

A guide to  
**private lands  
partnerships**  
to conserve  
Florida wildlife



Mark A. Trainor, © Rogue Eye Photography



**Florida Fish and Wildlife  
Conservation Commission**

[MyFWC.com](http://MyFWC.com)



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## Landowner Assistance Program

Partnerships with private landowners to conserve Florida's fish, wildlife and habitats can be initiated through the Landowner Assistance Program (LAP) at the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC). The partnerships are formed on a voluntary, cooperative basis. Landowners have the opportunity to work directly with LAP biologists and receive input based on the characteristics of their land, its conservation potential and the goals of the landowner.

LAP biologists can guide landowners on managing land for the benefit of wildlife while continuing agricultural, forestry, ranching and recreational uses. They can connect landowners with a broad range of conservation options and resources, whether they come directly from the FWC or its partners.

Managing both the land and its wildlife populations while adapting to change is a cooperative process in the LAP where staff do as much listening as talking with landowners. Landowners involved in the program also get opportunities to interact with other landowners, sharing their experiences on what works best to maintain healthy wildlife habitats.



Prescribed cattle grazing helps maintain burrowing owl habitat.



Jamie Adams

## Advantages

Private landowners partnering with the Landowner Assistance Program receive a conservation plan and technical assistance tailored specifically to how their land can provide healthy habitat for wildlife populations. Landowners are encouraged to submit an application, and there are no fees or minimum acreage requirements associated with participating in the LAP.

The tremendous impact of private landowners on conserving wildlife habitats in Florida, including habitats for both imperiled species and game species, is recognized by the LAP. Biologists work to provide financial and technical assistance, as well as information on key initiatives such as Florida's new Best Management Practices. Additional resources, including workshops and financial support, can be accessed through partners such as the Florida Land Steward Partnership and the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service.

## Conserving and Working the Land

Private landowners can conserve wildlife while still using the land for commercial purposes. Silviculture, for example, is compatible with wildlife habitat conservation. Additionally, under Florida law, there is a partial property tax exemption of up to 50 percent on land under conservation easements, even when used for commercial agricultural purposes. There are other financial options for private landowners interested in conservation, such as property tax exemptions and conservation tax assessments similar to greenbelt designation. These programs generally provide assurances that managing habitat for fish and wildlife will not increase regulatory burdens on landowners.



## Benefits for Wildlife and Habitat

The Landowner Assistance Program can provide landowners with technical assistance on how to restore and conserve land so it supports healthy fish and wildlife populations. The habitat management techniques which the LAP can provide guidance on include:

- Prescribed burning
- Mechanical and chemical vegetation enhancement
- Wildlife openings
- Wetlands enhancement and restoration
- Native tree and grasses restoration
- Nest box construction



## Landowners as Conservation Partners

The FWC's Landowner Assistance Program partnered with the University of Florida's Department of Wildlife Ecology and Conservation to reach out to Florida's private landowners. A 2008 survey of landowners was followed up by a 2011 survey, to which 1,391 landowners responded. A third survey in 2015 received 608 responses.

Landowners indicated conservation and restoration of native fish, wildlife and habitats continues to be a major priority as they work their land.



Landowners watch gopher tortoise entering its burrow.

- Depending on the survey year, between 68 and 86% of landowners indicate their routine land management practices benefited wildlife.
- 48 to 57% of landowners actively manage their land for wildlife, with 40% setting aside land specifically for wildlife habitat or ecosystem purposes.
- Supplementing food for wildlife (62%), particularly for deer, turkey and songbirds, is the most common wildlife management activity.
- 1/4 of landowners applied prescribed fires on a regular basis, with landowners burning to reduce wildfire risk and improve wildlife habitat, timber and pastures.
- Planting food plots for wildlife (46 to 58%) and installing nesting boxes for birds (33 to 44%) are common landowner practices.

## Leaving a Legacy

Private landowners know wild animals and plants keep their land brimming with life. The land may have been passed down through generations or the landowner may be starting a family tradition of children and grandchildren inheriting the land. This legacy of private land stewardship is one of the key pieces to protecting Florida fish and wildlife, and the wild and rural places they need to survive.

Currently, more than 19 million acres of Florida's nearly 35 million acres are in private ownership, presenting both conservation opportunities and value.

With developed lands in Florida expected to more than double in acreage by the year 2060, the conservation role of private landowners will become more valuable and the FWC's private lands partnerships even more critical.

*"My father always said when you sell something it's gone but if you get land and keep it, you can pass it on. Some day when I'm dead and gone, my granddaughter will enjoy it. We're blessed. It's worth it to me. This is the way it used to be."*

Steve Lee, shown at right with wife Rosemary on his property in Columbia County, is a Landowner Assistance Program partner.



Helen Roth wielded her chainsaw to clear hardwoods. She conducted prescribed burns and became a certified prescribed burn manager. Working on 100 acres of north Florida once used for turpentine farming, Roth is restoring the original longleaf pine-wiregrass habitat. This Gadsden County landowner was named 2015 Florida Land Steward Landowner of the

Year by Florida Land Steward, a partnership that includes the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) and other agencies. She was recognized by the FWC at its February 2016 meeting.



## **Key Partners & Resources**

Florida's Private Landowners

Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services: [FreshfromFlorida.com](http://FreshfromFlorida.com)

Florida Forest Service: [FreshfromFlorida.com/Divisions-Offices/Florida-Forest-Service](http://FreshfromFlorida.com/Divisions-Offices/Florida-Forest-Service)

Florida Land Steward: [FLSteward.org](http://FLSteward.org)

Florida Cattlemen's Association: [Floridacattlemen.org](http://Floridacattlemen.org)

Florida Wildlife Action Plan: [MyFWC.com/WildlifeLegacy](http://MyFWC.com/WildlifeLegacy)

Florida Forestry Association: [Floridaforest.org/](http://Floridaforest.org/)

National Fish and Wildlife Foundation: [NFWF.org](http://NFWF.org)

Natural Resources Conservation Service: [NRCS.USDA.gov](http://NRCS.USDA.gov)

The Nature Conservancy: [Nature.org](http://Nature.org)

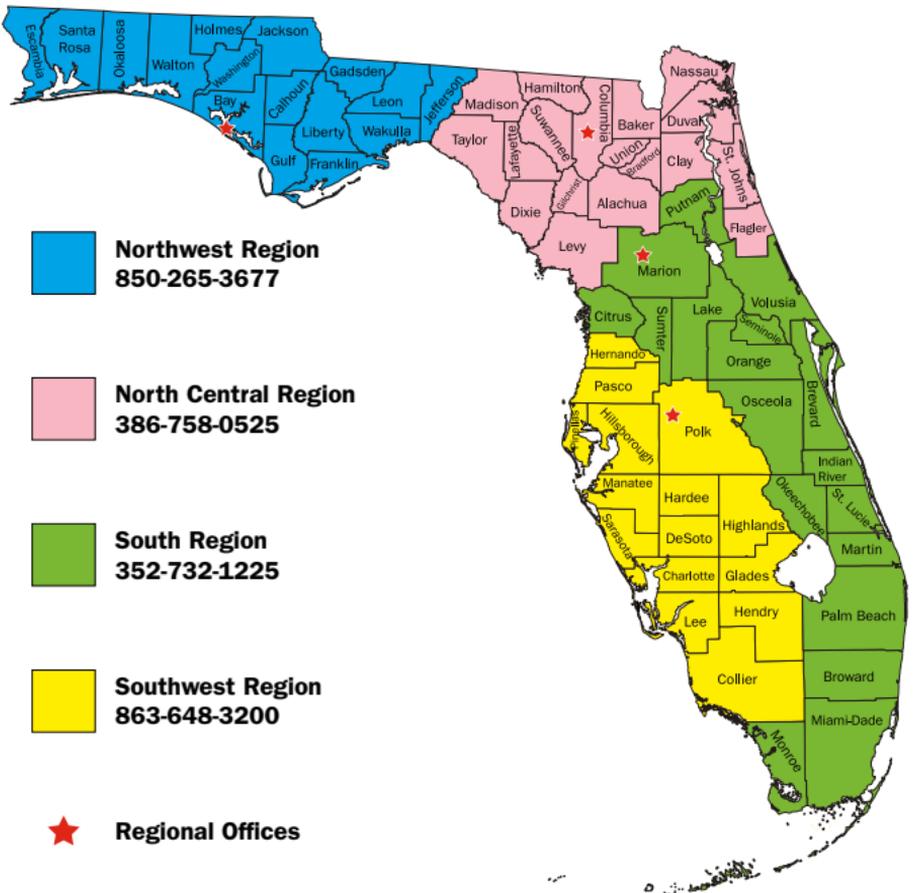
University of Florida, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences: [IFAS.UFL.edu](http://IFAS.UFL.edu)

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service: [FWS.gov](http://FWS.gov)





## FWC Landowner Assistance Program Regional Boundaries



Learn more about the Landowner Assistance Program and find the application form at [MyFWC.com/LAP](http://MyFWC.com/LAP)

### Contacts

Call regional offices and ask for a Landowner Assistance Program biologist.

