



# FWC Landscape Conservation Summit 2023

Luminary Hotel • May 31 - June 2





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*We would like to offer a special thank you to all our Landscape Conservation Summit sponsors, without whom the Summit would not have been possible.*

## SUMMIT HOSTS

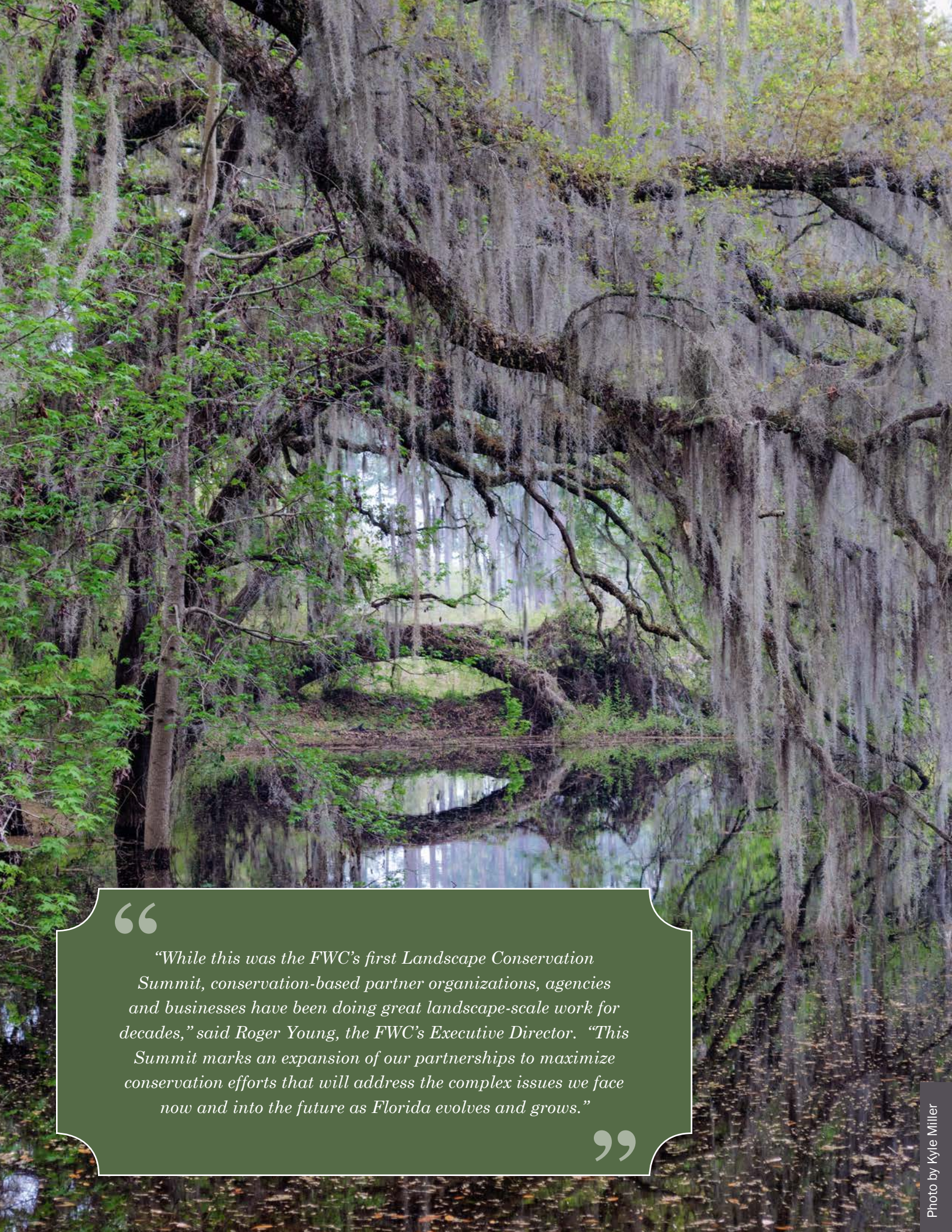


## SUMMIT SPONSORS



*Unless otherwise noted, all photos FWC*





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*“While this was the FWC’s first Landscape Conservation Summit, conservation-based partner organizations, agencies and businesses have been doing great landscape-scale work for decades,” said Roger Young, the FWC’s Executive Director. “This Summit marks an expansion of our partnerships to maximize conservation efforts that will address the complex issues we face now and into the future as Florida evolves and grows.”*

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## Executive Summary

Connect, collaborate and conserve. Working with partners to advance conservation in Florida at the landscape scale.

Our state's natural landscapes are facing ever-increasing challenges including habitat loss, climate change and invasive species. To address these challenges, we are boldly moving forward with partners across the state and beyond to implement high-impact conservation approaches to ensure our natural resources are conserved for generations to come.

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's (FWC's) first-ever Landscape Conservation Summit was a big success, having brought together close to 200 people, representing over 60 organizations including state, city, county, federal, non-governmental, business and non-profit organizations, as well as private landowners. With the help of Delaney Event Management and our sponsors, we brought this diverse group of partners together to connect, collaborate and ultimately conserve the landscapes and habitats that protect our water, clean the air, and provide a haven for our native fish, wildlife and plants.

Landscape conservation is a highly collaborative practice working on a larger scale to connect and protect landscapes comprising critical habitat and ecosystems for fish, wildlife, plants and people across public and private lands, regardless of boundaries. Connection and collaboration are critical to conserving the places that are meaningful to each of us while also conserving fish, wildlife and Florida's diverse landscapes. By working together, we can accomplish far more than we could individually.

What does success look like for landscape conservation in Florida? Conservation wins that are community-supported, regionally significant, and enduring for future generations. Success also means thriving habitats for fish, wildlife and plants; clean air and water; and productive landscapes that support sustainable farming, ranching, forestry, fisheries, tourism and recreation.

Do you know of organizations, businesses, private landowners or other stakeholders interested in joining the conversation about landscape conservation? Visit the FWC's Landscape Conservation webpage at <https://myfwc.com/strategic-planning/strategic-initiatives/landscape/> for more information.

We would like to express our sincerest gratitude to sponsors, site hosts, presenters, participants, and FWC staff who contributed to the Landscape Conservation Summit. Working towards Landscape Conservation is like climbing a mountain, full of challenges and obstacles, but with the help from you, we can reach the Summit of success. This event was a true representation of what the power of partnerships and collaborations can accomplish, and we are so fortunate to have had the opportunity to work with all of you. We look forward to being able to connect again in the future!



## Introduction

*How is Landscape Conservation different from traditional conservation approaches?*

Landscape conservation represents a **fundamental shift** in traditional conservation thinking on three levels:

**Geographic Scale:** To sustain biodiversity, ecological function, and climate resilience, conservation must transcend arbitrary boundaries and move beyond a site-specific, parcel-by-parcel approach.

**Perspective:** The landscape conservation perspective is that the entire landscape, private or public, developed to wild, must be considered in a thoughtful and integrated manner.

**Process:** Landscape conservation crosses jurisdictional and topical boundaries.

*Does this mean single species conservation actions will stop?*

No, some species will not be well represented by a broad, ecosystem-level approach and will still require species-specific strategies and actions. The landscape conservation design process will help identify which species, habitats and areas may need more targeted or directed management.





### *Why is landscape conservation important?*

The landscapes that we call home are critical to our well-being and often define our sense-of-place: our landscapes protect our water, clean our air, mitigate climate change, and provide a haven for the plants and animals we depend on.

Our landscapes power local and regional economies (i.e., timbering, grazing, farming, tourism and more) and communities; safeguard our cultural legacy; and provide scenic beauty, respite from modern life, and opportunities for healthy outdoor recreation and social gathering.

In the long view, our communities will be unable to flourish and survive without healthy natural landscapes. Importantly, human decisions will determine the future of these landscapes; the landscape conservation approach offers a framework for seeking decisions that move society to a place that recognizes that our natural landscapes are irreplaceable, invaluable, and part of the very fabric of our society.

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*“Connection and collaboration are critical to conserving the places that are meaningful to each of us while also conserving fish, wildlife and Florida’s diverse landscapes” said Dr. Thomas Eason, the FWC’s former Assistant Executive Director. “By connecting at the human scale, we can supercharge our collective efforts and accomplish far more than we can alone. The FWC is firmly committed to further engaging partners on landscape conservation as we move forward together.”*

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## **Plenary Session: Landscape Conservation at Every Scale**

This session featured a dynamic series of presentations highlighting the interconnected and interdependent work that needs to occur across scales within Florida, across the Southeast, and nationally. Speakers represented federal agencies, private lands, and a state agency perspective. The plenary session set the stage for summit attendees to better understand the landscape conservation efforts happening at larger scales and to foster an environment for productive conversations and collaboration on Florida specific landscape conservation efforts and approaches.

**Dr. Deb Rocque, Assistant Director of Science Applications,  
United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)**

From Opportunistic to Strategic: A National Perspective for Landscape Conservation

**Steve Jester, Executive Director, Partnerscapes**

Relationships: Landscape Conservation's Limiting Factor

**Dr. Amanda Sesser, Coordinator, Southeast Conservation Adaptation Strategy  
(SECAS)**

Working Collaboratively Towards the Southeast Landscape of the Future

**Juan Hernandez, State Conservationist,  
United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)**

Opportunities for Landscape Conservation in Florida

**Dr. Thomas Eason, Former Assistant Executive Director, FWC**

Connecting Across Scales to Collaborate for Landscape Conservation



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*Melissa Tucker, the FWC’s Director of the Division of Habitat and Species Conservation on the summit – “We want to get your input, your perspectives, and define places where your stories intersect with our stories.”*

*Gil McRae the FWC’s Director of the Fish and Wildlife Research Institute on the summit – “We’re trying to do this in a state that is heavily altered and consider the whole landscape with your help; This meeting is all about connecting.”*

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### *Key Takeaways*

- Landscape conservation is a people business; it works best when different perspectives come together around common objectives.
- Collaboration is a process that requires partnership, compromise, and trust.
- Collectively, we can grab the pen and write our own future.
- The secret ingredient is the heart and the love we bring to our work.
- Let’s not fight over jurisdiction; for landscape conservation to be successful, we must leave egos and patches on shirts at the door and come together.
- Time spent in building relationships between people that have value in a place is time well spent.
- Ask landowners what their needs are, what their challenges are, and then figure out approaches to address those needs.







## **Panel Discussion: Leaders in Conservation - A Vision for Florida's Future**

The leaders in conservation panel took a deeper dive into Florida's landscape conservation success stories, challenges, and opportunities. The panelists represented agencies, organizations, and landowners that can and do put landscape conservation concepts into action. Through a facilitated discussion, each panelist was able to provide their input and perspective on various topics such as increasing private and public partnerships, an aligned approach to acquisition, and their vision for the future of conservation in Florida.

### **Jennifer Goff**

Deputy Director with the Division of Habitat and Species Conservation, FWC

### **Mallory Dimmitt**

Chief Executive Officer, Florida Wildlife Corridor Foundation

### **Jennifer Hecker**

Executive Director, Coastal & Heartland National Estuary Partnership (CHNEP)

### **Gianfranco Basili**

Deputy State Supervisor, USFWS

### **Jim Strickland**

Private Landowner, Strickland Ranch; Vice Chairman, Florida Conservation Group

### *Key Takeaways*

- Florida is rich in partnerships, but they don't always include private lands and landowners. Including private landowners in these conservation partnerships will help better build in the values and needs of these stakeholders.
- Most conservation land opportunities are in rural counties. We need a way to pay local governments for the benefits these rural lands provide.
- Part of the landscape conservation approach is breaking it down into geographic areas where partners can come together around shared goals.
- Part of gaining public trust in government agencies is taking risks and trying new approaches to shared problems. Time is short and we can't miss out on opportunities.
- We have achieved a lot across the state, but there is still urgency and a need for continued momentum.



## Concurrent Field Trips

The summit featured five field trip options ranging from working private lands, managed public lands, and coastal habitats. These field trips provided attendees an opportunity to discuss how these areas were collaboratively implementing components of landscape conservation. Attendees selected the field trip of choice and were accompanied by an FWC team of facilitators, notetakers, and photographers who captured the key moments of each field trip.

### *Key Takeaways*

Field trip hosts and participants discussed diverse and inherent connections between land and water, across jurisdictional and geographic boundaries.

Improving environmental resiliency and connectivity are shared values across many partners.

Diverse partnerships and collaborations provide more value than groups all working independently; partnerships allow us to:

- Identify and work toward shared priorities, recognizing and respecting that values may not always 100% align.
- Leverage partner authorities/jurisdictions, skills, and pool resources of various partners to enable more impactful conservation action on shared priorities.
- Work through logistical and regulatory processes and identify efficiencies that work for everyone.
- Environmental value extends beyond conservation benefit and may vary across stakeholder group(s). Additional benefits include public recreation and hunting/fishing opportunities, public health, and intrinsic and economic value.

*JB Ranch*

Hosted by Liesa and Russell Priddy, JB Ranch

JB Ranch is an approximately 10,000-acre ranch in Immokalee, Florida, whose success is driven by dedicated owners and land managers. Private working lands, such as JB Ranch, play a critical role in supporting sustainable wildlife populations and habitat. This ranch is managed compatibly for livestock and native wildlife, providing food, water, shelter, and suitable habitat for both.







## *Babcock Ranch Preserve*

Hosted by Carl Conrath,  
Florida Forest Service

This property is operated as a financially self-sufficient working ranch within the Florida conservation lands network. Field trip attendees discussed on-site land management practices like control of exotic species, prescribed fire, and mechanical vegetation treatments. They also learned about the challenges associated with connecting two red-cockaded woodpecker metapopulations into one contiguous population, and on-site hunting opportunities.

## *Orange Hammock Ranch*

Hosted by Lee Amos, Conservation  
Foundation of the Gulf Coast and  
Hunter Folmar, FWC

The Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) purchased this ranch in 2020 with \$19.5 million of Florida Forever funds and a community contribution of \$1.5 million raised by Conservation Foundation of the Gulf Coast. This acquisition created a 121,000-acre conservation corridor of environmentally sensitive land between the Peace River, Myakka River and Charlotte Harbor. This FWC Wildlife Management Area (WMA) protects wetlands critical to the community drinking water supply while conserving habitats for a wide array of wildlife.







## *Stolen Saddle Ranch*

Hosted by the Baldwin Family

Stolen Saddle Ranch is an 11,441-acre working ranch that provides quality habitat for many native species including white-tailed deer, bobwhite quail, wild turkeys and gopher tortoises. The ranch is also a permitted recipient site for gopher tortoises impacted by development. Stolen Saddle has dedicated staff implementing a variety of practices to benefit wildlife including extensive brush management, prescribed fire, invasive plant control, and hydrological restoration.

## *City of Punta Gorda and Coastal Resiliency*

Hosted by Mitchell Austin, City of Punta Gorda; with presentations by Nicole Iadevaia, CHNEP; Eric Weather, FWC; Melynda Brown, Department of Environmental Protection Aquatic Preserves; and JoEllen Wilson, Bonefish & Tarpon Trust

This field trip included a boat tour of Charlotte Harbor and the Peace River. Participants explored and discussed managed coastal lands and waters, and their connection to the City of Punta Gorda and surrounding landscapes. Attendees viewed and discussed native wildlife, oyster reef restoration, smalltooth sawfish habitat, protected lands and waters, and nature-based solutions for coastal resiliency.







## Concurrent Sessions: Putting Landscape Conservation Principles into Practice

A wealth of knowledge and expertise exists across sectors, organizations, and the state of Florida. In our concurrent sessions, we sought to inspire our participants with success stories and novel approaches from a diverse range of partners and the FWC while providing space for connections and future collaboration.

The summit featured seven concurrent sessions over two days which focused on themes including collaboration, partnerships, resilience, and scientific data and resources. Sessions provided attendees an opportunity to hear 4-6 presentations related to the session's theme and participate in a facilitated discussion to identify opportunities and overcome barriers for landscape conservation implementation in Florida.

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*“We were thrilled to sponsor FWC’s Landscape Conservation Summit,” said Fish & Wildlife Foundation President & CEO Andrew Walker. “In order to meet the challenges facing wild Florida, we need to engage conservation partners at all levels. FWC’s Summit provided the space and scientific expertise to do so, helping advance landscape-scale design decisions.”*

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## Collaboration on a Shared Vision for Southwest Florida

**Connect, Collaborate, and Conserve:  
Southwest Florida**  
Matthew Kenworthy, *FWC*

**The Proposed U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
Southwest Florida Fish and Wildlife  
Conservation Area**  
Julie Morris, *Florida Conservation Group and National  
Wildlife Refuge Association*

**Developing a Collaborative Regional Approach  
to Marine Fish Habitat Conservation Informed  
with Co-produced Science**  
Corey Anderson, *FWC*

**Charlotte Harbor Flatwoods Initiative**  
Kim Fikoski, *South Florida Water Management District*

**Moving Water to Restore Rivers, Wetlands, and  
Estuaries in Central and SW Florida**  
Nicole Iadevaia, *Coastal and Heartland National  
Estuary Partnership*

### *Key Takeaways*

- Collaborations should include citrus and other agricultural industries and mining operations on capacity for water storage and movement.
- Florida's conservation community needs to be proactive in reaching out to nontraditional partners (e.g., developers, realtors, city and county planners, economists, engineers) to explore new opportunities.
- Partner with transportation sector, local, and county governments on projects and find common goals related to regional mitigation.
- Do not overlook the value of urban habitats.
- Florida's conservation community needs to convene routinely and share research, resources, and tools needed to collaborate and network on actions.







## Concurrent Session

### **Making Progress Through Partnerships**

#### **The Land Trust's Role: Advocate, Accountability Partner, Agent**

Ramesh Buch, *North Florida Land Trust*

#### **The Role of Sportsmen in Landscape Conservation**

Travis Thompson, *All Florida*

#### **Connecting Water, Wildlife, and Wilderness Through Partnerships and Priority Shifts**

Tabitha Biehl, *Polk County*

#### **Marshalling Science to Conserve the Florida Wildlife Corridor**

Josh Daskin, *Archbold Biological Station*

#### **The South Atlantic Salt Marsh Initiative: Marshaling Forward a Landscape-Scale Partnership**

Cameron Jaggard, *Pew Charitable Trusts South Atlantic Saltmarsh Initiative*

#### *Key Takeaways*

- Desire to create forums or platforms where landscape conservation ideas can be shared in real time.
- Need to share top priorities across organizations.
- Need to create a list of statewide and regional-based funding sources.
- Improve engagement and collaboration with sportsmen groups.
- Most conservation groups want the same things but can often be at odds with one another over smaller details.



## Concurrent Session

# A Collective Approach to Leveraging Conservation Opportunities

## Payment for Ecosystem Services

Tony Grossman, *FWC*

## Partners for Fish and Wildlife

Chad Allison, *U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service*

## Determining Optimal Wildlife Crossing and Bridge Retrofit Design to Facilitate Use by Florida Panther, Florida Black Bear, and Other Wildlife

Jennifer Korn, *Johnson Engineering*

## A Keystone Concept to Collaborative Conservation

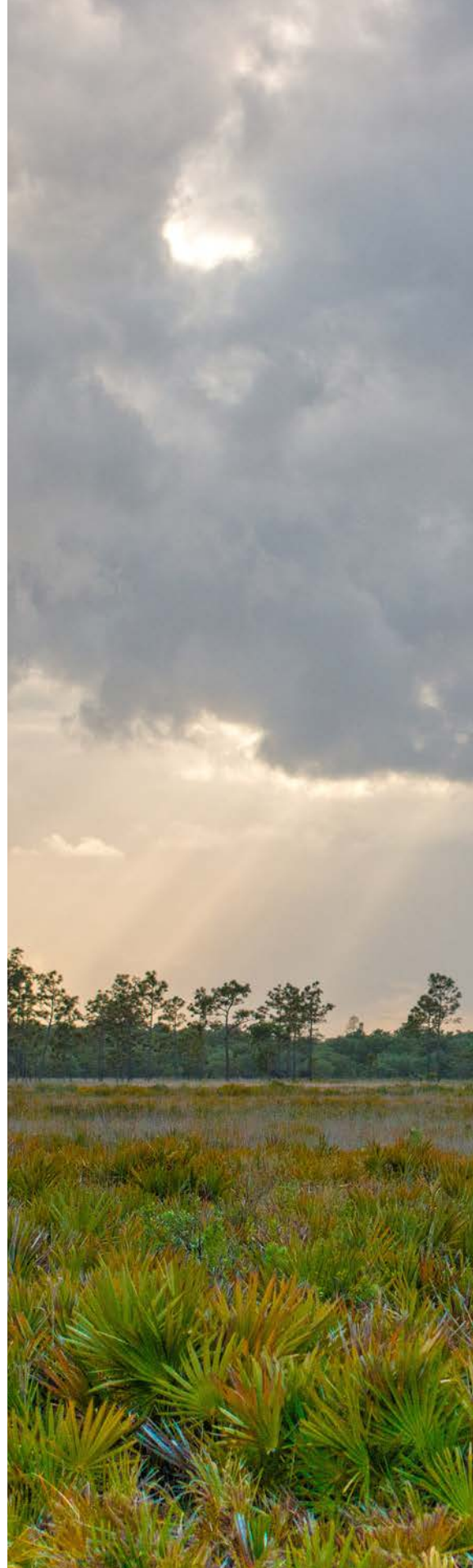
Alex Kalfin, *FWC*

## Large-Scale Land and Water Restoration on Existing Public Lands: The Lower Ocklawaha Basin Case Study

Jason Evans, *Stetson University*

### *Key Takeaways*

- Collaborations with private landowners are essential to effectively implement landscape conservation and increase habitat connectivity.
- Navigating funding opportunities is challenging, and guidance on how to layer use of multiple funding efforts would be beneficial.
- Public ownership isn't the sole solution, "keep working lands working."
- Working lands can be managed in a way that benefits both landowners and conservation needs.







## Concurrent Session

### **Decision Support Tools for a Landscape Based Approach**

**The Florida Wildlife Corridor: Biodiversity, Green Infrastructure, and Resiliency for Florida's Future**  
Tom Hctor, *University of Florida*

**Landscape Conservation Tools Developed by FWC Science Based Conservation Planning**  
Nicole Burns, *FWC*

**Evolution of LC planning in Florida: Florida Wildlife Corridor**  
Reed Noss, *University of Florida*

**Inventory and Conservation Planning for Longleaf in Florida and the Southeast**  
Jon Oetting, *Florida Natural Areas Inventory*

**Polk County Utilizing Statewide Data to Inform the Evaluation of Lands for Local Conservation Acquisition Program**  
Brooke Coulter-Minyard, *Polk County*

#### *Key Takeaways*

- We need to improve our communication about existing tools with the public to ensure understanding.
- We need to increase awareness of the tools and resources available to local governments.
- Barriers to wildlife movement should be addressed during the creation of public infrastructure (e.g., Florida Department of Transportation wildlife crossings) and not as an afterthought.
- These tools presented should be used to inform the regulatory process (e.g., determining the best placement of solar fields).
- Better records of conservation easements would help with understanding where land may already be protected.



Concurrent Session

## A Collective Vision of a Resilient Landscape

### Resilience in Florida: Connectivity Matters

Dr. Wes Brooks, *Executive Office of the Governor*

### South Florida Ecosystem Restoration

James Erskine, *FWC*

### Stories From Across the Gulf: Creating Community Dialogue Around Resilience

Melissa Hill, *National Wildlife Federation*

### Climate Informed Conservation

Jenifer Rupert, *East Central Florida Regional Planning Council*

### Ecological and Economic Impacts of Land Use and Climate Change on the Coastal Food Web and Fisheries in the Suwannee River Estuary

Dr. David Chagaris, *University of Florida*

### Key Takeaways

- Early and consistent engagement in resiliency planning is essential.
- A standard agreed upon data set could help increase consistency in planning and implementation of resiliency statewide.
- Engage local communities in larger scale projects.
- Storytelling can be a powerful tool for engagement and ownership. Provide communities with understanding of what they can do.
- There is a need to try nontraditional approaches and actions for unprecedented changes. For example, stormwater ponds reimaged for future conditions and habitat (i.e., wading birds & pollinators) or integration of green infrastructure into the built environment.

Photo by Kyle Miller







Photo by Joseph Ricketts

Concurrent Session

## The Role of Public & Private Lands in Landscape Conservation

**Private Lands and the Florida Wildlife Corridor**  
Keith Fountain, *Keith Fountain Law, PLLC*

**Partnerships for Water Storage**  
Benita Whalen, *Dispersed Water*

**FDOT District 1 Wildlife Crossings & Conservation Land Needs**  
Brent Setchell & Nicole Monies, *FDOT*

**The Role of State-Owned Lands in Landscape Conservation**  
Deborah Burr, *DEP Division of State Lands*

**National Security... How Florida's Agricultural Lands Are Part of the Nation's Critical Infrastructure**  
Kelley Boree, *Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services*

**The Value of Private Lands in Landscape Conservation**  
Ben & Louann Williams, *Private Landowners*

### Key Takeaways

- We need to change the way that properties are assessed.
- Appraisers may be the wrong people to make a complete assessment of value. Incorporate resource values.
- Leverage the power of land trusts.
- Prioritize conservation easements.
- Make sure we are protecting cattle lands and timber lands.

## The Science Behind Landscape Conservation

### Fish Research to Inform Landscape Conservation and Restoration

Phil Stevens, *FWC*

### Science Informed Juvenile Fish Habitat Restoration and Conservation

Joellen Wilson, *Bonefish & Tarpon Trust*

### Applying a Terrestrial Conservation Approach to Better Engage Recreational Fishers in Fish and Habitat Conservation Strategy

Aaron Adams, *Bonefish & Tarpon Trust*

### Impact of Infrastructure on Focal Species Connectivity

Eve Bohnett, *University of Florida*

### Gopher Tortoise Translocation Outcomes and Implications for Landscape Conservation in Florida: Current Research and Knowledge Gaps

Betsie Rothermel, *Archbold Biological Station & Neal Halstead, Wildlands Conservation*

#### *Key takeaways*

- Expanding collaborative networks and partnerships through multi-disciplinary teams is essential.
- Important to prioritize research that informs management; existing efforts can be improved by learning what managers need from research outputs to inform management decisions prior to executing research.
- Need to improve delivery of science data & tools to be actionable and relevant to those who would use them (e.g., local governments, decision-makers).
- Leverage collective resources and interests by working with partners in areas where priorities are shared.
- Be comfortable operating at various scales (e.g., regional, statewide, local level) and with some uncertainty.







## **A Landscape Conservation vision for the future**

*What is FWC doing post-summit?*

We are forming a long-term internal team to expand, monitor, and maintain support for landscape conservation efforts.

We will continue to incorporate landscape conservation practices into existing FWC plans, policies and programs by prioritizing projects that are future-oriented and proactive.

We will keep landowners informed and connected with landscape conservation efforts within their region and continue to identify and prioritize opportunities to work with landowners on landscape conservation.

We will engage with our local, state, federal, NGO, and private partners to implement landscape conservation on the ground throughout the state, and through our regional Connect, Collaborate, and Conserve (C3) efforts that are ramping up this year!

We will continue to support or participate in external initiatives with a landscape conservation focus.



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*“The Florida Wildlife Corridor Foundation was honored to sponsor and attend FWC’s Landscape Conservation Summit as we believe in the power of convening partners to accelerate the pace of conservation,” said Mallory Dimmitt, CEO of Florida Wildlife Corridor Foundation. “Landscape conservation can be a daunting task and events like these help us all to be successful by creating space for community problem solving and collaboration.”*

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### *What does successful landscape conservation look like long-term?*

Durable partnerships with government agencies, private conservation organizations, private landowners, academic institutions and other partners that are relevant, engaged and contributing to landscape conservation.

Partnerships that utilize each other’s strengths to hold up a collaborative vision and to get more accomplished throughout Florida.

Ultimately, we see Florida’s landscapes, wildlife, and people being more connected and providing a range of benefits for Florida visitors and citizens including thriving habitats for fish, wildlife and plants; clean air and water; productive landscapes that support sustainable activities such as farming, ranching, forestry and tourism; and scenic beauty and opportunities for outdoor recreation.



