

The Florida Coastal and Ocean Coalition

Caribbean Conservation Corporation & Sea Turtle Survival League •
Environmental Defense • Natural Resources Defense Council • Reef Relief •
Surfrider Foundation • The Ocean Conservancy

Hand Delivered/Original by US Mail

October 19, 2007

Deborah Poppell, Acting Director
Division of State Lands
Florida Department of Environmental Protection
3900 Commonwealth Boulevard, MS 100
Tallahassee, FL 32399-3000

Re: Florida Forever Successor Program

Acting Director Poppell:

The Florida Coastal and Ocean Coalition (Coalition) appreciates the opportunity to comment and make recommendations on a successor program for the Florida Forever state land buying program. Specifically we would like to stress the need for an increased and dedicated acquisition of coastal lands and habitat.

The Coalition is a first-time effort of environmental organizations to join forces to conserve, protect and restore Florida's coastal and marine environment. The Coalition promotes state action to curb unwise development and protect coastal and marine habitats, implement and enforce coastal and ocean pollution laws, protect marine ecosystems, ensure robust and plentiful fisheries and marine species, reduce global warming impacts, and strengthen coastal and ocean governance in Florida.

The Coalition emphasizes the implementation of an ecosystem-based approach to coastal and ocean management; of which land acquisition is an important component. We also recognize the important linkages between the health of Florida's economy and the health of its beaches and dunes, coral reefs, mangroves, sea grasses, wetlands and other natural resources to our state.

The diverse ecosystem knowledge, policy expertise and resources that the Steering Committee member organizations (listed below) bring to the Coalition, as well as the over 100,000 supporters that they represent in Florida, give the organization an unprecedented ability to speak out and work to protect the sandy shores and salty marine environments of the state.

Over 160 entities have endorsed the Coalition's first published document "*Florida's Coastal and Ocean Future: A Blueprint for Economic and Environmental Leadership*", which outlines what Florida can and should do to address the most pressing environmental issues facing our oceans and coasts.

One of our prime recommendations in the “Blueprint” is to “*fully fund and expand the Florida Forever conservation land-buying program*” to “*curb at-risk coastal development and protect valuable coastal habitats*”. Of the 535,643 acres of land purchased with \$1.8 billion in Florida Forever funds through December 2006, only 5,060 acres (less than 1 percent) were for Florida’s fragile coastlines.

Our protected coastal beaches and dune habitats attract and support a thriving tourism trade and provide recreational opportunities for both visitors and Floridians alike. Florida’s estuaries and offshore waters support one of the largest commercial and recreational marine fishing industries in the nation; however, it relies on undisturbed estuarine and coastal systems to protect watersheds and habitats important for these species to thrive and survive.

We believe that there should be a successor program to Florida Forever that devotes at least \$1 billion per year to preserving environmentally sensitive and threatened land. We recommend that such a program place a high priority through dedicated funding to protect dwindling coastal habitats and at-risk coastal lands. This will help protect against sea-level rise, hurricanes and storms, all of which are expected to become more severe as a result of global warming. Acquisition should also focus on increasing public beach access and reducing the need for armoring, renourishment and other infrastructure projects of high public and environmental costs. A strategically targeted coastal land acquisition program is needed to keep pace with changing land values and the increasing threats to valuable and vulnerable coastal resources. Coastal land acquisition should be strategically targeted to accomplish pre-determined goals. We would welcome any opportunity to advise and work with you and others on a coastal land acquisition strategy.

Again, the Coalition appreciates this opportunity to provide these comments and recommendations to the Department of Environmental Protection, Division of State Lands on a successor program for Florida Forever. If you would like to discuss these comments further, please contact us. We look forward to working together to better protect and restore the coastal and marine environments that Florida is so well known for nationally and internationally.

Sincerely,
Gary Appelson – Caribbean Conservation Corp.
Sarah Chasis, J.D. – Natural Resources Defense Council
Ericka D’Avanzo – Surfrider Foundation
Gerald Karnas. – Environmental Defense
Paul G. Johnson – Reef Relief
David White, J.D. – The Ocean Conservancy

cc: Eric Eikenberg, EOG
Mike Sole, DEP
Ken Haddad, FWCC
Distribution