

Conservation Newsletter, April 18, 2021

With the legislative session wrapping up, two items to keep tabs on among the many that will impact the environment, conservation, resiliency and energy policy across the state.

1. Florida Forever funding is (again) in peril. Florida Forever was a program overwhelmingly voted as a state constitutional amendment by voters years ago which – as is often the case with constitutional amendments – has been derailed by legislators in Tallahassee. It has rarely been funded to the full \$300 million per year for acquiring conservation land across the state. The House has recommended \$100 million for the Florida Forever priority list. Disappointingly, the Senate has recommended only \$50 million and restricts it to conservation easements on agricultural properties. Neither chamber is recommending full funding (\$300 million) and both exclude important programs like Florida Communities Trust, which provides matching funds for local municipalities and land trusts to build parks; and the Rural and Family Lands Protection Program.

[Email your legislator using this automated form](#) to request they support greater funding for Florida Forever.

Florida Forever allows organizations like the North Florida Land Trust to acquire large parcels, as it announced recently with [541-acres in Marion County](#).

2. A bill to repeal the law establishing the M-Cores Toll Roads – the catastrophic ‘Roads to Ruin’ project – [appears headed for passage](#). The three state-wide toll roads would have devastated natural habitats, cost billions of dollars and were the pet project of one man, former Senate President Bill Galvano (R-Bradenton). While this bill removes the worst of what ‘Roads to Ruin’ would have done, it doesn’t completely erase all projects from the books. This is good news, if not everything conservation advocates were hoping for.

Lastly, I was able to join the Late Bloomers Garden Club at Walter Jones Historical Park in Mandarin yesterday to put in a couple hundred native plants along a pathway there which leads from the historical center and parking lot to the river. Swamp milkweed, tropical sage, oak leaf hydrangea among the species planted. Check it out if you’re in the area – you’ll notice it right away!