



**WITH THE WILD**  
**WE STAND**

**FISH & WILDLIFE FOUNDATION OF FLORIDA 2024 IMPACT REPORT**





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Since 1994, the nonprofit Fish & Wildlife Foundation of Florida has worked with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) and its partners to ensure Florida remains a place of great natural diversity and beauty. We are deeply engaged in conserving Florida's iconic wildlife and critical habitats on land and sea. Thanks to our many donors, we are also Florida's largest private funder of outdoor education for children and teens, and we help ensure continued public access to traditional outdoor recreation.





## WORKING AT THE INTERSECTION OF URGENT NEED AND LASTING IMPACT

As the Foundation marked its 30th anniversary this year, I was reminded not only of the milestones we've achieved but also of the immense challenges we continue to face. From extreme weather to Florida's continued rapid population growth, conserving and restoring Florida's finest remaining wild places is critical to our quality of life and the state's future.



**LAURA RUSSELL**  
*Board Chair*

Our Foundation prides itself on creating solutions that balance the often competing needs between human society and wildlife. We have proven time and again that with the right partners, vision, and commitment, meaningful progress is possible. Working in close partnership with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and many others, we've helped safeguard thousands of acres of critical habitat and iconic species like the Florida panther, black bear, and manatee. We also provide financial support to FWC and dozens of other organizations providing outdoor education and recreation opportunities to children and families. We are willing to gamble on promising new technologies to combat invasive species and restore our coral reefs and fisheries.

We not only celebrate the past with this 30th anniversary, we recommit ourselves to the future. Ours is now Florida's largest conservation foundation, and with that distinction comes significant responsibility. We owe our partners, our financial supporters, and, above all, Florida's outstanding natural environment our best efforts to help address our state's largest conservation challenges. Every hurricane that reshapes our coastlines, every harmful algal bloom, and every ecosystem or species at risk galvanizes us to work harder.

This determination is rooted in the support of people like you. Looking forward, we see a Florida where nature thrives alongside the human landscape, where

every individual has access to the great outdoors. We must ensure that future generations inherit a landscape as rich and diverse as the one we cherish today.

Thank you for being a vital part of this journey. Here's to the next 30 years of making a lasting impact, together.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Laura Russell".

“  
HERE'S TO THE NEXT  
**30 YEARS**  
”





“

WE'RE CONFIDENT THIS IS A

WIN-WIN

”



Burmese Python (*Python bivittatus*), photo by Liz Barraco

## PILOTING FLORIDA'S FUTURE

2024 has been a year of important pilot programs for Florida conservation. All augur well for the future of our wildlife.

In August, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) launched the **Florida Panther Payment-for-Ecosystem-Services Program** (see page 20). We helped FWC raise \$2 million to launch this effort to expand and improve habitat for panthers and other native wildlife. FWC will compensate private landowners for restoring and maintaining high-quality native habitat for panthers — the better the habitat, the higher the per-acre compensation. 69 landowners from 14 counties owning 172,000 acres applied for acceptance into the program — an outstanding response. We look forward to reporting further on this effort to better secure the panther's range.

We are also seeking legislative approval and funding for a **marine "Coastal Corridor"** to improve habitat for our fisheries on the Gulf and Atlantic coasts. Recreational fishing in Florida is a \$14 billion industry, of which \$3.1 billion can be attributed to fishing and diving on our existing artificial reefs. Many are succumbing to natural deterioration, and we need new underwater habitat support structures

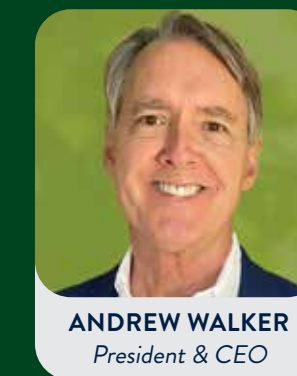
to boost our fisheries and buy us time to restore Florida's Coral Reef and other natural habitats important to our marine life. We are seeking state funds to help FWC launch this 35-county effort and sustain it over the next 15 years.

We and FWC are also partnering with a young, innovative company managing invasive species by creating markets for their skins. Florida-based **INVERSA Leathers** has already perfected turning lionfish into fine leather goods, leading to the removal of 40,000 lionfish from the Caribbean in just a few years. Now they are turning their attention to **Burmese pythons**, and U.S. fashion designer Gabriela Hearst, known for her commitment to sustainable and ethically produced fashion, has begun using Florida invasive python leather in her spring/summer 2025 collection, thanks to INVERSA. The goal is to add significant financial incentives to capturing Florida pythons while driving down the cost and efficiency of capturing them.

And finally, our Foundation is partnering with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the South Florida Water Management District, Everglades National Park, and others to ensure a future for Florida's highly endangered **Cape Sable Seaside Sparrow**.

As freshwater flows are restored in the Everglades, we must find and improve other habitat for the sparrow, much of whose current wet prairie will eventually be flooded. We're confident this is a win-win — finding new habitat for the sparrow and boosting its population, thanks to a \$600,000 grant from the South Florida Water Management District to launch captive breeding while restoring freshwater flows to the Everglades.

As donors to our nonprofit Foundation, you are helping make this progress possible. Thank you! More to come throughout 2025.



ANDREW WALKER  
President & CEO





## OUR MISSION

The nonprofit Fish & Wildlife Foundation of Florida works to conserve Florida's iconic wildlife and the lands and waters they need to survive, while supporting traditional outdoor recreation and education. We work closely with FWC and many other public and private partners through philanthropy, communications and education, and on-the-ground conservation action.



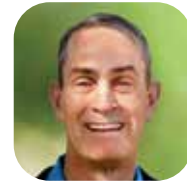
**BOARD OF DIRECTORS**



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**FWC EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**  
**Roger A. Young**  
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**THANK YOU TO OUTGOING BOARD MEMBERS**

This year we say goodbye to four long-serving, outstanding members of our Board:

- **Ignacio Borbolla**
- **Chairman Emeritus**  
**Richard A. “Dick” Corbett**
- **Seth D. McKeel, Jr.**
- **John Pope**

Thank you all for your service and lifelong commitment to conservation!



**Nick Wiley**

Nick Wiley is a lifelong outdoor enthusiast whose passion for wildlife conservation began in the woodlands, swamps, and creeks of south Georgia where he spent countless hours exploring as a child. “I spent every opportunity catching and studying any critter I could get my hands on, especially snakes,” Nick shared. His love of the outdoors was nurtured by his family, particularly his grandfather who taught him how to fish and hunt. “He and I were best buddies as we fished about every pond in Turner County, flushed wild quail around farm fields, and enjoyed the camaraderie of community dove hunts,” Nick said.

A pivotal moment in second grade: holding a seven-foot-long indigo snake at the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge sparked his lifelong commitment to studying and conserving wildlife. “I have a photograph of that magnificent ebony snake draped around my neck with its head and tail touching the floor on either side of me,” Nick remembered. “I was enchanted by the Okefenokee and its wildlife. On the school bus ride home, I remember dreaming about how I could be like the refuge’s zoologist when I grew up.”

His professional journey reflects this fascination and dedication. With 30 years at FWC, Nick served in roles ranging from field biologist airboating across

the state surveying alligators to Executive Director. “It was a tremendous honor to be selected to serve in this role and work with an excellent senior leadership team for eight years,” Nick said of his time as Executive Director. He played a key role in initiatives like restructuring the agency post-merger and founding the Florida Youth Conservation Centers Network, which continues to connect young people with the outdoors.

Today, as Chief Operating Officer of Ducks Unlimited, Nick combines conservation with teamwork, leading efforts to protect vital wildlife habitats. “It is rewarding to know we are setting records for restoring and protecting habitats every year, but the enjoyable part is seeing the smiling faces of our volunteers and staff as they give high fives and hugs for making a meaningful difference for conservation by working together,” he shared. In recognition for this work, Bass Pro Shops recently honored Nick with their Conservation Partner of the Year award.

Joining the Foundation’s Board felt like coming home for Nick, especially since he previously served on the Board during his tenure as FWC Executive Director. “The Foundation is focused on doing the right things for conservation in Florida,” Nick observed. “I have been so impressed watching this Foundation

**BOARD SPOTLIGHT**



continue to build, grow, and deliver support for the highest priority fish and wildlife conservation needs in the state and continue to serve as a strong and meaningful partner for FWC.”

When not working, Nick splits time between Tennessee and Florida, enjoying kayaking, birdwatching, and chasing Osceola turkeys, always reconnecting with the landscapes that first inspired his conservation journey.



# Erin Smart

DIRECTOR OF FINANCE



Director of Finance Erin Smart first joined the Foundation as a bookkeeper, and after leaving to become a certified public accountant, returned to us as Director of Finance. Growing up in north Florida, Erin developed a love for the outdoors through horseback riding, camping with the Girl Scouts, and exploring the beaches and woods near her home. A formative moment in her connection to wild Florida occurred at age six when her family stopped to let a six-foot alligator cross the road. “It was my first time seeing an alligator, and the experience left me both fascinated and humbled,” Erin shared. “It was a powerful reminder of the need to respect and protect Florida’s unique wildlife and habitats.”

Erin oversees all of the Foundation’s financial operations, ensuring the accuracy of day-to-day accounting transactions, managing the budget, and preparing financial statements. While her favorite state animal is the Florida black bear, she is most proud of the impact the Foundation was able to

## STAFF SPOTLIGHT

make during the supplemental manatee feeding in 2022 and 2023, witnessing the overwhelming outpouring of national and international financial support that allowed the Foundation to purchase 600,000 pounds of lettuce. “The response we received of people willing to help was unbelievable,” Erin said.

She also takes great pride in the Foundation’s ability to accomplish big things with a small team, often surprising others with how much can be achieved by a staff of just 12. “We are small but mighty,” Erin shared. “The Foundation is able to pivot and respond very quickly to whatever comes our way. It amazes me and them the number of things we are able to accomplish with such a small team.”

When she’s not serving in a leadership role for our small but mighty team, she can be found with her husband, two daughters, and their dog exploring wild Florida.

“It was a powerful reminder of the need to respect and protect Florida’s unique wildlife and habitats.”

## STAFF



**Andrew Walker**  
President & CEO



**Will Bradford**  
Chief Operating Officer



**Michelle Ashton**  
Director of Communications & Events



**Emily Dey**  
Major Gift Officer



**Cindy Fray**  
Administrative Assistant



**Francesca Klypchak**  
Philanthropy Coordinator



**Julie Lane**  
Accountant



**Nabiha Nur**  
Graphic Design Intern



**Paula Pack**  
Events Coordinator



**Tindl Rainey**  
Director of Conservation & External Relations



**Dani Richter**  
Director of Philanthropy



**Rachael Schirmer**  
Digital Marketing Manager



**Erin Smart**  
Director of Finance

## PFS COMMITTEE

**Dr. James “Buddy” Powell**  
Committee Chair, Clearwater Marine Aquarium Research Institute

**Jason Gulley**  
Citizen Representative

**James Stansbury**  
Florida Commerce

**Dana C. Bryan**  
Florida Springs Institute, Wakulla Springs Alliance

**Chandler Keenan**  
Florida Department of Environmental Protection

**Kent Smith**  
Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

## WFF COMMITTEE

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Committee Chair, The Future of Hunting in Florida

**Newton Cook**  
United Waterfowlers – Florida

**Morgan Richardson**  
Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

**Elizabeth Bland**  
American Daughters of Conservation

**Mike Elfenbein**  
Cypress IWLA, The Future of Hunting in Florida



In the wild, adaptability is key to survival — and the same holds true for conservation. We're not just reacting to change; we're leading it. With each new challenge, we're embracing collaborative, innovative approaches to conserve wild Florida.

In 2024, our Foundation raised and distributed more than \$10 million statewide to projects supporting conservation, youth education, and outdoor recreation programs. Thousands like you made this possible through outright and planned charitable gifts, purchases of our four specialty license plates, and more.

The following stories reflect our commitment to being responsive, using creativity and science to ensure wild Florida thrives in an ever-changing world.



## 2024-2028 ACTION PLAN

Over the next five years, the Fish & Wildlife Foundation of Florida will undertake a series of strategic actions to address Florida's principal threats to wildlife, natural lands, and outdoor experiences.

### KEY THREATS

- RAPID (SUB)URBANIZATION
- LOSS OF OUTDOORS ACCESS
- NONPOINT SOURCE POLLUTION & HARMFUL ALGAL BLOOMS
- RISING SEA LEVELS & LOSS OF COASTAL HABITAT
- LOSS OF REEFS & OTHER FISHERIES HABITAT
- INVASIVE SPECIES
- WILDLIFE DISEASE
- POTENTIAL WATER SCARCITY

### CORE INITIATIVES

- CONSERVE WILDLIFE
- PRESERVE OUR TRADITIONAL OUTDOOR HERITAGE
- RESTORE OUR REEFS & FISHERIES
- GET YOUTH BACK INTO NATURE
- COMBAT INVASIVE SPECIES

### STRATEGIES

- REDOUBLE OUR SUPPORT FOR FWC
- EXPAND OUR PUBLIC & PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS
- SUPPORT CONSERVATION INNOVATION
- STRENGTHEN NATURE PHILANTHROPY AS FLORIDA'S COMMUNITY FOUNDATION FOR CONSERVATION
- EDUCATE, INSPIRE, AND ENGAGE FLORIDIANS IN CONSERVATION

80 | NOTABLE GRANTS

TOTALING  
\$1,843,537

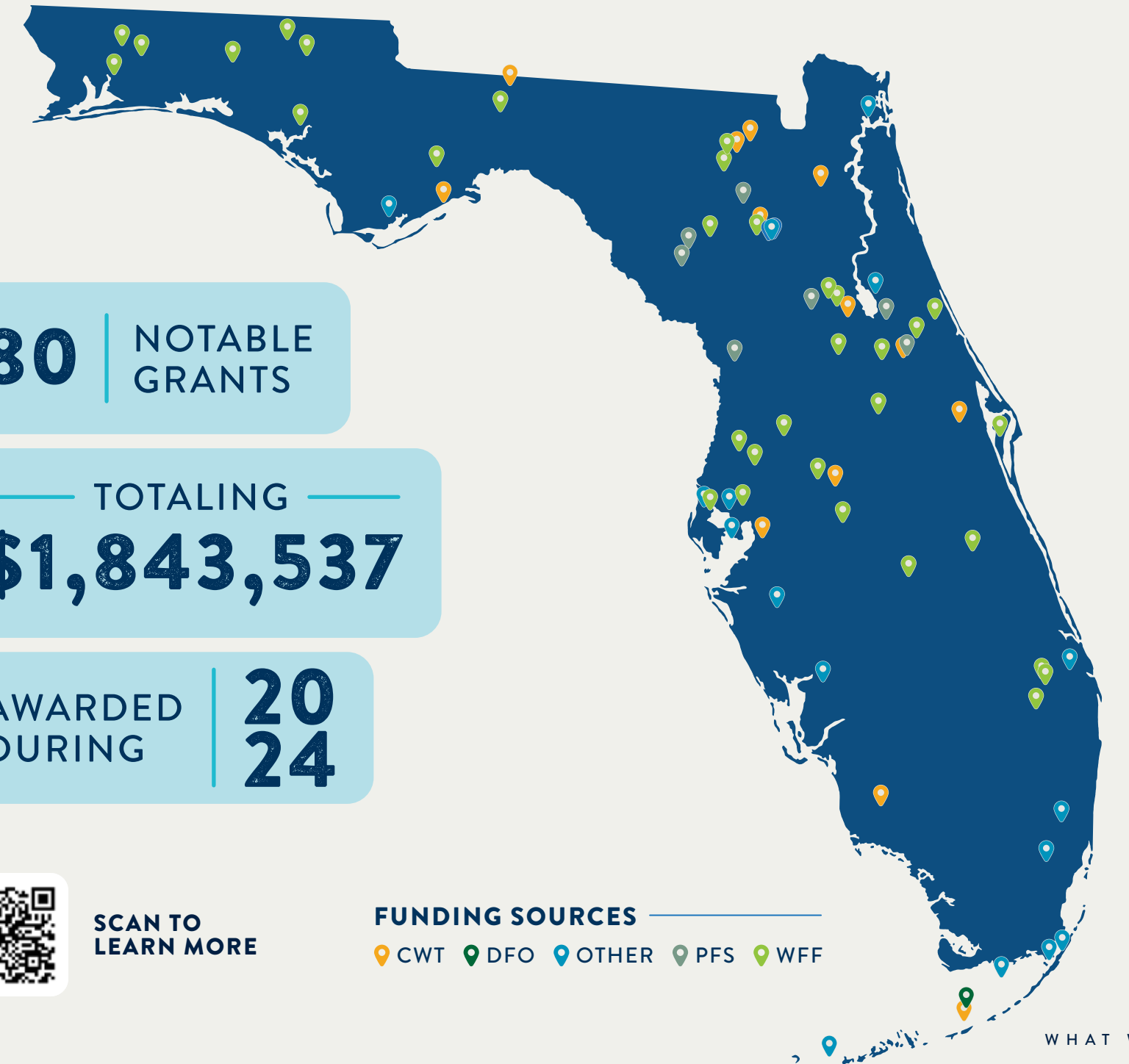
AWARDED DURING | 2024



SCAN TO LEARN MORE

#### FUNDING SOURCES

- CWT
- DFO
- OTHER
- PFS
- WFF





“It’s a creative solution using a partnership of citizen volunteers and scientists to help a Florida protected species find their shell-mate.”



Queen conch (*Aliger gigas*)



## PLAYING MATCHMAKER FOR KEYS’ QUEEN CONCH



In the warm, shallow waters of Florida and the Caribbean, the queen conch, a large marine snail, engages in a slow but methodical mating ritual each spring and summer. But lately, the queen conchs in

the Florida Keys face challenges in finding mates and reproducing, putting their future at risk. Decades of overfishing and displacement by hurricanes have significantly reduced their population, causing difficulty for them to match. To make matters worse, female conchs in nearshore waters struggle to develop sexually, further endangering the species.

To help the queen conchs, scientists planned a unique intervention. Thanks to funding from the Foundation, FWC issued a survey to local Keys’ residents asking them to report queen conch sightings. Researchers used this information to relocate queen conchs from the isolated, shallow waters to healthier populations farther offshore.

“Nearshore conch are destined for a life of celibacy, and we’re trying to fix that,” says Gabriel Delgado, a research scientist and conch specialist with the FWC

who oversaw the relocation of more than 200 tagged conch in the summer from the coast near Marathon to an offshore reef in the Upper Keys. “It’s like, ‘Hey folks, you guys are having trouble meeting another conch. Well, here’s some more to the party, now you can open up to each other a little bit more.’”

In the late fall, translocated conch were still living in their new homes. Biologists have not observed any mating or laying eggs yet, but that’s to be expected considering it is not reproductive season for the species.

“It’s a creative solution using a partnership of citizen volunteers and scientists to help a Florida protected species find their shell-mate,” said Andrew Walker, the Foundation’s President & CEO. “And by putting the conch back in the Conch Republic, the project will increase the health of Florida’s coral reef.”



# Casting a Lifeline to Lake George

JOHNNY MORRIS, LEGENDARY ANGLER, NOTED CONSERVATIONIST, AND BASS PRO SHOPS FOUNDER, ANNOUNCED A PERSONAL DONATION OF \$200,000 TO OUR FOUNDATION AND FWC IN MAY 2024, WHICH WHEN ADDED TO A \$200,000 GRANT FROM THE BASS PRO SHOPS AND CABELA'S OUTDOOR FUND, TOTALED \$400,000 IN DONATIONS FOR THE TRANSFORMATIVE WORK TO RESTORE LAKE GEORGE.

The announcements, set against the backdrop of the Bassmaster Elite tournament at St. Johns River, came at a critical juncture for Lake George, whose vital aquatic vegetation — a linchpin for the ecosystem and pivotal for prized freshwater fish like the Florida largemouth bass — was badly damaged by Hurricanes Matthew in 2016 and Irma in 2017.

“We’re proud to stand alongside our customers in advocating for anglers and outdoor enthusiasts in supporting this important conservation project,” Morris said. “Bringing Lake George to full ecological health will ensure it remains one of the most iconic and celebrated fisheries for bass anywhere in the world.”

FWC embarked several years ago on an ambitious effort to restore the lake, Florida’s second largest. The water quality is good, so FWC was able to

begin restoration by fencing out grazing animals like turtles, manatees, and tilapia. In many other waterways, restoration requires expensive hand planting, but Lake George grasses are recovering on their own when grazing young plants is prevented. The \$400,000 from the Outdoor Fund will accelerate this work in 2025.

“This gift is the latest in a multi-year Bass Pro Shops and Cabela’s commitment to find solutions to Florida’s most important conservation issues,” said Foundation President & CEO Andrew Walker. “We’re deeply grateful to Mr. Morris, his conservation team at Bass Pro Shops and Cabela’s, and the thousands of customers who round up their change as a donation to its Outdoor Fund.”

Restoration will revive Lake George’s reputation as a premier bass fishing spot and enhance tourism

in the St. Johns River watershed. As mentioned, the gift was announced by Walker and Tom Graef, Director of FWC’s Division of Freshwater Fisheries Management at the 2024 Bassmaster Elite tournament. The tournament was the first to be held at the lake since 2017; this restoration ensures it won’t be the last.

“This marks a significant milestone in restoration efforts for Lake George,” said Graef. “The continued support from Johnny Morris and Bass Pro Shops and Cabela’s Outdoor Fund makes a difference in maintaining healthy Florida fisheries. By restoring eelgrass, we’re not only protecting bass but enhancing the resilience and functionality of the lake’s entire ecosystem.”



Lake George fence going up



Eelgrass planted in Silver Glen



Silver Glen fencing tied into USFS shoreline



Johnny Morris



Measuring enclosure and running string at Lake George

DONOR SPOTLIGHT

“We’re proud to stand alongside our customers in advocating for anglers and outdoor enthusiasts in supporting this important conservation project. Bringing Lake George to full ecological health will ensure it remains one of the most iconic and celebrated fisheries for bass anywhere in the world.”



# GROUNDBREAKING GRANT BOOSTS FLORIDA PANTHER CONSERVATION



The quest to safeguard the Florida panther (*Puma concolor coryi*) received a significant boost in 2024 thanks to a \$1.5 million National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) grant and an additional \$400,000 from our Foundation. This vital funding from NFWF's America the Beautiful Challenge could prove the next big step in the recovery of the endangered Florida panther, supporting FWC's and the Foundation's innovative project to enhance and conserve essential habitat.

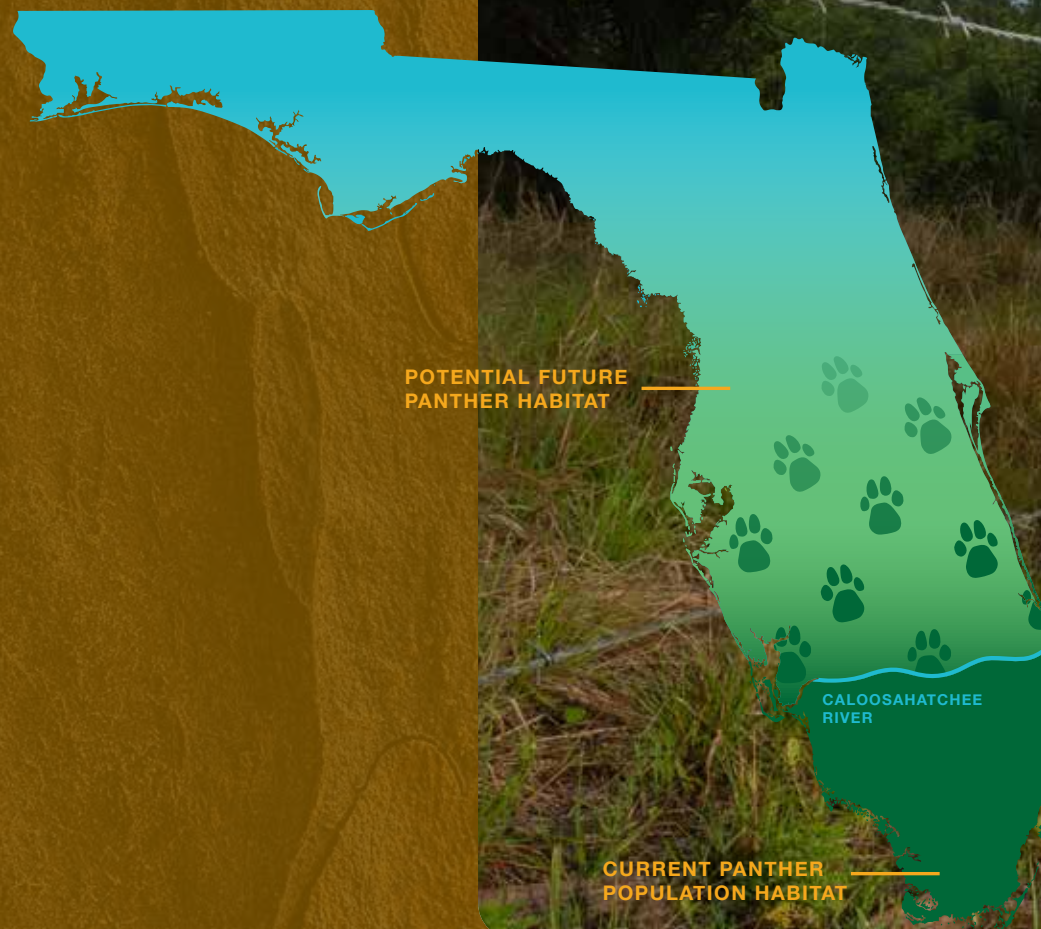
"The America the Beautiful Challenge supports an amazing and diverse set of conservation and restoration projects across the nation," said Rachel Dawson, Director of National Programs at NFWF. "This project from FWC and the Fish & Wildlife Foundation of Florida — the Florida Panther Payment-for-Ecosystem-Services Program — will help ensure the panther's future by providing financial support for private landowners who restore and preserve critical native habitat."

Once reduced to approximately 30 individual animals, the panther population has increased to an estimated 200 individuals, thanks to decades of recovery work by biologists with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, FWC, and many private organizations. Virtually all of these cats are located south of the Caloosahatchee River. To be considered safe from extinction, several additional populations need to be established. In most of those areas, land is largely in private ownership.

"Ranchers really have a passion for conservation and the species that are on their ranches," says Sarasota County cattle rancher and conservationist Jim Strickland. "While being environmentally conscious, we also know there are times we don't make a lot of money, and if we lose four or five calves to predation by panthers, depending on the operation, that could really hurt financially."

Announced last summer, the pilot project has attracted 69 applications from 14 counties, representing more than 172,000 acres of potentially critical panther habitat. Nearly two-thirds of applicants were landowners with whom FWC had little or no recent engagement, underscoring the program's ability to foster new relationships. More than 80 percent of applicants also expressed interest in having wildlife cameras installed on their lands.

Biologists with FWC's Habitat and Species Conservation Division are evaluating each application. "We believe this initiative will not only aid the Florida panther but prove a blueprint for wildlife conservation nationwide," said Tindl Rainey, Director of Conservation & External Relations for our Foundation. "At the same time, FWC and we are assisting ranchers and other landowners who have stewarded these lands, often for many generations."



Florida panther (*Puma concolor coryi*), photo by Carlton Ward Jr / Wildpath



# Lending a Helping Hand to the Tricolored Heron

## DONOR SPOTLIGHT

Thanks to the generosity of Florida homebuilder GL Homes, efforts are now underway to study the remaining populations of tricolored herons (*Egretta tricolor*) in Everglades National Park.

Named for its dark slate-blue colored head, purple chest, and white under-plumage, the tricolored heron has been disappearing from much of the Everglades for reasons not entirely understood. Their numbers, however, have increased along the edges of Florida Bay. In 2024 GL Homes underwrote the first scientific survey to document their locations and numbers, establishing a baseline that can be used to track future population and location changes.

The work will continue in 2025 to determine if the Florida Bay tricolored herons are also making use of inland portions of the Everglades where they were once abundant. The ultimate hope is to gain greater

understanding of their population and preferred habitats within the park, and why their numbers have declined so significantly.

GL Homes is also funding efforts to protect the tricolored heron further north at seven island rookery nesting sites around Tampa Bay. Home to about 150 pairs of tricolored herons in 2024, these sites will be surveyed to track nesting success and ensure the birds have the safest possible environment to raise their young. Scientists are using remote cameras to track predators and remove threats when necessary, ensuring minimal disturbance to the colonies during nesting season. Despite a busy hurricane season, the seven sites received little to no storm damage in 2024.

A portion of GL Homes's donation will also be used to educate the public about the importance of these

islands and conduct regular cleanups, removing discarded fishing gear and other debris that can entangle and kill nesting birds.

“The Foundation has been a strong partner in our desire to help tricolored herons,” said GL Homes Senior Vice President Dick Norwalk. “They worked with partner organizations to identify projects which we could support, including studying the herons’ nesting patterns in an area where they have largely been absent in recent years. We were grateful to work with the Foundation to ensure the conservation of a bird beloved by our team.”



Tricolored heron (*Egretta tricolor*)

“The Foundation has been a strong partner in our desire to help tricolored herons.”

DICK NORWALK • GL HOMES SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT



# REMEMBERING A CONSERVATION HERO

JEN EELLS | SEPTEMBER 14, 1982 – JULY 22, 2024

Jen Eells, a biologist for FWC, had a deep passion for small mammals, especially bats. This passion took her across the country, from studying endangered beach mice to researching the disease ecology of Florida grasshopper sparrows. But her love for bats in particular drove her to pursue conservation with unmatched dedication.

Tragically, Jen passed away in a car accident on July 22, 2024 while conducting critical bat monitoring research in north Florida. Her commitment to preserving bat populations and their ecosystems is a legacy that continues to inspire her colleagues.

In her honor, the FWC North Central Region hosted the first Annual Jen Eells Memorial Bat-House Construction and Education Workshop on the last Friday of October.

Our Foundation is proud to honor Jen's life and passion for bats and other sometimes overlooked native species. In addition to underwriting this annual event, we and FWC

have created the Jen Eells Small Animal Research Internship in her memory. This annual internship will be open to graduating high school students and freshman — and sophomore — year college students wishing to pursue a career in field biology.



Southeastern Myotis (*Myotis austroriparius*), photo by Kevin Oxenrider



# WHEN CORALS NEED EVACUATING TOO



HURRICANES CAN CAUSE SIGNIFICANT DAMAGE TO CORAL REEFS, EVEN AS THOSE REEFS PROTECT THE MAINLAND FROM WAVES AND STORM SURGE. BUT CORALS BEING GROWN ON LAND OR IN NURSERIES JUST OFFSHORE ARE PARTICULARLY VULNERABLE WHEN A STORM COMES THEIR WAY.

Mote Marine Aquarium on the coast in Sarasota successfully transferred hundreds of young corals to tanks at its International Coral Gene Bank, their sister facility in eastern Sarasota County, prior to Hurricane Milton's landfall on October 9th. The corals at our own Florida Coral Rescue Center in Orlando, run in partnership with SeaWorld, Disney, and the Association of Zoos and Aquariums, were able to shelter safely in place thanks to the facility's backup generators.

Corals held by the Florida Aquarium at its Apollo Beach facility, adjacent to FWC's Suncoast Youth Conservation Center, were moved to the Georgia Aquarium in Atlanta and to the Reef Institute in

West Palm Beach thanks in part to our Foundation's funding. Many other organizations were involved, including the University of Miami and the Ruskin Aquaculture Facility, which had corals residing at the Florida Aquarium. The Georgia Aquarium faced logistical challenges in their journey along Interstate 75, joining the millions of people evacuating Florida. Luckily, the team thought ahead and packed extra cans of gasoline to make it home. While complex, the evacuation effort was entirely successful.

All of these corals are back in place, where they are being bred and grown to a size at which they can be planted back onto Florida's Coral Reef. We are collaborating with these organizations in a long-term

effort to breed corals with greater genetic diversity and resilience to disease, rising ocean temperatures, and other stresses.

During Hurricanes Debby, Helene, and Milton our Foundation also supported FWC Law Enforcement's search and rescue operations, providing funds to replace worn equipment and help FWC employees affected by the storm find temporary shelter and food. **Governor Ron DeSantis, meanwhile, provided our Foundation with \$1 million via the Volunteer Florida Foundation and Florida Disaster Fund** (page 27) to help members of the Florida Aquaculture Association rebuild after Helene and Milton. The Foundation will add funds of its own to this effort.

*Continued on page 26*



*Florida Coral Rescue Center, photo by SeaWorld*



“

*When we saw the devastation in the State of North Carolina, we quickly shifted a part of our response team and were one of the first States to assist those who are in a critical situation in western North Carolina. It is especially humbling to see so many FWC personnel want to help others despite what we are dealing with in our own backyards.”*

ROGER YOUNG • FWC EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AND FOUNDATION BOARD MEMBER

FWC first responders also worked extensively in North Carolina after Helene, bringing their high-water vehicles and specialized storm response equipment to the hardest-hit areas.

“When we saw the devastation in the State of North Carolina, we quickly shifted a part of our response team and were one of the first States to assist those who are in a critical situation in western North Carolina,” said FWC Executive Director and

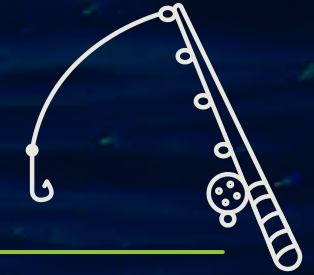
Foundation Board Member Roger Young. “It is especially humbling to see so many FWC personnel want to help others despite what we are dealing with in our own backyards.”

Our thanks to all of you who have contributed to these kinds of relief efforts over the years. You can still do so by scanning this QR code for these and future storms.



SCAN TO  
DONATE

## HELPING ANGLERS RETURN TO THE WATER



As we shared, Governor Ron DeSantis generously awarded our Foundation \$1 million from the Florida Disaster Fund to help rebuild the state’s fishing and aquaculture sectors following the devastation caused by 2024’s storms. Our Foundation contributed an additional \$260,000 to restore boat slips, docks, fish houses, and aquaculture businesses across the Big Bend region.

“As FWC’s citizen support organization, we consider it an essential responsibility to help in times of emergency,” said Andrew Walker, President & CEO of the Foundation. “Our hearts go out to all who were impacted by the recent storms, including our state’s vital fishing industry. We are honored to help both commercial and recreational anglers get back on the water.”

This investment represented a crucial step in disaster relief, ensuring the swift recovery of essential marine

infrastructure, restoring livelihoods, and supporting the economic resilience of Florida’s fishing communities. Fishing and Florida are inseparable: Florida leads the nation in the number of saltwater fishing anglers, generating a \$9.2 billion impact on the state’s economy. Additionally, the annual dockside value of commercial fisheries was estimated at \$244 million. The grant will help Florida residents regenerate lost income and rebuild their businesses and infrastructure.

“The Big Bend’s fishing industry took a direct hit from hurricanes Debby and Helene, and so did the hardworking Floridians who make their living on the water,” said Governor DeSantis. “Today’s investments will help to rebuild critical waterside infrastructure and help get Floridians in the fishing and aquaculture industries back to full operations.”



# CHARTING NEW WATERS



THE UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI IS A GLOBAL LEADER IN MARINE SCIENCE AND CONSERVATION, COLLABORATING WITH FWC AND OTHER PARTNERS ON CRITICAL INITIATIVES LIKE REEF RESTORATION AND COASTAL ECOSYSTEM PRESERVATION.

This year our Foundation proudly partnered for the first time with the University's Cnidarian Immunity Laboratory, co-funding intern Rose Santana under the guidance of Dr. Nikki Traylor-Knowles.

Born and raised in the Dominican Republic, Rose grew up immersed in the ocean's beauty and importance thanks to her grandfathers, both fishermen. "They taught me the importance of the ocean and how it sustains people's lives," Rose recalled. "I decided very early I wanted to study marine biology." Her childhood on an island surrounded by water inspired her lifelong dream of becoming a marine biologist, a dream she pursued by earning a degree in marine biology with minors in environmental studies and marine and coastal affairs at Florida International University. She is furthering that dream by now pursuing a PhD in biology at Florida International University, focusing on the effects of climate change and pollution on coral reefs.

Rose's internship focused on studying turtle grass (*thalassia testudinum* seagrass), an essential ecosystem for marine life and coastal health. Her research examined how water temperatures influence seagrass growth and how seagrasses exposed to different temperatures respond to stressors like poor water quality and overfishing.

She discovered that while increased temperatures did impact seagrass structure, it was not the only driving factor. Further studies need to be performed to understand the combined effects of multiple stressors. Her findings contribute to knowledge of how these vital ecosystems are adapting to climate change. "Learning about the impact we have on the environment is critical in developing a plan to protect it," Rose emphasized. Her work is particularly well-timed, said Dr. Traylor-Knowles, given the significant loss of coastal seagrass in recent years and extreme water temperatures. Such research could benefit our

Foundation's seagrass restoration efforts in the Indian River Lagoon, Biscayne Bay, and elsewhere.

Beyond her research, Rose is deeply committed to diversifying marine science. Recognizing the lack of representation in the field, she founded a chapter of Women in Marine Science at FIU to connect students with lab opportunities and mentors. She also participated in school science nights, using hands-on activities to inspire the next generation of scientists. "If kids see someone who looks like them, it might encourage them to pursue a career in marine science," Rose explains.

Dr. Traylor-Knowles is a leader in coral immunity research and has worked extensively on stony coral tissue loss disease. She is also founder of Black Women in Ecology, Evolution, and Marine Sciences.



“They taught me the importance of the ocean and how it sustains people's lives.”

ROSE SANTANA • CO-FUNDING INTERN

“Young scientists like Rose represent the future of conservation,” said Foundation President & CEO Andrew Walker. “The best and brightest minds are needed to ensure we can overcome stony coral tissue loss disease and other challenges to our natural world.”

The work of the Cnidarian Immunity Laboratory is crucial to restoring Florida's Coral Reef. By helping support young scientists like Rose, the Foundation hopes to spur innovation and creativity to help ensure a future where ecosystems thrive alongside the communities that rely on them.

The Foundation was honored to partner with the University of Miami and Dr. Traylor-Knowles Laboratory and looks forward to additional opportunities to support the careers of young scientists working in conservation.



Florida manatee (*Trichechus manatus latirostris*)

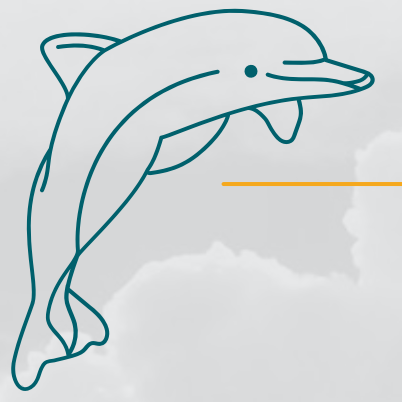


“FOR PEOPLE TO CARE WE MUST  
**CONNECT**  
PEOPLE TO THE DOLPHINS”



Dolphins (Delphinidae), photo by Rebekah Nelson

## FROM THE SKY TO THE SEA



**DRONES ARE DOING MORE THAN DELIVERING PACKAGES IN FLORIDA THESE DAYS – THEY’RE ALSO PROVING A POWERFUL AND RELATIVELY INEXPENSIVE CONSERVATION RESEARCH TOOL.**

A partnership between the Miami-based Marine Order for Research and Action through Environmental Stewardship (MORAES) and the Dolphin Research Center (DRC), the “Dolphins by Drones” project is putting this to the test via a study of bottlenose dolphins (*Tursiops truncatus*) in Florida Bay.

On a calm day in the middle Florida Keys, Kirk Linaje of MORAES can be found launching a drone to hover above a dolphin to collect a breath sample when it surfaces. With a specially designed petri dish, Kirk and his team can capture such samples to assess each dolphin’s genetics, health, and adaptation to environmental changes, all with no physical contact. “We no longer have to capture and touch the animals or otherwise stress them to get this information,” he explained. The drones can even estimate each animal’s weight.

Drones are also allowing the team to observe dolphins in places they couldn’t access before, paving the way for a broader understanding of dolphin movement, population dynamics, and the environment they depend on. Such real-time monitoring can also be shared immediately with other researchers or students in classrooms. “If we’re expecting people to continue to care about dolphins and conserve them, we have to connect people to them,” said Emily Guarino, a researcher and trainer at the DRC.

Drone technology is being rapidly adapted to monitor a host of wildlife species on and off land, as well as algal blooms and other phenomena. Our Foundation anticipates sponsoring development of additional applications.





# TRACKING TURKEYS



HAVE YOU BOUGHT YOUR SPECIALTY LICENSE PLATE YET THIS YEAR? CONSIDER OUR DEER TAG: PROCEEDS FROM THE SALE OF WILDLIFE FOUNDATION OF FLORIDA (WFF) PLATES ALLOW US TO MAKE A MEANINGFUL DIFFERENCE FOR CONSERVATION, WILDLIFE RESEARCH, AND OUTDOOR RECREATION. IN 2024, WE PROVIDED \$328,000 IN PLATE FUNDS FOR 37 NEW PROJECTS ACROSS THE SUNSHINE STATE.

One was a multi-year study by FWC and the University of Florida on wild turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*) behavior and health. This project aimed to equip wildlife managers with data to set hunting seasons that more accurately align with wild turkey nesting and gobbling habits, better balancing hunter satisfaction with population sustainability.

In 2024 researchers successfully captured and tagged 41 wild turkey hens across key conservation areas, including the University of Florida's 27,000-acre DeLuca Preserve, a site conserved with help from Ducks Unlimited and our Foundation.

Each bird was fitted with a GPS transmitter to track movements and automated recording units were established on research sites, allowing the team to closely monitor nesting patterns and gobbling activity.

This study included a focus on two emerging viral diseases affecting turkeys, lymphoproliferative disease and reticuloendotheliosis. Analyses of blood samples and other data will allow researchers to document the prevalence and effects of these diseases in the state, informing future conservation and management of turkey populations.

Despite challenges posed by Hurricanes Helene and Milton, the research team made significant progress in 2024, and our Foundation is continuing to fund this work in 2025. Autonomous recording units have been deployed at hunted and non-hunted sites to track daily gobbling patterns, and comprehensive data on nest-initiation dates and brood success is being collected. This information will continue to guide FWC in setting hunting season dates while ensuring turkey populations remain healthy and sustainable.



Turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*), photo by Joe Davis







*Anhinga, photo by Andy Wraithmell*



THE FLORIDA CONSERVATION LEGACY SOCIETY WAS CREATED TO RECOGNIZE AND THANK THOSE INDIVIDUALS WHO HAVE MADE THE MOST PERSONAL AND THOUGHTFUL GIFT OF ALL, A COMMITMENT TO ENSURE FLORIDA REMAINS WILD FOR GENERATIONS TO COME.



LEAVE A LEGACY

You can leave a lasting legacy by naming the Foundation in your estate plans through a will, trust, prepaid life insurance policy, or other estate planning vehicles.

Thanks to our partnership with **FreeWill**, estate planning has never been easier. FreeWill is a free, online will-writing tool that guides you through the process of creating your will and legacy in 20 minutes or less. To get started, scan this QR code. For more information about leaving a legacy gift, please visit our website or contact Director of Philanthropy Dani Richter at [drichter@wildlifeflorida.org](mailto:drichter@wildlifeflorida.org). All inquiries will be kept confidential.

Whether via a bequest or outright gift of cash, stocks, artwork, or real estate, please consider a contribution to our three permanent endowments.

### FLORIDA CONSERVATION LEGACY SOCIETY MEMBERS

- |   |                                  |
|---|----------------------------------|
| Mr. Alex Ariciuc                        | Mr. Glenn Eric Lewis             |
| Ms. Anna Barbara Bennett                | Mr. John Morrison                |
| Ms. Amanda Breault                      | Mr. Darin O'Neal                 |
| Ms. Dana Clare & Mr. Leif Burhans       | Mr. Gregory Otto                 |
| Ms. Gina Mariani Chastain               | Ms. Michelle J. Pavlick          |
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| Ms. Georgianna Darst                    | Mrs. Laura & Mr. Byron Russell   |
| Mrs. & Mr. John Diede                   | Ms. Kristina Scadden             |
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| Ms. Katie Kimball                       | Mr. Jeffrey Zipay                |
| Ms. Bryony Kowalewski                   |                                  |

## OUR ENDOWMENTS

### THE CHILDREN AND NATURE ENDOWMENT



Remembering future generations in your estate plans is easy via a gift to the Children and Nature Endowment, which supports outdoor education programs for youth throughout Florida. More than 300,000 children and teenagers annually receive formative outdoor experiences via the programs we support, but many more Florida children have little connection to the outdoors and all of its physical and psychological benefits. Help us help more children by donating to our Endowment.

### RARE PLANT CONSERVATION ENDOWMENT



Rare plants account for nearly 15% of the state's 2,864 native species, many of which are endemic to Florida. Some are rare due to their narrow biological niche, but most have become threatened by the human transformation of the landscape. By donating to the Rare Plant Conservation Endowment, you're helping safeguard these species by supporting the scientists who conduct the surveys, outplanting, reintroduction trials, pollination studies, and habitat protection essential to preventing their extinction.

### THE FLORIDA CONSERVATION ENDOWMENT



The Florida Conservation Endowment is our general endowment, used to support a portion of our operations and the many conservation programs and projects we operate or sponsor. This permanent fund, to which donors can contribute via outright or planned gifts like bequests, annuities, or trusts, will help ensure a predictable stream of revenue for our conservation programs far into the future. Please leave a living legacy by supporting our work!



## CAMPFIRE CONCERT 2024

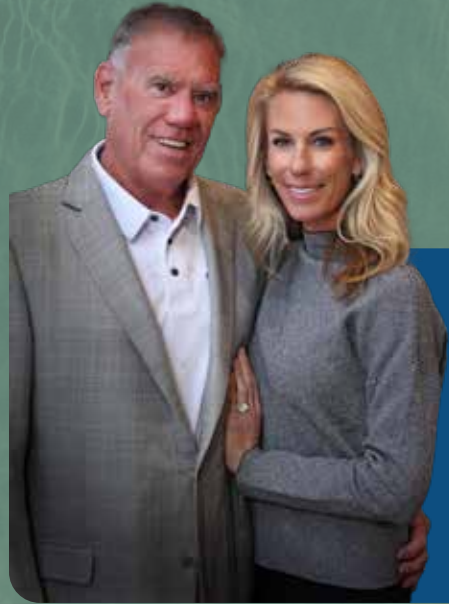
Our Campfire Concert at the Pelican Club in Jupiter on Friday, March 29th, 2024 was a lively event. Upon arrival guests were greeted with a Campfire Old Fashioned, courtesy of rum distillers Flor de Caña, and close encounters with native animals courtesy of Busch Wildlife Sanctuary (the sandhill crane was a crowd favorite). Our concert featured country artists Chris Janson and Ricky Young. S'mores on the deck ended an evening that grossed \$906,000, with a net of \$600,000, the majority of which will benefit FWC's Youth Conservation Camps.



# Laura and Byron Russell

JUPITER, FL

## DONOR SPOTLIGHT



“It’s about making a lasting impact, ensuring that these natural wonders remain vibrant and full of life for generations to come.”

For Foundation Board Chair Laura Russell and husband Byron Russell, wild Florida has always been more than just a backdrop for outdoor adventures — it’s a vital part of their lives. Whether casting lines in the Atlantic Ocean or quietly waiting for the first gobble of a wild turkey in the early morning woods, their love for Florida’s diverse landscapes has created cherished memories and a deep-seated commitment to conservation.

Their dedication to Florida wildlife took on new meaning when Laura became the Chair of the

Foundation in 2023. With a first-hand view of our impact and the urgent need for ongoing support, Laura and Byron decided to name the Foundation in their estate plans to leave a wild legacy that echoes their passions for future generations. “We’ve been blessed to experience Florida’s beauty in so many ways,” Laura shared. “It’s given us countless memories with our family, and now, through our planned giving donation, we want to ensure that future generations can enjoy the same incredible experiences.”

Working directly with Foundation staff, making their planned gift took less than an hour. “There were several options that allowed us to designate a portion of my retirement account to the Foundation with confidence,” Laura said. “Every contribution, no matter the size, helps to protect the wildlife and habitats that make Florida unique. It’s about making a lasting impact, ensuring that these natural wonders remain vibrant and full of life for generations to come.”

## WAYS TO GIVE

	IMPACT ON FISH & WILDLIFE FOUNDATION OF FLORIDA		POTENTIAL TAX BENEFITS			OTHER ADVANTAGES FOR YOU
	IMMEDIATE IMPACT	FUTURE IMPACT	IMMEDIATE INCOME TAX BENEFITS	ESTATE TAX BENEFITS	CAPITAL GAINS TAX BENEFITS	
Gift of Cash						Enjoy giving during your lifetime
Gift of Securities						Provide support at a lower cost than gift of cash
Establish a Fund						Direct your conservation impact over time
Gift of Real Estate						Eliminate expense of maintaining a residence or property you no longer need
Gift of Personal Property						Use your coin or stamp collections, artwork, mineral royalties or other valuable property to make an impact
Gift in Will or Estate Plan						Allows you to leave a legacy without impacting current lifestyle
Gift of Retirement Plan Assets						Avoids double taxation and can be used for annual mandatory distribution
Gift of Life Insurance						A substantial and easy gift to make
Charitable Remainder Trust						Provides you, or someone you choose, a certain amount of income for a period of time

The information in this publication is not intended as legal or tax advice. For such advice, please consult an attorney or tax advisor









# THANK YOU!

THE FISH & WILDLIFE FOUNDATION OF FLORIDA IS ONLY AS STRONG AS YOU, OUR SUPPORTERS, MAKE US. WE WISH TO THANK THE FOLLOWING INDIVIDUALS, FOUNDATIONS, CORPORATIONS, AND ORGANIZATIONS THAT MADE CHARITABLE GIFTS OF \$250 OR MORE IN 2024.

To donate, please scan the QR code or make an online donation at [wildlifeflorida.org](http://wildlifeflorida.org). And if you're looking for a new way to support our work and get a little something for yourself, a friend, or child, please check out our online store. You can "adopt" a plush burrowing owl and panther, buy a UV-protected shirt for a perfect day on the water, or a mug to keep your coffee warm in the deer stand.

## HAMMERHEAD SHARK SOCIETY (\$100,000+)

Bass Pro Shops & Cabela's Outdoor Fund\*\*  
The Ferman Motor Car Company, Inc.\*\*  
Informa Markets  
Mrs. Connie & Mr. Garner Koons  
Mrs. Daphne & Mr. Martin C. Wood III\*\*

## FLORIDA BLACK BEAR CREW (\$50,000 - \$99,999)

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SCAN TO DONATE

\* CONSERVATION CHAMPIONS (RECURRING DONORS) \*\* CAMPFIRE CONCERT 2024 SPONSORS



# Nathan Smith

TARPON SPRINGS, FL

Our mission to conserve wild Florida is only possible thanks to the unwavering support of donors like Nathan Smith.

Nathan was born and raised in Tarpon Springs and now resides in Odessa. He and his wife enjoy spending time in nearby natural gems like Lake Francis Nature Preserve, accessible by a short bike ride from their home. Another favorite spot is Anderson Park, where Nathan treasures quiet mornings on a lakeside bench, watching birds, squirrels, and boaters. It's a place steeped in nostalgia, reminding him of kindergarten field trips to the park in the 1980s.

Nathan has been a monthly donor to our Conserving Florida's Wildlife fund since April 2022.

"I first noticed the Foundation during its work to feed manatees impacted by habitat loss," he said. This work sparked his desire to take a more active role in conservation.

"As I've grown older as a Florida native, I've come to discover a desire to be a good tenant during my existence here," said Nathan. "It's important to me to live in harmony with our environment, to replace my divot, leaving things a little better after I'm gone."

His passion for conservation is rooted in his own past experiences as a Boy Scout, enjoying countless camping and backpacking adventures in Florida's great outdoors. "At the time, I think I took for granted the availability of those outdoor places in



## DONOR SPOTLIGHT

Florida to go enjoy," he reflected. "If I can do even a little to help make those things available for the next generation and for the wildlife that calls those places home, that would be deeply rewarding."

Join Nathan in making a monthly gift to conserve habitats, save species, and preserve the natural beauty that makes our state so special. Together, we can make a lasting impact.

“It’s important to me to live in harmony with our environment, to replace my divot, leaving things a little better after I’m gone.”

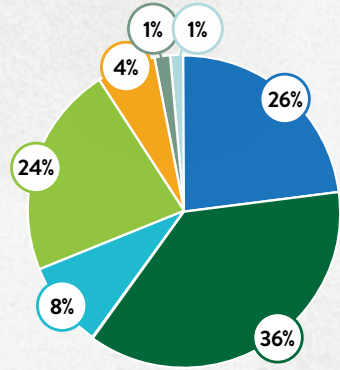






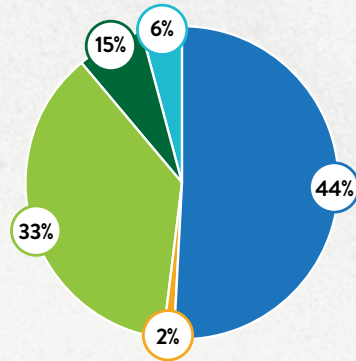


# 2024 FINANCIAL OVERVIEW



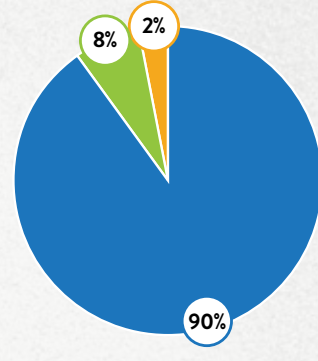
**2024 REVENUE BY SOURCE**

SOURCE	REVENUE
Endangered Species Mitigation	\$9,395,498
Program Fees and Services	\$12,913,570
Philanthropic Giving	\$2,917,638
Investments	\$8,594,750
License Plates	\$1,518,638
Government Grants	\$488,957
In-Kind	\$355,408



**2024 PROGRAM EXPENSE BY CATEGORY**

CATEGORY	EXPENSE
Conserving Wildlife	\$5,421,905
Combating Invasives	\$203,807
Preserving Our Outdoor Heritage	\$3,971,905
Getting Kids Back to Nature	\$1,783,872
Restoring Our Reefs	\$732,273



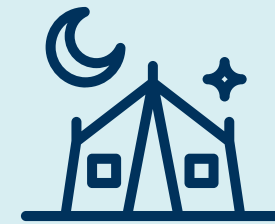
**2024 PROGRAMMATIC EFFICIENCY**

CATEGORY	EXPENSE
Program	\$12,113,762
Administration	\$1,054,753
Fundraising	\$338,722



**\$1,980,000**  
TO REPLANT AQUATIC HABITATS

Underwater meadows are the unsung heroes of marine ecosystems. With your help, we made significant progress in restoring these critical habitats in the Indian River Lagoon.



**\$906,660**  
FOR GETTING KIDS OUTDOORS

Thanks to your philanthropy, our Campfire Concert exceeded its goal by 170%.



**\$1,145,000**  
FOR HURRICANE RESPONSE

Our response to three hurricanes hitting Florida in 2024 was to raise over a million dollars in support of first responders and the hard hit marine infrastructure.





Proud Citizen Support Organization for the Florida  
Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission



## CONSERVING NATURE AND OUR OUTDOOR HERITAGE

Help support our work by donating to the Foundation, buying a license plate, “adopting” a plush burrowing owl, or getting new gear in our revamped store. More information can be found by scanning the QR code.



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*Burrowing owl (Athene cunicularia), photo by Andy Wraithmell*