

The Florida Coastal and Ocean Coalition

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

April 22, 2008

Speaker Marco Rubio
Florida House of Representatives
402 South Monroe Street, Capitol 420
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1300

Re: Florida Forever and Communities Trust Program

House Speaker Rubio,

On behalf of the Florida Coastal and Ocean Coalition, we are writing to express our strong support for keeping the Florida Communities Trust Program (FCT) within the Florida Department of Community Affairs (DCA). The Coalition is a first-time effort of environmental organizations to join forces for the conservation, protection and restoration of Florida's coastal and marine environment. Our steering committee organizations represent millions of citizens across the country and over 100,000 activists in Florida deeply concerned for Florida's unique seaside and marine resources.

We believe that FCT is a program well suited for implementation under DCA. FCT is a grant program that annually provides \$66 million to counties, cities and certain non-profits for the express purpose of assisting in the implementation of their comprehensive plans. It is not duplicative of the Department of Environmental Protections' land acquisition program, which focuses on the purchase of very large parcels of land for large scale ecosystem protection.

By contrast, the FCT program focuses on small parcels of land that are targeted for acquisition at the local level for purposes that do include small scale environmental protection, but also acquisition for parkland, aesthetics and open space objectives, greenways, and a diversity of small – scale acquisition projects specifically designed to implement specific goals, objectives and policies in the adopted comprehensive plans of local governments. These may include policies requiring specific levels of service for parks and recreation land, or requiring a certain amount of land to remain in open space for purposes of community character.

Consequently, we believe this program falls squarely within the expertise of the DCA, which has reviewed and approved those plans and is staffed by experienced planners. The FCT is specifically a growth management tool and should continue to be implemented by Florida's growth management agency.

The Coalition believes that shifting the program from DCA to another agency which does not possess the expertise and understanding of local government comprehensive plans would create – rather than solve – administrative inefficiencies, particularly given

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the current high level of satisfaction with the program. DCA's proven and effective track record of successfully implementing FCT speaks for itself. FCT is a popular program with Floridians and local government officials because DCA can give the program the personal touch and attention it deserves.

This issue is of particular importance to the FCOC and our hundreds of thousands of members across Florida as many of the parks and recreation areas that are purchased through FCT provide residents of coastal communities access to coastal resources to surf, fish, bird, hike, paddle, swim, or otherwise enjoy the incredible coastal resources and recreational opportunities that Florida provides when land is in public ownership.

Please keep this popular and successful FCT program housed under DCA. We think Secretary Pelham is doing a great job at DCA, and we appreciate his and Governor Crist's leadership on all the issues DCA must address.

We strongly support both the funding of the Florida Forever program for 2008, as well as efforts to enact a successful successor program. We urge you to focus on that and we appreciate the strong support historically in the Legislature for Florida Forever. Our members use those public lands and Florida is a better place as a result of your efforts over the years.

Sincerely,
Gary Appelson – Caribbean Conservation Corp.
Sarah Chasis, J.D. – Natural Resources Defense Council
Ericka D'Avanzo – Surfrider Foundation
Jerry Karnas – Environmental Defense Fund
Paul G. Johnson – Reef Relief
Joe Murphy – Gulf Restoration Network
David White, J.D. – The Ocean Conservancy

cc: Charlie Crist, Governor, State of Florida
Tom Pelham, Secretary, Florida Department of Community Affairs