

FLORIDA'S FUTURE LANDSCAPE

SAFEGUARDING NATURE THROUGH CONSERVATION EASEMENTS

With one of the fastest growing populations in the country, conservation easements are a critical component of balancing growth and resource protection in Florida. They provide payment for private landowners to voluntarily conserve the places that make Florida special, while continuing agricultural production.

Conservation easements are one of the best tools for conserving private land, having safeguarded countless wildlife habitats and vast expanses of open space in the United States and globally.

»»» WHAT IS A CONSERVATION EASEMENT?

A conservation easement is a voluntary and legally binding agreement between a landowner and a conservation organization or public agency. A conservation easement can either be purchased from the landowner or donated by the landowner, usually to a land trust.

Easements restrict certain uses of the land (like development, though terms vary between agreements) to protect conservation values. The landowner continues to own and manage their land, and in most cases, landowners can keep using their land as they have been. Many thousands of acres of still-productive ranching and timber lands in Florida are under easement today. Landowners can still sell their land or pass it on to heirs, and the conservation easement will stay with the property.

»»» WHY ARE CONSERVATION EASEMENTS CRITICAL FOR CONSERVATION IN FLORIDA?

The demand for land is skyrocketing with Florida's burgeoning human population. Around 27,000 acres of Florida's natural and agricultural lands are being converted to development every year. Easements allow landowners to benefit financially without selling their land to developers, protecting the land from being converted.

Agricultural easements can even protect low-intensity agricultural lands, allowing landowners to continue timber and ranching. These easements are a win-win: landowners protect the "Old Florida" way of life that's been passed down for generations, and Florida preserves its wild spirit.



Conservation easements aren't just about nature—they offer tangible benefits to landowners and communities.

➤➤➤ WHAT ARE THE ADVANTAGES OF CONSERVATION EASEMENTS...

...FOR LANDOWNERS?

- Financial benefit, including possible proceeds from the sale of the easement as well as potential federal, state, and local tax benefits.
- Shield vital agricultural operations from development, ensuring the future of Florida ranching and timber.

...FOR COMMUNITIES?

- Provide ecosystem services like protection of native pollinator habitat, or enhancement of water quality by safeguarding wetlands.
- Under a conservation easement, the land stays on the tax rolls.
- Continued private management of now-conserved lands.

...FOR NATURE?

- Keep habitats and ecosystems safe, including the protection of wildlife corridors, wetlands, and carbon stocks.
- Protect land at a fraction of the cost of outright purchase, multiplying the amount of land we can protect.

➤➤➤ WHICH CONSERVATION EASEMENT PROGRAMS ARE AVAILABLE TO FLORIDA LANDOWNERS?

Conservation easements aren't a one-size-fits-all solution, and there are a number of different programs available.

- **State programs:**
 - Rural and Family Lands Protection Program (Florida Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services): designed to protect important agricultural lands and natural resources, allowing continued agriculture. Among the most flexible Florida easements.
 - Florida Forever (Department of Environmental Protection-Division of State Lands): the largest public land acquisition program of its kind in the United States.
- **Federal programs:**
 - Forest Legacy Program (US Forest Service): designed to protect environmentally important forest areas that are threatened by conversion to non-forest uses.
 - Agricultural Land Easements Program (USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service): supports the protection, restoration, and enhancement of or protection of working farms and grasslands.
 - Wetland Reserve Easement Program (USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service): helps landowners protect, restore, and enhance wetlands which have been previously degraded due to agricultural uses.
 - Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration Program (Department of Defense): supports easements near military installations to maintain shared benefits of open land for conservation and the military mission.
- **Local programs:**
 - Water Management Districts and Local Governments: Florida's five Water Management Districts own easements protecting water resources. Local governments may own other easement lands as well.
- **Land trusts:**
 - These are private organizations that work statewide or locally to connect landowners with funding for land conservation.

➤➤➤ HOW CAN INTERESTED LANDOWNERS SET UP A CONSERVATION EASEMENT IN FLORIDA?

The best way to get started is to reach out to a local land trust. These groups are highly knowledgeable about all options. Find your land trust partner at the Alliance of Florida Land Trusts:



Visit our website for links and more information about conservation easements:

