Florida Forever Coalition
1000 Friends of Florida  Audubon Florida  Defenders of Wildlife
Everglades Trust  Florida Recreation and Park Association
Florida Wildlife Federation  Trust for Public Land

The Honorable Rick Scott
The Capitol
400 S. Monroe Street
Tallahassee, Fl 32399

RE:          FY 2014 Budget Recommendations for Conservation Programs

Dear Governor Scott:

One of Florida’s great success stories is our network of parks and other public lands that provide places for people to recreate, habitat for wildlife, and protection of water resources. Over the past four decades a series of land conservation measures have enjoyed broad public support and bi-partisan support of Governors and legislative leaders.

Declines in state revenues, priorities related to the state’s economy, and a re-evaluation of public land goals have slowed Florida’s land acquisition programs. We write today to propose that your Fiscal Year 2014 budget proposal include substantial commitments of renewed funding for Florida Forever and the Everglades.

The conservation programs of Florida Forever dovetail closely with the economies of many local governments and private firms who employ thousands of people in natural area-connected tourism. The special places visited by our tourists and residents were protected by earlier project funding and can best be sustained by the carefully vetted designs of Florida Forever projects in same watersheds and ecosystems. Billions of dollars of annual revenue are derived from tourism, agriculture, forestry products, water supply, sport and commercial fishing, hunting and other outdoor recreation - all sustained by Florida’s ongoing investment in conservation.

We ask specifically that the funds made available when the Preservation 2000 bonds are paid off be reallocated to land conservation and Everglades restoration. According to the most recent revenue estimates, in FY13 Florida will complete $257 million in annual P2000 debt service freeing up an equivalent amount of documentary stamp taxes. We request that your budget allocate the funds no longer needed for P2000 debt
service for land and water conservation under the Florida Forever program and for Florida’s contribution to Everglades restoration.

The Florida Forever program, which succeeded Preservation 2000, allocates funds for public land acquisition through DEP, the water management districts, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, the Florida Forest Service and through Florida Community Trust grants to local governments. The Florida Forever List is a carefully vetted group of projects that represents much of what is left of our state’s natural areas. Florida Forever was originally authorized to allow annual appropriations of up to $300 million.

Florida, as part of its legislatively authorized partnership with the federal government to restore America’s Everglades, has committed to provide an average annual appropriation of $100 million. Those funds are urgently needed to help underwrite the costs of delivering fresh water to and restoring the spatial extent of the wetlands that make up the greater Everglades ecosystem. We acknowledge that state support to the Everglades water quality plan also requires an annual $32 million appropriation.

We ask your consideration of this request while fully recognizing that there are competing uses for the documentary stamp tax revenues freed up when the Preservation 2000 bonds are paid off. Those funds, generated in a large part by doc stamp taxes raised specifically to fund Preservation 2000, should remain allocated to the purposes of environmental protection and restoration.

The Florida Forever Coalition, represented by the undersigned organization leaders, will be grateful for your consideration of our request.

Sincerely,

Charles Pattison
1000 Friends of Florida

Eric Draper
Audubon Florida

Laurie MacDonald
Defenders of Wildlife

Noah Valenstein
Everglades Trust

Manley Fuller
Florida Wildlife Federation

Will Abberger
Trust for Public Land

Eleanor Warmack
Florida Recreation and Park Association