



## Position Statement on Wildlife Corridors Florida Sierra Club Chapter Conservation Committee

The Florida Chapter of Sierra Club supports state, regional and local agencies in their conservation land-buying efforts; the acquisition of perpetual legal interests sufficient to create viable wildlife corridors of protected native habitat stretching from the Everglades northward to the Okefenokee Swamp, along the Nature Coast and westward through the panhandle to connect existing conservation lands to allow for safe passage of far roaming species like the endangered Florida panther, black bear and other wide-ranging wildlife which require larger blocks of habitat to survive along with many threatened plant species.

Wildlife corridors are connections across the landscape that link up areas of habitat. They support natural processes that occur in a healthy environment, including the movement of species to find resources, such as food and water.

The Florida Ecological Greenway and Florida Wildlife Corridor comprises approximately eighteen million acres, of which approximately 10 million acres of conservation lands are currently being managed by federal and state conservation agencies, and private land managers. Florida has the fastest growing population in the nation so it is increasingly urgent to protect the remaining 8 million acres from future development.

The Florida Ecological Greenways Network (FEGN) is a statewide database that helps to identify missing, critical links in the Wildlife Corridor and prioritizes achievement of a connected statewide ecological network of public and private conservation lands. It is the primary data layer used to inform the Florida Forever, Rural and Family Lands Protection Program and other state, federal, and regional land acquisition programs of the most important ecological corridors and intact landscapes across the state for protection of Florida's native wildlife, ecosystem services, and ecological resiliency. It is the key layer providing the scientific foundation for the Florida Wildlife Corridor.

The FEGN database is created and maintained by the Center for Landscape Conservation Planning. Center Director Tom Hctor has led the creation, revision, and implementation of FEGN since its inception in 1995. Key project partners include the Florida Conservation Group, Florida Wildlife Corridor, and Florida Natural Areas Inventory as well as technical advisory group members and private state agencies and foundations who have provided technical assistance and funding.

The State, Water Management Districts, local governments and environmental organizations need to continue to focus their efforts on actions that will advance the establishment of viable and sustainable regional wildlife corridor(s) that are interconnected statewide.

This can best be accomplished through the acquisition and conservation of wildlife habitats that protect a diverse and significant array of Florida's natural resources such as: imperiled species; aquifer recharge; springs systems, watershed, functional wetlands, fragile coastal resources,



sustainable forestry and ranch lands; archaeological and historic resources; and outdoor natural resource-based recreational lands that will also aid in climate change resiliency. These goals can best be accomplished by prioritizing acquiring lands on the Florida Forever list that have already been scientifically and publicly vetted for their conservation importance creating a natural, perpetual, viable and sustainable statewide network of conservation lands that also function as a wildlife corridor. Once acquired it is critical that these lands are actively managed to protect and restore the ecosystem and be protected from loss of ecological function.

Sierra Club Florida understands the urgency to ensure survival of our unique habitat and the species within; the critical need to create and conserve natural and manmade wildlife corridors, as these missing linkages will connect all of Florida's existing conservation lands, into one functional statewide ecological network.

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