



*The mission of the Florida Native Plant Society is to promote the preservation, conservation, and restoration of the native plants and native plant communities of Florida.*

January 11, 2009

Governor Charlie Crist  
The Capitol  
400 South Monroe Street  
Tallahassee, Florida 32399-0001

Subject: Proposal to Cut Funding for Land Management and Florida Forever

Dear Governor Crist:

The Florida Native Plant Society recognizes the difficult decisions now facing Florida as a result of severe budget shortfalls. These decisions now include a proposal to halt all funding for the highly successful Florida Forever program and to withhold funding critical for basic resource management needs on existing conservation lands.

Although budget cuts clearly are unavoidable, this proposal is both shortsighted and outrageous. For example, the latest *Florida Department of Transportation Agency Overview* (December 2008) acknowledges an FDOT budget of **\$8.2 BILLION for 2009**. Many legislators have indicated that roadbuilding funds jobs, while conservation lands are simply a drain on the state budget that can only be afforded when the coffers are flush. So FDOT's budget is sacrosanct. To be blunt, this is a gross mischaracterization of reality.

**A 1% cut in FDOT's budget would save \$82 million. That is far more than is spent annually to fund the entirety of basic resource management needs (e.g., prescribed burning, control of invasive nuisance species, and protection of imperiled species) on Florida's conservation lands, with enough left over to bond an entire annual share of acquisition funding for Florida Forever.**

How many jobs would be lost as a result of a 1% reduction in FDOT's funding for one year, when the huge cost of transportation projects is associated NOT WITH STAFFING, but with the large capital costs of those projects? How many Floridians would benefit directly from the continued acquisition of natural lands in Florida, and the continued conservation of those landscapes by managing the resources protected on them? Quite simply, everyone who recreates on those lands or is employed in managing them and making them available to the public, and the landowners from whom the lands are purchased. And we know that the economic benefits of land conservation and our superlative State Park system – of ecotourism generally – far exceed those direct benefits I just listed.

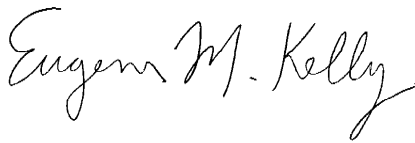
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Please do not allow our legislature to take this irresponsible action when there are so many other ways to save money rather than to cut services to the people. And make no mistake, **the recreational values and ecosystem services provided by our natural environment are services to the people.**

- Please recognize that Florida Forever bonding makes good fiscal sense. **A \$10 million appropriation for Florida Forever would have a disproportionately large economic impact by allowing the state to borrow \$300 million to purchase lands NOW** – when they are available and when many landowners have negotiated in good faith with the state. Those lands, and the environmental resources they hold, may not be available next year.
- Proper management of the resources protected on our existing conservation lands is a basic responsibility from which we cannot take a vacation. Prescribed burning and the control of non-native nuisance species is relatively inexpensive but critical to maintaining the environmental values of those lands. **The money Florida saves today by cutting management funding would be miniscule and will be far exceeded by the additional funding needed to compensate for a year (or more?) of neglect.** Even if the closure of existing State Parks is necessitated by budget cuts – and we hope they are not - **please do not allow basic resource management needs to be ignored.**

Floridians are looking for leadership from our elected officials in these difficult times. Please do not allow those officials to take the easy way out.

Sincerely,



Eugene M. Kelly, President  
Florida Native Plant Society

cc: Senator Jeff Atwater, President, Florida Senate  
Senator Lee Constantine, Chair, Environmental Preservation and Conservation  
Senator Paula Dockery, Member, Environmental Preservation and Conservation