

The Nature Conservancy Florida Chapter Results Report 2024 Florida Legislative Session

The 2024 Florida Legislative Session has adjourned, and bills have passed that will further conservation of Florida's precious natural habitats while taking steps backward related to critical climate policy in the State of Florida.

Statement from the Executive Director Regarding the 2024 Florida Legislative Session

The Florida Legislature made conservation and support for the environment a priority, through the allocation of significant funding to programs that are critical to a sustainable future for our state, and the lands and waters that we all depend for our health and quality of life.

Protection and restoration of Florida's vital land and water resources will be accelerated by allocating funds from the Seminole Gaming Compact of 2021 to acquire and manage conservation lands, and to make significant investments in resiliency efforts and clean water infrastructure.

CS/SB 1638

The distribution of funds will be as follows:

- \$100 million to support the Florida Wildlife Corridor including acquisition of land.
- \$100 million for the management of uplands and the removal of invasive species, which is divided as follows:
 - \$36 million to the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP),
 - \$32 million to the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services for land management activities,
 - \$32 million to the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission for land management activities.
- \$100 million to the DEP to the Resilient Florida Trust Fund.
- The remainder to the DEP to the Water Protection and Sustainability Program Trust Fund.

In addition to the distribution of funds, the bill requires the Land Management Uniform Accounting Council (LMUAC) to recommend the most efficient use of land management funds provided to state agencies and submit its recommendation to the Executive Office of the Governor, the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives by January 3, 2027.

For the 2024-2025 fiscal year it sets forth the following appropriations:

- \$2 million from the General Revenue Fund to the University of Florida to continually update the Florida Wildlife Corridor plan and the Florida Ecological Greenways Network plan.
- \$5 million to DEP to coordinate with the Water School at Florida Gulf Coast University to conduct a study to identify and analyze potential regional projects that meet the eligibility requirements of the Water Quality Improvement Grant Program.
- \$150 million from the General Revenue Fund to the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) for operations and maintenance. The SFWMD shall enter into a contract with the Water School and Florida Gulf Coast University to conduct a study of the health and ecosystem of Lake Okeechobee.

CS/CS/HB 1557

The Florida Department of Environmental Protection omnibus bill takes steps to increase protections of a key ecosystem conservation area, provides incentives to increase and promote reclaimed water, and makes changes to the Resilient Florida Program

The bill revises, creates, and repeals various provisions under jurisdiction of DEP relating to aquatic preserves; preservation & regeneration of seagrass; Southeast Florida Coral Reef Ecosystem Conservation Area; use of reclaimed water; Resilient Florida Grant Program; comprehensive statewide flood vulnerability & sea level rise data set & assessment; Statewide Flooding & Sea Level Rise Resilience Plan; regional planning councils & estuary partnerships; and other matters.

The bill enacts the following actions:

- Designates the Kristin Jacobs Coral Reef Ecosystem Conservation Area as an aquatic preserve.
- Requires each WMD, in coordination with DEP, to develop rules by December 31, 2025, that promote the reuse of reclaimed water.
- Expands the types of projects undertaken by municipalities and counties that may be awarded funding by the Resilient Florida Grant Program and expands the information that must be submitted to DEP when vulnerability assessments are funded.
- Requires DEP to coordinate with the Chief Resilience Officer as well as the Florida Flood Hub for Applied Research and Innovation (Florida Flood Hub) in developing and maintaining the sea level rise data set and in updating the comprehensive statewide flood vulnerability and sea level rise data set and requires that the assessment be updated at least every 5 years.
 - Changes the minimum sea level rise curves used in local vulnerability assessments to use curves developed by the Florida Flood Hub or 2022 NOAA Intermediate Low or Medium curves and deletes references to the NOAA Intermediate High curve.
 - Allows resilience collaboratives and estuary programs to apply for Resilient Florida project funding.
- Requires the Chief Science Officer to coordinate with the Chief Resilience Officer and the Florida Flood Hub when developing statewide sea level rise projections.
- Clarifies that the Legislature intends to transfer regulation of the Onsite Sewage Program from the Department of Health to the Department of Environmental Protection

Bills were also passed that do not serve Floridians well, and in fact, threaten the state's ability to decarbonize its economy most efficiently — squandering the incredible economic opportunity afforded by the transition to renewable energy and electric transportation in the Sunshine State.

CS/CS/SB 1084

The bill makes several changes to various regulatory activities of the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. Specifically, the bill preempts the regulation of electric vehicle charging stations to the state and prohibits local governmental entities from enacting or enforcing such regulations. Local governments and residential and commercial developers should have the autonomy to establish electric vehicle charging stations that meet the needs of their constituents, buyers, and tenants.

CS/CS/HB 1645

The bill rewrites state energy policy to eliminate state goals to address the impacts of global climate change and the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. It also aims to remove from current law, "the implementation of alternative energy can be a source of new jobs and employment opportunities for many Floridians."

A troubling provision bans the construction and operation of offshore wind energy in Florida. While Florida is not in a position today to realize offshore wind energy, this provision eliminates the implementation of future technologies that could have a place in Florida's diversification of energy development. Further, the elimination of the authority of the Florida Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services Office of Energy to set renewable energy goals and strategies will have a chilling effect on the growth and expansion of the renewable energy business sector.

It also repeals programs that have provided incentives for green procurement, energy efficiency and renewable energy.

CS/CS/SB 1628

The bill provides that local governments must complete a business impact statement prior to adopting and implementing a comprehensive plan amendment or land development regulation amendment. This change will make more difficult to adopt comprehensive plan amendments that address coastal resilience, including the adoption of adaptation action areas, and the protection of natural resources through open space protections.

CS/SB 7040

The bill ratifies DEP's adopted stormwater rule with changes that lower the water quality standards from the rule adopted by FDEP for redevelopment projects in impaired waters and allows grandfathering of certain projects and developments under the previous stormwater rule.

The State Budget

The overall budget of the State of Florida is \$117.46 billion for the 2024 fiscal year beginning on July 1, 2024.

2024-2025 Florida Environmental/Conservation Budget

BUDGET ISSUE	Final Budget presented to Governor
LAND ACQUISITION	
Florida Forever (1685)	\$100,000,000
Acquisition of select parcels (1685A) Wakulla, Rattlesnake Key, Wekiva-Ocala Greenway	\$14,282,000
FF Debt Service (1687)	\$82,159,634
FCT (1686)	\$15,000,000
Rural & Family Lands (1516)	\$100,000,000
Florida Recreation Development Assistance Program (1829)	\$14,285,629
Wetlands Restoration & Protection (1730a)	\$20,000,00
EVERGLADES RESTORATION Total	\$614,000,000
CERP (1715)	\$550,000,000
EAA (1715)	\$64,000,000
Northern Everglades (1716)	\$71,516,213
C-51 PBC (1716A)	\$100,000,000
Preventing Discharges to Caloosahatchee/St. Lucie (1719)	\$50,000,000
WATER QUALITY	
Innovative Technologies/Blue Green Algae (1714)	\$10,000,000
Blue Green Algae TF & nutrient reduction (1706)	\$10,800,000
Red Tide (1714)1717	\$5,000,000
Dispersed Water Storage (1709)	\$5,000,000
Springs Restoration (1732)	\$55,000,000
Wastewater Construction (1735)	SECTION 165. There is hereby appropriated for Fiscal Year 2023-2024, \$15,900,896 in nonrecurring funds from

	the General Revenue Fund and \$879,272,571 in nonrecurring funds from the Wastewater Treatment and Stormwater Management Revolving Loan Trust Fund.
Wastewater Grant Program (1741)	\$135,000,000
TMDLs (1766)	\$25,000,000
Local Water Projects (1732A)	\$410,406,315
Pensacola/Perdido Estuary Program Restoration Initiative	\$750,000
Biscayne Bay Septic to Sewer (1856)	\$20,000,000
Florida Keys (1736)	\$20,000,000
Indian River Lagoon (1740A)	\$75,000,000
WATER QUANTITY	
Alt. Water Supply (1716A)	\$55,000,000
MFLs for NFWWMD & SRWMD (1696h)	\$3,446,000
LAND MANAGEMENT	
Land Management by WMDS (1696G)	\$14,237,210
Div. of Forestry LM (1510)	\$8,902,162
DSL LM (1677)	\$3,660,358
Parks LM (1817)	\$2,507,747
Invasive Plant Control (1952)	\$38,483,031
COASTAL RESILIENCE	
Regional Resilience Coalitions (1834)	\$2,000,000
Flood Hub (1849)	\$5,500,000
Resilient Florida Planning Grants (from Resilient FL TF) (1854)	\$20,000,000
Resilient Florida Flooding & SLR Resilience Plan (1853)	\$125,000,000
Coral Reefs Protection & Restoration (1837)	\$8,000,000
Coral Reef FCR3 Initiative	\$9,500,000
St. Andrew Bay Sea Grass Restoration (1843)	\$999,000
Beach and Inlet management	\$50,000,000
Seagrass Restoration Technical Development Initiative (1841)	\$2,000,000
ENERGY	
Human Services Energy Efficiency (400)	\$6,400,000
DEO Home Energy Assistance (2337)	\$186,488,863

DEO Weatherization (2338)	\$3,472,840
DEO LIHEAP (2339)	\$16,000,000
IRA Energy Efficiency Rebate Spending Authorization	\$346,326,390 (nonrecurring) .

We thank the President of the Senate, Kathleen Passidomo and Speaker of the House, Paul Renner, for their commitment to funding the programs critical to continued land acquisition and management in Florida and increasing protection of the Kristin Jacobs Coral Reef Ecosystem Conservation Area. These actions further improve the resilience of Florida's natural resources important to people and nature.

Greg Knecht, Executive Director, The Nature Conservancy in Florida