

THE POST

ISSUE 21

04

H2O: HEADWATERS TO LAKE OKEECHOBEE

Protecting the Everglades Headwaters

10

D RANCH PRESERVE

Your Preserve in Central Florida

**CONSERVATION
FLORIDA**

About Conservation Florida

Conservation Florida is a statewide, accredited land trust with a mission to save Florida's natural and agricultural landscapes for future generations. Our conservation projects support Florida's native plants and wildlife, fresh water, conservation corridors, family farms and ranches, economy, and nature-based recreation. Since our founding in 1999, Conservation Florida has led the way in strategic and evidence-based land protection and has saved over 25,000 acres of critical habitat through acquisition, facilitation, and incubation of conservation projects.

We save land by developing conservation strategies, exploring funding sources, and purchasing or accepting donations of land and conservation easements. Our other services include providing expertise to guide landowners through the land protection process, serving as a trusted community partner to support statewide land conservation, and promoting land conservation through effective education and advocacy. Our vision is large-scale, and we are 100% committed to conservation in the state of Florida – for nature, for people, forever!



The accreditation seal is awarded to land trusts meeting the highest national standards for excellence and conservation permanence.



conserveflorida.org



@conserveflorida

1.

2020 The Year *the Land* Saved Us

Dear Nature: Thank you!

Are we saving land, or is it the other way around? This year, Floridians found solace in the great outdoors, and our mission to save land became amplified.

Raise your hand if you found a little bliss in Florida's natural beauty recently. You're not alone! We are so lucky to be surrounded by many unique types of wildlife and habitats as well as the best public lands in the nation (*our biased opinion*). Thankfully, there's always a chance to find a moment of peace in Wild Florida.

In March, we launched a social media campaign to share peaceful and uplifting photos and short videos of nature using the hashtag #WildFloridaRx to bring nature indoors and highlight nature's role in health and wellness.

These doses of nature deliver lush, sparkling, sun-drenched Florida scenes to thousands of people every week – inspiring many to take their own adventures and photos.

We also launched the Great Florida Backyard Bioblitz – an immersive online series that explored the backyards of Florida and recorded their biodiversity. Over 100,000 observations were made by participants of all ages who enjoyed nature while staying safe.

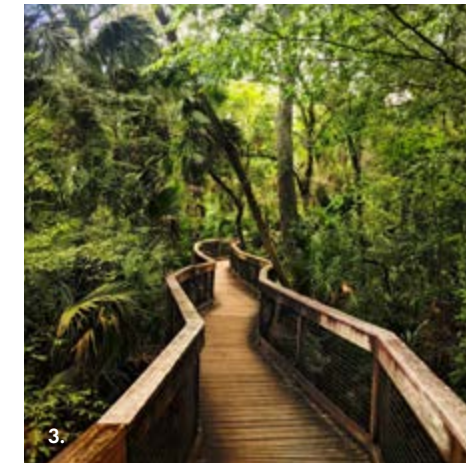
We are grateful for the opportunity to connect people with nature because

we are convinced that the more people who connect with all that wild Florida has to offer, the more they will advocate for land and water protection.

You can help! Share your stories, photos, and enthusiasm with others by tagging your photos on Facebook and Instagram with #ConserveFlorida and #WildFloridaRx. Become a volunteer. And please consider making a donation in support of our work to protect Florida's natural and agricultural landscapes for future generations.

FROM OUR CONSERVATION COMMUNITY: #WildFloridaRx, @conserveflorida

1. Golden sunsets over the northern Everglades. 🌞 - @lucas_schaffer 2. 🐾 be the nature 🐾 - @raziel.ventures 3. Florida is so much more than sand and water! - @melissabrano 4. There's nothing not to love about an early wild Florida morning. - @ashdock73



Introducing the H2O:

Headwaters to Okeechobee



The Everglades Headwaters Watershed forms the boundary for the H2O, a regional protection initiative *that's all about water*.

With your support, Conservation Florida is working to conserve landscapes that will provide long-term protection for Florida's freshwater.

We're working in the Northern Everglades from the Headwaters in Orlando to Lake Okeechobee. This vital and vibrant landscape spans Orange, Osceola, Highlands, Glades, St. Lucie, Martin, and Polk counties. It is prized for its large, historic cattle ranches, sweeping vistas, and critical ecosystems. Because it forms the headwaters of the Greater Everglades, its protection is vital for the future of Florida.

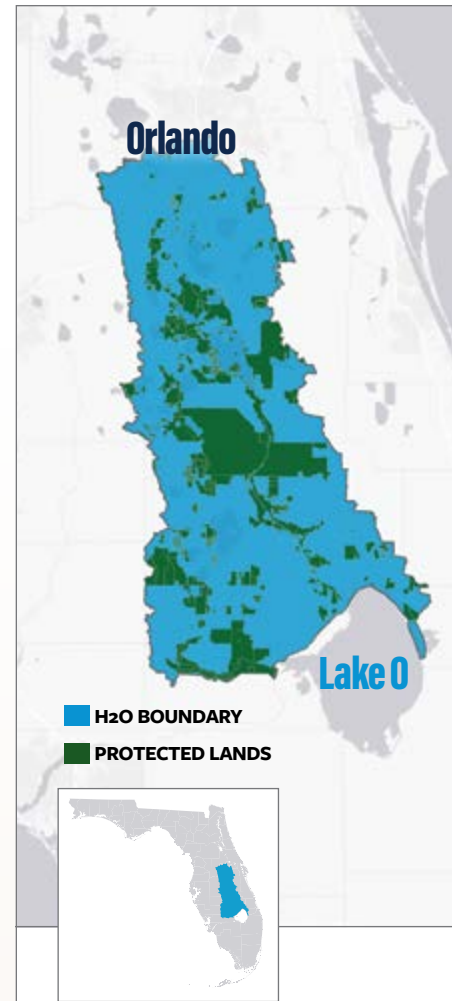
Many are surprised to learn that the Everglades Headwaters begin in Orlando behind large hotels that support Florida's bustling tourism industry. Water from Shingle Creek flows for miles before it meets Lake Tohopekalunga, on into the Kissimmee River system, and south to the Everglades.

Protection of both natural and working land in the region is essential. This landscape highlights the importance of working with ranchers to protect water, wildlife, and wildlife corridors.

The conservation projects that we target in this region will help filter surface water flowing from the north before it reaches Lake Okeechobee. In addition to contributing to the clean-drinking water supply for millions of people, the land provides shelter for many species of neotropical birds during their spring and fall migrations. It is also estimated that more than 50% of all habitat used by panthers in the Northern Everglades is on private lands.

This region is brimming with life and is home to roughly 38 federally-listed species and 161 state-listed threatened and endangered species. Our current work in this region will protect thousands of acres of family-run ranches and wild landscapes, which will provide significant habitat for Florida panthers and many other critical species like the grasshopper sparrow.

We're working with trusted partners, including Avon Park Air Force Range, to acquire conservation easements within the H2O that will protect thousands of acres. The H2O includes the Avon Park Sentinel Landscape.



What is a watershed?

A watershed is an area of land in which all of the rain that falls onto it drains or "sheds" that water into a specific waterbody. Watersheds in Florida drain rainfall into creeks and rivers. These smaller bodies of water flow into larger ones, including lakes, bays, and oceans.

Some rain drains into a watershed by soaking into the ground. This groundwater remains in the soil, where it will eventually seep into the nearest waterbody or seep much deeper into underground reservoirs called aquifers.

Other rainfall ends up on hard surfaces, like pavement, where it may enter storm drains that feed into waterbodies. Watersheds can vary in size – from a few feet to thousands of square miles.

Everything we do on land can ultimately affect the health of our Florida water.

Fun Fact: Florida has 29 major watersheds!

Saving land to protect water

Highlighted Conservation Florida Projects within the H2O



Photo by GRAHAM NORMAN



Photo by LARRY RICHARDSON

XL Ranch Lightsey Cove

This 537-acre ranch is prized for its undisturbed habitat. Located on the northwest edge of Lake Istokpoga, the land offers a glimpse of prehistoric Florida with ancient oak hammocks and sand pine scrubs scattered among marshes and endangered grasslands. Boasting 2,000 feet of shoreline, the property is also home to an archaeological site. We are working with our partners at NRCS to acquire a conservation easement. We now have this property under contract, and thanks to our partners and the generosity of the landowners, it is fully funded!

Arbuckle Creek Ranch

This 1,250-acre ranch is adjacent to the Avon Park Air Force Range. It has two creeks on the property that converge and flow into Arbuckle Creek, which flows for a mile along the property. This watershed drains into the Kissimmee River and on to Lake Okeechobee. The ranch provides natural habitat to a variety of endangered species, including Florida panthers which have been seen on the property. We are working with partners to acquire a conservation easement on this property, which is now under contract.

Voices for Conservation

FLORIDIANS DON'T ALWAYS AGREE, BUT WE DO FIND COMMON GROUND IN THE LAND WE SHARE.



PEYTON CHANDLEY

A Young Voice for Ranching and Conservation

Conservation is not a very popular topic among my peers. As a teenager and rancher, I think it should be. Our planet is already suffering from too much urbanization, and it will be even more populated when my generation grows older. Green spaces can always be turned into concrete, but developed land can rarely go back to nature.

I have been fortunate enough to grow up in one of my favorite places – a dreamy landscape in Lake Wales, Florida. It is not uncommon to see a family of wild turkeys, a bald eagle carrying a freshly caught fish, a pair of crested caracaras, scampering whitetail deer, or the occasional gopher tortoise all within one hour.

My ancestors are estimated to have arrived in Florida with cattle in the 1850s, making me an eighth generation Florida cattle rancher. Some of my favorite memories have been marking and branding cows during the winter and gathering up calves to wean and ship during the summer. I have a lot of pride in this lifestyle, but unfortunately, the number of people entering the agriculture field is diminishing.

Florida has one of the most bio-diverse terrains in the world. We have ranches, like Brama Island for example, where you can find pastureland, forest, lakefront, marshes, and oak hammocks all in one place.

Experiencing wild Florida is something that I want everyone to have the chance to do forever. I am grateful for organizations like Conservation Florida that are working to make an impact on this growing problem before it is too late.



TRAVIS THOMPSON

A Fishing and Waterfowl Guide, Writer, Radio Host and a Voice for Conservation

I'm a 5th generation Floridian, born into a family that camped, hunted, and fished every single weekend.

I want to have places I can take my kids and someday my grandkids. I want to sit in the same woods where I spent a Saturday with my grandfather. Floridians love to talk about water in conservation, but land is the starting point.

As a sportsman, a Floridian, and a father, the land is a community I belong to. I take from it, in game, but I am part of it, and it is a part of me. There's no compartmentalization, no discernible differences.

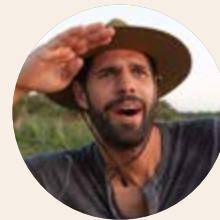
Without organizations like Conservation Florida, the wild places will be lost forever. Our corridors will be broken, and our habitat lost, our ecology compromised, and our community destroyed. I support the work being done ... ensuring wild Florida exists for generations to come. A legacy of conservation that, as a hunter, I'm proud to be part of.

Conservation isn't a magic box. It doesn't simply happen ... it takes teamwork. An effort that's larger than one stakeholder group. It's ranchers, it's sportsmen, it's the environmentally conscious ... it requires that we all play the role of the steward, and that we push for the right things for these places we love.

Read more about Peyton and Travis and watch video interviews at conserveflorida.org/ConservationConversations



Speaking of conservation ...



"Florida is such a beautiful place, and unfortunately, I feel it's usually overlooked and taken for granted. Conservation efforts .. educate and encourage people to get outdoors and see some of the incredible gems Florida has to offer." - **Lloyd Green**



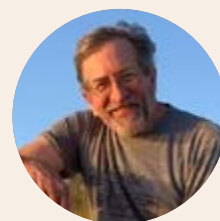
"Growing up in Florida, I visited and enjoyed conserved areas of land. Now, interning with Conservation Florida has given me the opportunity to engage with Florida habitats in a more impactful way and to be a part of the process of conserving land." - **Eva Ortiz-Feder**



"For the Grandchildren. As a Boy Scout, I had the opportunity to canoe most of Florida's major rivers and begin the development of a deep and lasting appreciation of our important ecosystems. I want our future generations to have the same opportunity." - **Barry Rutenberg**



"I support Conservation Florida because preserving the natural landscape of our state provides a tangible history of Florida's original wildness for everyone to experience." - **Ellery Linder**



"I will never tire of being outdoors, be it in the woods or on the water, nor cease to be amazed by the beauty of nature ... seeing the wonderful animals or hearing their calls. I will forever hold the times spent with family and friends in Florida's natural environment close to my heart." - **KC Nayfield**

About Conservation Florida's 'Voices for Conservation' Series

Conservation connects us. It's part of our ethos, our Floridian ethic. In it, there is hope for Florida's conservation future.

Conservation Florida created 'Voices for Conservation' to amplify the importance of protecting our native plants and wildlife, fresh water, family farms and ranches, and wild places.

The series of blogs and videos will feature Florida conservationists from all walks of life speaking up for a common goal: Saving Land. For Nature. For People. Forever.

Every voice offers a unique perspective, but at the heart of each story is the same powerful message.

Protecting land is necessary to keep our state, its people, and its wildlife healthy and thriving.

Your Support in Action

Thanks to you, our landscape-scale projects are saving some of the rarest ecosystems and plant and animal species in the world, connecting more people with nature, and creating a conservation future that benefits generations to come.

1. Our projects in the H2O (Headwaters to Okeechobee) total over 20,000 acres of ranchlands in the Everglades Headwaters Watershed. See feature article on pages 4-5. **2.** On the banks of Lake Istokpoga, we are working to protect XL Ranch, which contains endangered plant and animal species. **3.** Our work along Arbuckle Creek will help create a corridor for paddlers and wildlife and a buffer for Avon Park Air

Force Range. Photo by **CARLTON WARD JR.** **4.** We are working with teachers and local communities to create more advocates for nature. **5.** The W2O (Wekiva to Ocala) conservation corridor will protect habitat between Orlando and Ocala. **6.** D Ranch Preserve in Volusia County is owned by Conservation Florida, and it protects 476 acres of habitat near the St. Johns River. See feature article on pages 10-11. Photo by **ADAM**

BASS **7.** Spanning 7,200 acres in Okaloosa County, our Welannee Watershed Forest project will complete the protection of most of both sides of the upper Yellow River. Photo by **ADAM BASS** **8.** We are working with regional partners to create landscape-scale wildlife corridors in Northwest Florida. **9.** Longleaf habitat protection is a key priority in the Panhandle with thousands of acres in progress.



1. H2O



5. COMMUNITY BASED CONSERVATION



4. WEKIVA TO OCALA



7. YELLOW RIVER, WELANNEE



2. XL RANCH LIGHTSEY COVE



3. ARBUCKLE CREEK RANCH



6. D RANCH PRESERVE



8. NORTHWEST WILDLIFE CORRIDORS



9. SPRINGS & LONGLEAF PINE HABITAT

NORTHERN EVERGLADES

Everglades Headwaters, family ranches, and wildlife corridors

CENTRAL FLORIDA

springs, rivers, wildlife corridors, and a focus on community conservation

NORTHWEST FLORIDA

wildlife corridors, springs, rivers, and longleaf pine habitat

D Ranch IS YOUR PRESERVE!



In early 2020, **thanks to your support and a generous donation**, 476 acres of wild Florida were protected forever.

The previous owner's love of nature led him to donate D Ranch Preserve to Conservation Florida.

Our staff is in the process of creating a management and stewardship plan that will prioritize the conservation of its incredible habitats while allowing for limited public use of the land.

Getting to know the life at D Ranch Preserve has been a treat for Conservation Florida's staff during this year of working remotely.

To date, the Conservation Florida team has identified over 60 species of native plants including rare pine lilies and rarer orchids.

The preserve is teeming with life. From black bears to butterflies to bald eagles flying overhead, its abundance of biodiversity is a joy to behold.

Conservation Florida's staff spot wildlife during every visit.

We've encountered a healthy population of threatened gopher tortoises, wood storks, red-tailed hawks, pygmy rattlesnakes, six-lined racerunners, otters, deer, and more. It's never a dull visit to D Ranch Preserve!

The preserve is located in Volusia County. It contains 149 acres of critical Florida scrub habitat and 60 acres of scrubby flatwoods. Many Florida species require this habitat for their survival, including Florida Scrub-Jays, sand skinks, eastern indigo snakes, wood storks, and burrowing owls.

In addition to buffering public conservation lands, D Ranch Preserve further protects the Lake Monroe watershed. In addition, a freshwater stream on the preserve flows through Lake Monroe Conservation Area wetlands and into Lake Bethel, which feeds both Lake Monroe and the St. John's River.

Conservation Florida's Conservation Programs Fellows have been actively documenting wildlife, habitats, and areas in need of restoration.

This special property's rare ecosystems provide habitat for Florida's wildlife. It also builds on current conservation areas and helps protect Florida's freshwater. We're so proud that this is OUR preserve and hope you will come out and experience it firsthand one day soon.

- Team Conservation Florida



Donations are needed to support opening D Ranch Preserve to the public.

For the Love of Florida

by Traci Deen, Executive Director & CEO



FLORIDIANS GET IT. We know that getting out in nature does the body and mind good.

We're seeing this in action now. As people search for ways to cope with stress and heartache, as we try to stay healthy and active and look for safe ways to connect with loved ones, Floridians are turning to nature and local family farms like never before.

We've been getting outside and soaking up the Wild Florida Rx and have found nature to be a source of comfort. I think many of us have **gained a deeper appreciation for the benefits provided by our natural ecosystems and a better understanding of what we have to lose.**

This difficult year has made Conservation Florida's mission even more relevant, and it has added a new urgency to our motto: Saving Land. For Nature. For People. Forever.

But what hit us during this year is recognizing that while we are working every day to save land, **this year, the land saved us.**

While we don't know how current challenges will play out, there is one thing we can promise you: the land we conserve together will still be here tomorrow, next year, and 100 years from now. That's permanence. That's something you can count on.

...and nature is always there for us when we need it most.

Imagine if earlier generations didn't protect the special places on which we now depend? Where would we be today?

We swim, eyes open and breath held, in crisp, turquoise Florida springs. We explore, vacation, and fish our coasts. We paddle and kayak waterways alongside the manatee and dolphin. We enjoy an endless variety of recreational

activities on the best public lands in the nation. We eat Florida-grown, Florida-raised food. We love it here. Who wouldn't? This is home, and it's iconic. It's Florida.

Now, it's our turn to continue that legacy and save Florida's natural and agricultural landscapes for future generations.

We have work to do!

We watch as our coasts battle the tides of a rising sea and as our estuaries experience algal blooms that destroy entire ecosystems. We ache as panther after panther is struck down on our roads. We lament the loss of green space as another piece of paradise is paved, and another ranch is lost to rooftops. We see what's coming: more of us, more roads, more rooftops.

Protecting Florida's natural and agricultural landscapes has never been more important than it is today as we face a growing population, an extraordinary rate of habitat loss and fragmentation, and reduced funding for land conservation.

Florida is the third-most populous state in the nation, growing by nearly 1,000 newcomers each day. We're projected to exceed 30 million residents by 2060. With this comes a greater demand for water and the development of rural and natural lands for urban use. How we manage our natural resources over the next 10 years – what we save and what we pave – will undoubtedly determine Florida's conservation future and the future of Florida as a whole.

So, this is it. This is the last great push for land conservation in our state.

Conservation Florida will be your partner as we protect critical lands, advocate for meaningful and consistent conservation funding, and serve as a steady voice for the long-term prioritization of Florida's wild and working landscapes.



My heartfelt invitation to make a difference for Wild Florida

Because of you, Conservation Florida has permanently conserved over 25,000 acres of land over the last 21 years. But we must do more, and soon.

We know that Florida's land and water should be defended with unyielding boldness and Florida's biodiversity must be cherished.

So, as a friend to nature, please take a look at your values, your priorities, and your budget and join us: support our work with a meaningful gift, volunteer as we

explore and document wild Florida, or call your state lawmakers and tell them that conservation matters to you. Just know that we will be here alongside you as together, we save land, for nature, for people, forever.

Nature is a precious gift, and we have a chance, right here, right now, to save enough of it in Florida to make a lasting difference ... a forever difference. Land conservation *deals* in forever.

Remember, it all starts with the land. Clean air, fresh drinking water,

nutritious food, recreation, physical health, and mental wellbeing.

We are all tied to the land and part of nature. Nature saves us...now we save nature. We're working for and with you to protect Florida's natural and agricultural landscapes — to preserve wild, wonderful Florida.

This is my heartfelt invitation to join us as we continue to make strides toward our conservation goals, for the love of Florida and for her future.

Every act of giving has a story...
What's yours?

by Justin Buzzi, owner of Get Up And Go Kayaking and a Conservation Florida supporter

GROWING UP IN FLORIDA means getting out on the water all the time. And because my dad is a boat captain, I've even had the opportunity to live on the water. It's where I feel the most at home and the most relaxed.

Naturally, when I started my clear-kayaking business back in 2016, it was completely focused on our waterways. Since then, I've led more than 350 guided kayak tours in and around Central Florida to share my passion for our natural surroundings. Now that we have 14 locations, we have the incredible opportunity to educate even more



people about our fragile environment and the importance of saving our lands and precious waterways.

Our goal is to share our love of kayaking and wildlife, one tour at a time. I want to make absolutely sure that we preserve our wilderness areas for generations to come. We started contributing to Conservation Florida

when Alex McKeeman, our first tour guide, passed away while diving Silver Glen Springs. Each year, we hold one day where 100 percent of the proceeds go to Conservation Florida. It's been a great way to keep his memory alive. He, too, was extremely passionate about the true, authentic Florida that we hold so dear to our hearts.

Gifts in memory & in honor of others

In memory of:

Alex McKeeman

David and Alyssa McKeeman
 Get Up & Go Kayaking;

"We're grateful to donate a full day of tours in Alex McKeeman's name. He was a true Floridian and loved anything and everything to do with the water and land we have here. This is for you buddy."

"Conserving FL alongside you."

"We miss you, Alex!"

"In honor of your love and dedication to the beautiful outdoors."

Laura and Josh Rutledge; "Missing you everyday."

Cecil Shepard

Leslee Linn; "In loving memory of a true Florida outdoorsman."

Freda Green

Deborah Green

Glenn A. Lingle

Pip and Phyllis Randall

In honor of:

Christie & Denise & Christian Sciacca

Donovan Jacoby

Diane Ehlert

Shaída Ehlert

Earth Day's 50th Anniversary

Michael Forrester

Ed Montgomery

Joe Montgomery; "In honor of Ed's leadership and dedication to the mission of Conservation Florida"

John and Mary Ferrell

John Ferrell; "In honor of John and Mary Ferrell, who always desired for the state of Florida to obtain their property. Thank you Conservation Florida for helping me make this happen."

Jessica Modriskiey

Nicole Fernandez; "In honor of Jessica Modriskiey and her unending dedication to Conservation Florida that inspires me daily!"

Katie March at Swamp Tupelo Candle Co

Jacqueline Stewart

Neil, Sarah, and Camille Asma

William and Mary Beth Asma

Robin Krivanek

Jennifer Krivanek; "In honor of my mother."

Steve Grothmann

James Schaefer

Jennifer Clifton and Steve Grothmann; "Here's to Florida Man, Bird Man and Animal Man"

Wilhelm Grothmann

We wish to thank all of those who graciously make our work possible. Here, we share your messages of love and friendship. These tributes were made between 10/01/2019 and 10/31/2020.

Thank you!

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 Wildlands Conservation



Photo by LLOYD GREEN

L to R: Cyndi Fernandez, assistant director; Eva Ortiz-Feder, land stewardship intern; Papa Gueye, conservation program fellow; Lillian Dinkins, conservation program fellow; Traci Deen, executive director and CEO, Jessica Modriskiey, operations manager; Allison Reynolds, land protection associate; Adam Bass, director of conservation (not pictured: Allie Russakis)

Your Conservation Team is Growing



Director of Conservation

Adam is a third-generation Floridian with experience in real estate, agriculture, and art. Before joining our team, Adam managed a 2,000-acre farm and cattle operation and founded a successful wildlife photography business. Adam also served as a Corporal in the Marine Corps with two tours in Iraq.



Conservation Program Fellow

Lillian is a recent graduate of Tuskegee University where she majored in Environmental, Natural Resources, and Plant Sciences with a focus in Forestry and Wildlife. She is from Atlanta, Georgia and although she is a city girl, she has a love for the outdoors and a passion for wildlife.



Conservation Program Fellow

Papa majored in agronomy at Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University. His love for plants spans as far back as he can remember. As a child, he loved going to his grandfather's farm in Senegal. He moved to the U.S. in 2012 and is pursuing his passion to protect places with natural beauty.



Multimedia Coordinator

Allison is currently a student at the University of Florida where she is studying public relations. She is a third-generation Floridian who learned the importance of conservation from watching her family work to protect the land of her family's cattle ranch.

CONSERVATION FLORIDA

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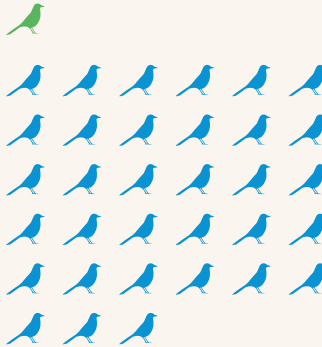
SCAN CODE WITH YOUR
SMARTPHONE'S CAMERA
TO DONATE



ON THE COVER Crested Caracara

Protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and the Endangered Species Act, in Florida, it is listed as Threatened. This striking photo was taken by Adam Bass, our director of conservation on one of our protection projects in the H2O!

1:33 ROI



When you give to Conservation Florida, you can expect a high rate of return.

Over the last three years, our return on investment (ROI) has been at a ratio of 1:33.

Every \$1 million we spent working to save land, yielded \$33 million in conservation impact. **In other words, for every \$100 donated, we protected \$3,300 worth of conservation lands!**

GENEROUS CORPORATE PARTNERS

There is prosperity in sharing. We value businesses that support conservation.

