

## Oklawaha Valley Audubon Society Strategic Plan – 2023

### **Vision/Impact Statement:**

A world in which people and wildlife thrive.

### **Mission Statement:**

The Oklawaha Valley Audubon Society leads the community in protecting birds, wildlife, and the places they need throughout Lake County and the region using science, advocacy and conservation.

### **Long-term Outcomes:**

OVAS will support the strategic goals of National Audubon, Audubon Florida, and the Central Florida Region of Audubon Florida. Specifically, the long-term outcomes that OVAS will directly contribute to are:

*Working Lands:* The quality of wildlife habitat on government and privately managed lands in Lake County and the region is increased.

*Water and Coasts:* Water quality and water flows in the watersheds of the Oklawaha and St. Johns rivers, and the lakes, wetlands, springs, and aquifers in Lake County and the region are noticeably improved to restore the functioning of habitats across priority landscapes in the region and downstream along Florida's coast.

*Wildlife-Friendly Communities:* Local community members are engaged in ensuring wildlife-friendly habitats are established throughout Lake County and the region; Wildlife-friendly policies have been passed; Community members are engaged in local and region-wide conservation efforts; Conservation corridors have been established.

*Climate and Coasts:* Greenhouse gas emissions from Lake County and the region are reduced to minimize the related human-induced impacts on ecosystems, biodiversity, and sea level rise.

### **Short-term Outcomes:**

*Working Lands:* Engage land managers of government and privately-owned lands and advocate for increased wildlife habitat quality on those lands.

*Water and Coasts:* Engage with community leaders, planners, and decision makers to protect water at the source (*e.g.*, aquifers, wetlands, lakes, springs, and rivers); Advocate for sustainable water supplies for natural and built systems; Advocate for water quality improvements.

*Wildlife-Friendly Communities:* Engage community to increase awareness of the need and participation in increasing wildlife-friendly habitats.

*Climate and Coasts:* Engage with community leaders, planners, and decision makers to reduce the impact of greenhouse gases.

## Strategies:

### *Education and Outreach:*

- OVAS will provide a speaker on a relevant topic (working lands, water, coast, wildlife-friendly communities, and climate) for our Annual Meeting.
- OVAS will organize field trips; birding data will be uploaded to eBird for scientific use.
- OVAS will kindle the interest of children and young adults in the outdoors and conservation issues.
- OVAS will support Trout Lake Nature Center.
- OVAS will develop and implement action plans to increase diversity and inclusion of our board and our membership that reflect the diversity of our local community.

### *Working Lands:*

- OVAS will advocate for state laws and local land use decisions and programs, including funding, which protect conservation lands and provide for managing those lands to restore and maintain wildlife and habitats.
- OVAS will further the Conservation Action Agenda of Audubon Florida for Working Lands. <https://fl.audubon.org/conservation>

### *Water and Coast:*

- OVAS will be mindful of public policy decisions impacting water quality and flow in Lake County and the region, and provide input to state and local managers and decision makers and private property owners. [*e.g.*, St. Johns River Water Management District, Lake County Water Authority, Florida Department of Environmental Protection, County and City Commissioners and Planners].
- OVAS will further the Conservation Action Agenda of Audubon Florida for Water and Coast. <https://fl.audubon.org/conservation>

### *Wildlife-Friendly Communities:*

- OVAS will join the National Audubon Plants for Birds program as a partner.
- OVAS will support Audubon Florida's EagleWatch and Jay Watch programs.
- OVAS will support Audubon Florida's Center for Birds of Prey and similar local facilities.
- OVAS will collaborate with like-minded organizations on plants sales, speakers, and projects to mobilize communities to promote the use of native plants in all landscapes.
- OVAS will advocate for public policies that conserve existing wildlife habitat and restore damaged habitats
- OVAS will further the Conservation Action Agenda of Audubon Florida for Bird-Friendly Communities. <https://fl.audubon.org/conservation>

### *Climate and Coast:*

- OVAS will encourage local governments and communities to protect tree canopy and shrubs, and to facilitate residents in planting more trees and shrubs.
- OVAS will further the Conservation Action Agenda of Audubon Florida for Climate and Coast. <https://fl.audubon.org/conservation>



# Audubon FLORIDA

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## REGIONAL CONSERVATION PRIORITY: CENTRAL FLORIDA

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The Central Florida Regional Conservation Committee includes much of the remaining conservation corridor through the central peninsula. While continuing our regional priorities of partnering with landowners and property managers and protecting water quality and water resources, the following goals reflect our shared focus in 2023.

*Therefore be it resolved:*

*The Audubon chapters in the Central Florida Region, in alignment with Audubon Florida and the Atlantic Flyway, using information derived from sound science, will mobilize volunteer leadership, members, conservation allies, community leaders, public officials, and governmental agencies to:*

### **Promote Lake Apopka Restoration, Visitor Access and New Audubon Nature Center**

- Chapters will focus joint resources and efforts to assure continued progress on restoration of the Lake Apopka North Shore marshes and to increase appropriate public access to the marshes for birdwatching, nature study, and compatible recreation activities. Chapters will work with Audubon Florida and Orange & Oklawaha Valley Audubon Societies to promote the long-term goal of building and operating a new Audubon Center to showcase Lake Apopka as Florida's most important inland bird habitat, the headwater of the Harris Chain of Lakes and an important central Florida reclaimed water/stormwater management infrastructure component.

### **Monitor and Act on Local & State Government Land Use Decisions Impacting Wildlife Habitat**

- Chapters will work together to advocate for full funding for Florida Forever and the Rural and Family Lands Protection Act to secure money to purchase identified conservation property (such as those listed below) by meeting with legislators to build support for specific properties rather than lobbying solely for the umbrella programs.
  1. Lenholt Farm: a vital property which links Ocala National Forest and the extensive state holdings along the Wekiva River
  2. Conlin Lake X/Kirchman Tract: an 11,000-acre, pristine property at the headwaters of the Econlockhatchee and Kissimmee Rivers watershed
  3. Purchase of conservation easements on Kissimmee Valley ranchlands where owners are interested and willing to participate

4. Green Swamp: Florida's hydrologic heart and its related uplands are a critical part of the central portion of Florida's Wildlife Corridor running through Polk, Lake, Sumter, Hernando and Pasco Counties. Land use plans must ensure the integrity of both the Floridan Aquifer and the Florida Wildlife Corridor.

### **Equity, Inclusion and Diversity**

- Just as biodiversity strengthens natural systems, the diversity of human experience strengthens our conservation efforts for the benefit of nature and all human beings. Therefore, the Central Florida RCC resolves that each chapter will develop and implement action plans to increase diversity and inclusion of its board and its membership that reflects the diversity of their local community.