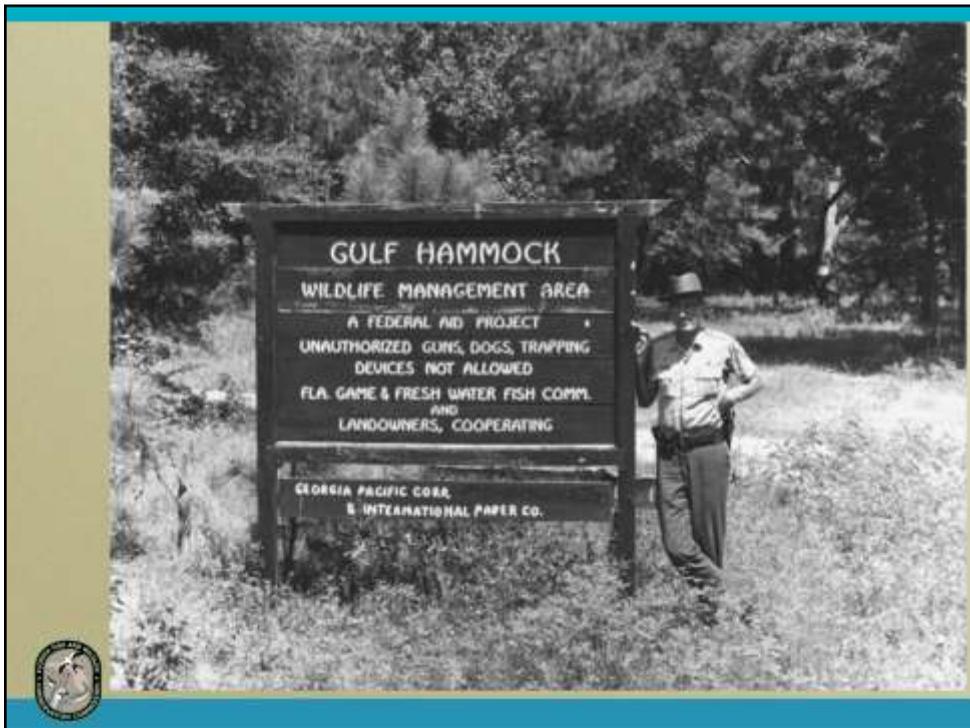
Our goal for these presentations is to stimulate a discussion about how FWC can:

- Enhance our relevancy to Florida's private landowners
- Assist private landowners with continuing land uses that are compatible with wildlife conservation;
- Improve the public's perspective and appreciation for the wildlife conservation efforts of private landowners.

Key strategies for success we will discuss include:

- Understanding the demographics of the private landowners we are working with, their wildlife conservation interests and challenges;
- Recognizing the wildlife contributions they are providing;
- Working in a coordinated and cooperative manner with other agencies and entities to speak with one voice to private landowners;
- And finding ways to increase the value of wildlife habitat provided by private landowners.

The Office of Conservation Planning Services serves as the agency's primary point of contact for working with private landowners. Our conservation planning services to private landowners are provided through our Landowner Assistance Program (which is administered by Dr. Joe Prenger) and our Land Use Planning Program (which is



FWC's predecessor agency, the Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission began working with private landowners in 1948 when 100,000 acres was leased from the Patterson McInnis Lumber Company.

## *Conservation Opportunities on Private Lands*

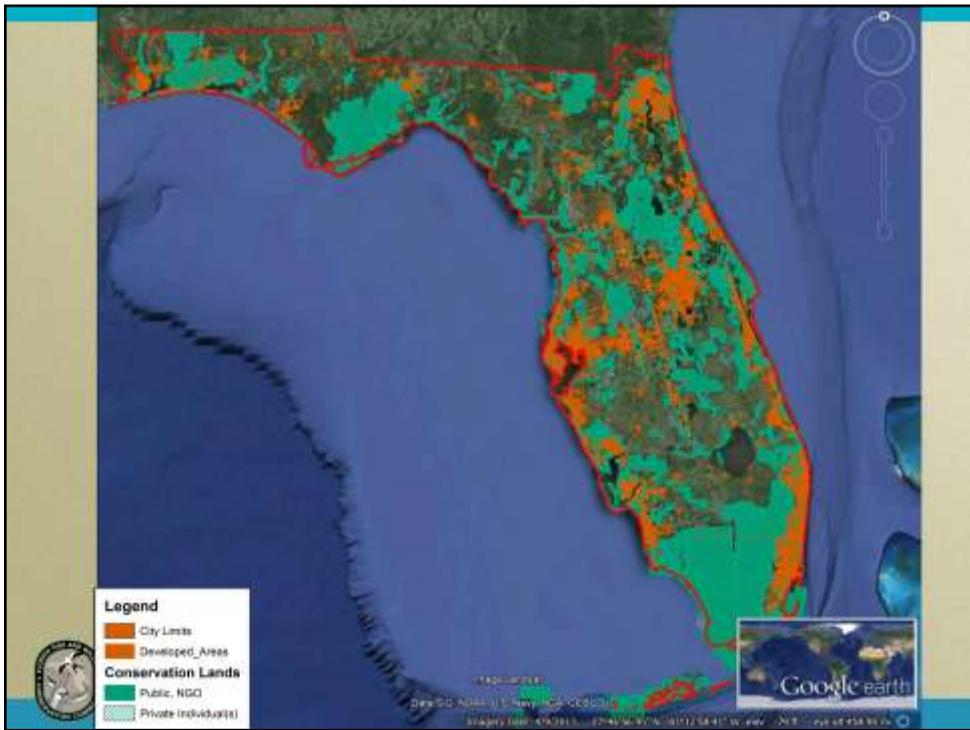
- A History of Working with Private Landowners
  - Wildlife Management Areas
  - Game Management Assistance
  - Crop Depredation Relief
- A Future of Working with Private Landowners
  - Conservation Planning Services
  - Conservation Incentives for Private Landowners
  - Wildlife Management Assistance



Our history of working with private landowners primarily focused on game species.

We are already recognizing that private landowners, including their interests and needs are becoming more diverse.

To remain relevant to private landowners in the future, we will need to remain open-minded and adaptive in order to continue to assist their evolving interest and needs for wildlife-related assistance.



State of Florida: Approximately 34.7 million acres

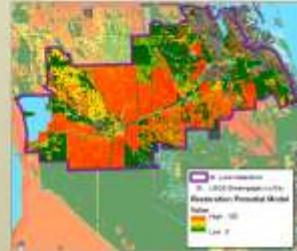
- 5.3 million acres Developed /
- 10 million acres in Conservation
- 19.4 million acres of Conservation Opportunity in Private Ownership.

If Florida's population doubles during the next five decades, as *Florida 2060: A Population Distribution Scenario for the State of Florida* predicts, about 7 million additional acres of land—equivalent to the state of Vermont—could be converted from rural and natural to urban uses.

# Cooperative Conservation Blueprint

## CLIP 3.0 - the Critical Lands and Waters Identification Project

- GIS database of statewide conservation priorities
- Broad range of natural resources, including biodiversity, landscape function, surface water, groundwater, and marine resources



- Here in Florida we are rich with geo-spatial data.
- FWC staff assisted with the Critical Lands and Waters Identification Project.
- Utilizing the Critical Lands and Waters Identification Project results, FWC created the Cooperative Conservation Blueprint that further prioritizes areas to explore fish and wildlife conservation opportunities.

# Land Use Planning Program

➤ Florida's Sector Planning process provides the opportunity for our staff to participate in landscape-level land use planning.

➤ Land Use Planning staff are currently pursuing conservation opportunities on ~570,000 acres of private lands through growth management and associated regulatory processes.

➤ These efforts contribute to accomplishment of our Cooperative Conservation Blueprint.



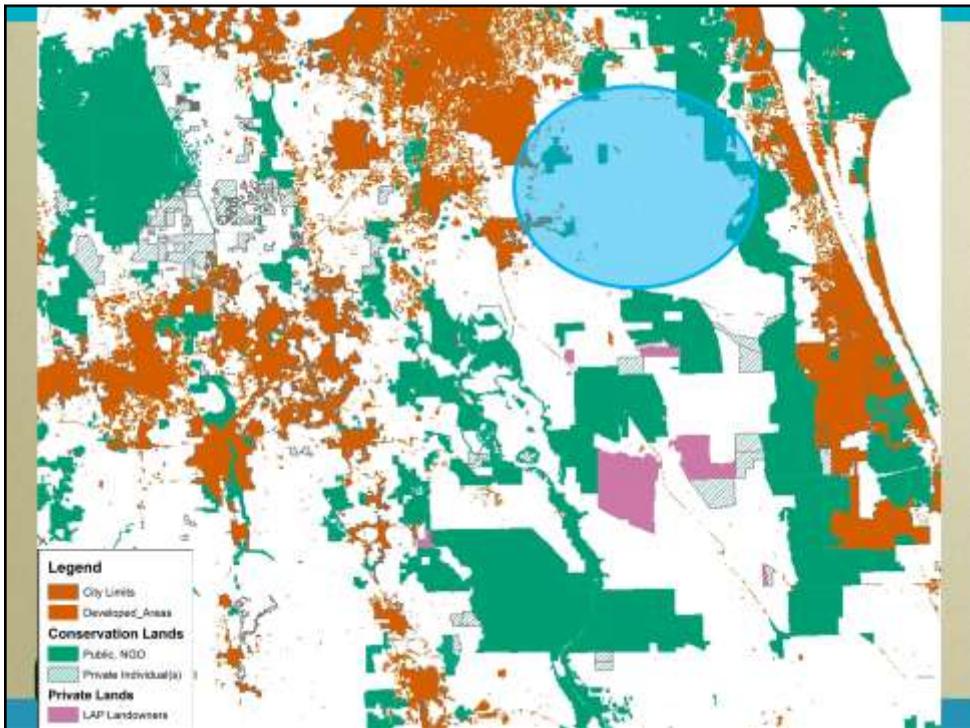
Smart growth is becoming increasingly important in Florida. Land Use Planning staff is currently working with private landowners undergoing multiple types of land and water use processes. Staff is working closely with sister agencies, local governments, and landowners to allow for more options to profit from fish and wildlife resource conservation on private lands while maintaining habitat connections between private lands, public conservation lands, and the important habitat areas identified by the Cooperative Conservation Blueprint.

Examples include mitigation and habitat conservation banking, and sector planning.

These options combine land conversion activities such as urban development with:

- conservation, restoration, and enhancement of habitat;
- preservation of rural and under-developed lands; and
- maintenance of working lands.

We are working with private landowners on approximately 400,000 acres currently undergoing a sector planning process and 175,000 acres currently undergoing a mitigation banking process. Over ½ million acres of undeveloped private lands are engaged in growth management and related regulatory processes.



This series highlights an area of central Florida and illustrates how we are utilizing land use planning opportunities with private landowners to conserve wildlife habitat at the landscape level. Building on the conservation investment already made in this area through conservation land acquisition and our Landowner Assistance Program, our Land Use Planning Program staff have engaged in a sector planning process that will determine long-term land use across a 130,000 acre area.



FWC contracted with the University of Florida in 2008 and 2011 to survey private landowners across Florida.

The information gained from these surveys is being used to evaluate the effectiveness of our efforts to achieve conservation by working with private landowners. This slide illustrates the diversity of wildlife interests and the diversity of wildlife conservation activities private landowners are currently engaged in.

# Landowner Assistance Program



- Provide fish and wildlife - related technical assistance
- Develop comprehensive habitat-based management plans
- Develop and implement incentive programs for private landowners



Based on these survey results, our Landowner Assistance Program focuses on providing technical assistance.

We conduct workshops and field days for landowners, prepare habitat management plans for private landowners, and assist landowners interested in financial assistance programs.

# Landowner Assistance Program

- Diverse Conservation Interests
- Recognizing the Conservation Contributions
- Leveraging Conservation Resources
- Solution Oriented Approach

Building Relationships at the Speed of Trust



We believe that the most important keys to our success to date include:

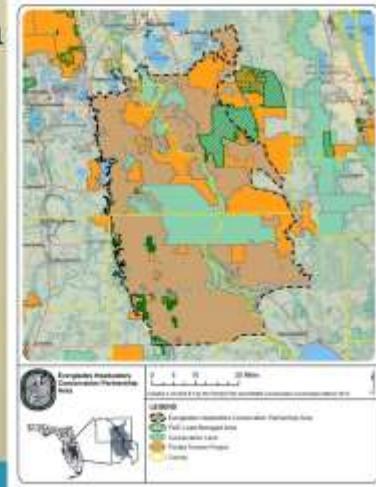
- Understanding the diverse wildlife conservation interests and challenges of the private landowners we are working with;
- Recognizing the good conservation actions landowners are engaged in (often our staff learn more good ideas from the landowner than we provide them);
- Working in a coordinated and cooperative manner with other agencies and entities to speak with one voice to private landowners;
- Being solution-oriented;
- And recognizing that we can only build these conservation partnerships with private landowners at the speed of trust.

# Conservation Easements

NRCS Wetlands Reserve Program

USFWS Everglades Headwaters NWR

- Evaluation / Prioritization
- Habitat Inventory
- Restoration Planning
- Monitoring



Private landowners appear to be increasingly interested in Conservation Easements.

The Wetlands Reserve Program funded through the FARM Bill has been very successful in Florida. To date, approximately 313,000 acres have been placed in permanent conservation easements though this program in Florida at a cost of approximately \$575 million. A number of these Wetland Reserve Program-funded easements and associated wetland restoration projects occur within the Northern Everglades Headwaters Refuge boundary.

# Private Lands Initiatives

## Wildlife Best Management Practices

- Work with FDACS and agricultural landowners
- Identify practices that provide reasonable assurance that take will be minimized or avoided.



## Payment for Ecosystem Services

- Compensate landowners for the conservation value of the wildlife habitat stemming from their land use.



Two new Private Landowner initiatives we are working on in Florida include Wildlife Best Management Practices for Agriculture and a habitat-based Payment for Ecosystem Services.

# Private Lands Deer Management Program

- Provide technical assistance and conservation plans for habitat management



Our Private Landowner Survey results indicate that White-tailed deer remain the number one species managed for by private landowners across Florida. Our Landowner Assistance Program staff is working with our Hunting and Game Management Division to administer the Private Lands Deer Management Program.



## Watermelon Pond Conservation Cooperative

*"Conservation will ultimately boil down to rewarding the private landowner who conserves the public interest." Aldo Leopold, The River of the Mother of God and Other Essays*



Another highlight of our Landowner Assistance Program is the Watermelon Pond Conservation Cooperative. This cooperative covers an area of Longleaf sandhill habitat in Gilchrist, Levy and Alachua counties. Longleaf sandhill is identified as a priority habitat in Florida's State Wildlife Action Plan. Landowner Assistance Program staff worked with public and private landowners in this area to identify conservation issues and opportunities that these landowners had in common. Utilizing workshops and field days coupled with assistance to individuals landowners, this conservation cooperative continues to grow. Together, they are making a difference across this landscape.