

Center for Landscape Conservation Planning

2022 Annual Activities Update

The past year has been a productive and exciting one for the Center. The following is a summary of key work and partnerships.

Current Activities

- **Florida Ecological Greenways Network and Florida Wildlife Corridor Science:** Center staff have and continue to pursue support from a variety of sources as part of our key role in providing the science foundation for the Florida Ecological Greenways Network (FEGN) and the Florida Wildlife Corridor (the top three highest conservation priorities in the FEGN). In July, the Center received a legislative appropriation for one year to support this work, and we are actively working to identify additional sources of support for future years.
- **Staffing:** To accomplish the tasks outlined in the legislative appropriation, we have hired or increased capacity for over 10 additional staff and students, including key science and technical experts, focused on various aspects of Florida Wildlife Corridor science and conservation. This includes developing new spatial modeling tools based on AI technology to both identify the most strategic wildlife corridors and other conservation priority areas across the state and to track protection opportunities and progress both for conservation agencies and organizations as well as stakeholders and the public.
- **Key Efforts Underway.** The funding for staff will advance the science needed to support identification of strategic priorities within the Florida Wildlife Corridor (the Corridor), and to communicate the science with key federal, state, local, and non-profit partners statewide. We are also disseminating this knowledge to other ecological connectivity science and policy practitioners in the United States and across the globe, including through a book on landscape-scale conservation in Florida. Specific projects include:
 - Partnering with the Florida Conservation Group (FCG) to provide direct science support for **land protection** in southwest Florida. During the past year, FCG has worked with ranchers and other private landowners to protect over 19,000 acres of land and submit more than 21,000 acres to the state and other agencies for inclusion in priority programs such as the state's Florida Forever program land acquisition list. All of these projects are based on the strategic prioritization science provided by the Center.
 - Working with Archbold Biological Station on science-based analyses to **communicate the conservation significance of the corridor** as well as identifying the corridor bottlenecks that are most critical, major highways that cross the corridor, and the strategic large parcels most important for completing protection of the corridor.

- Working with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) in partnership with the National Wildlife Refuge Association and Florida Conservation Group (FCG) to develop a **plan for more land protection work by the FWS in southwest Florida**.
 - Working with 1000 Friends of Florida, FCG, and the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS) to **complete both 2040 and 2070 development scenarios** (including trend and alternate scenarios) to be released in the next few months along with various communication and outreach materials from UF and 1000 Friends of Florida. We are using these scenarios along with agricultural land use data from FDACS and all relevant conservation priority GIS data to identify the current agricultural lands that are most important for conservation and most threatened by development, with the Corridor as the primary focal resource.
 - Developing a **GIS data viewer** for the Ocala to Osceola (O2O) Corridor for the North Florida Land Trust, and working with Archbold, Florida Natural Areas Inventory (FNAI) and other partners to develop additional viewers for the Florida Wildlife Corridor and potentially other strategic conservation priority areas across Florida.
- **New Projects and Partnerships.** We are also developing new projects and partnerships that have the potential to increase the scope of our ecological connectivity work to better assess wildlife corridor priorities across state lines into Georgia and Alabama as well as to further assess areas within the Florida Wildlife Corridor that are most important for providing climate resiliency. These include:
 - **Longleaf Pine Conservation.** We are initiating a project with The Longleaf Alliance and Florida Natural Areas Inventory to identify longleaf pine conservation and ecological connectivity priorities across the former range of longleaf pine. This project will increase our knowledge about longleaf pine conservation and restoration priorities in Florida, address ecological connectivity priorities across states lines into Georgia and Alabama, and disseminate knowledge with additional regional state partners to bring Florida-style ecological connectivity and wildlife corridor science and planning to the entire southeastern United States.
 - **Coastal Resilience Value.** We are coordinating with staff from the Florida Department of Environmental Protection Office of Resilience and Coastal Protection to fund a position within the Center focused on identifying the coastal resilience value of existing Florida Forever projects, including the many Florida Forever projects in the Florida Wildlife Corridor. This will likely be multiyear funding that would further support several current staff.
 - **Urban Green Infrastructure.** The Center continues to be engaged in smaller-scale, community green infrastructure design and planning projects, including working with vulnerable populations to increase resiliency to future climate hazards through green infrastructure design; research focused on biodiverse and climate-wise landscapes, including through our Climate-Wise Landscapes Initiative (<https://dcp.ufl.edu/landscapechange/>); work focused on springshed design and planning in the Ocala National Forest in partnership with the U.S. Forest Service; and work focused on recreation and circulation design within the Cumberland Island National Seashore. These efforts are resulting in new partnerships and funding and support for Center staff and students.

Future Plans

- **Legislative Funding Proposal.** All of this is great news, and our goal is to maintain this momentum as we move beyond the current fiscal year. One important objective is to continue working with the UF Office of Government and Community Relations on a recurring legislative funding proposal to fund the Center for Landscape Conservation Planning. These proposals are centered on the idea that the Center will continue to provide the core science needed to inform land protection decisions and conservation of the Corridor.
- **Your Support.** The Center for Landscape Conservation Planning is the foremost entity within Florida engaged in applied research on landscape conservation and land use with an emphasis on protecting Florida's biodiversity and ecosystem services. As the third most populous state with growth of approximately 1,000 new residents per day, protecting Florida's remaining rural and natural lands while planning for resilient and smart growth has never been more important. Center staff are actively working to address these issues through applied research projects and engagement with state, local, and federal agencies, mentoring our next generation of conservation science Ph.D. students, and providing guidance and learning opportunities for Masters and undergraduate students at the University of Florida.

Center staff and students are almost completely reliant on outside funding to achieve our mission, including supporting specific projects focused on conservation planning and providing student research and learning opportunities. Outside funds are critical as the University of Florida provides only a small portion of the financial support needed to conduct Center research and education and support Center staff. We hope you will share information about the Center with your network, and consider making a tax deductible donation during the year. We are also looking for donors interested in long term funding for the Center including to establish an endowment for ensuring in perpetuity support for our essential work to protect the state's wildlife corridors, ecological connectivity, climate resiliency, and green infrastructure.

Please feel free to reach out to Center staff for more information about our mission and work.

Sincerely,



Director, Center for Landscape Conservation Planning
School of Landscape Architecture and Planning
University of Florida
Email: tomh@geoplan.ufl.edu
Web: <http://conservation.dcp.ufl.edu/>
Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/UFCLCP/>

Support: <http://conservation.dcp.ufl.edu/support/>