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Florida Legislators: Do Your Jobs, and Protect Our Trails and Natural Places

TALLAHASSEE, FL.—Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (RTC) and Florida Audubon have issued a joint message calling on state legislators to fulfill the wishes of Floridians who overwhelmingly voted in support of an initiative that could provide $16 billion for conservation projects over the next 20 years, including for trails.

Last November 2014, Floridian voted 3-1 in favor of the Florida Water, Land and Legacy Conservation Amendment (Amendment 1), which is now hamstrung in the state legislature’s special session along with other critical funding for trails and natural places, potentially putting these valuable recreational, tourism, conservation and quality-of-life assets at risk.

“Here we are at an historic point in the greenways and trails movement in Florida during which we can truly start piecing together a statewide system of trails that connect our urban centers to our beaches, springs and natural areas,” said Ken Bryan, Director, Florida Regional Office, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy. “Trails support conservation, economic opportunity and transportation and serve as corridors for other users, such as our birdwatching friends, to use to access our state’s unique places.”

Rails-to-Trails Conservancy and Florida Audubon understand exactly what is in jeopardy here. Tourism alone generates $2.5 billion in state and local taxes. In addition, nearly 75% of all Florida visitors participate in nature-based activities during their visit to the state, according to the 2012 Outdoor Industry Association (OIA) report.
“As Florida grows, people will need new parks and trails, and wildlife will be more dependent on public land,” said Eric Draper, Executive Director, Florida Audubon. “Getting outside to walk, hike and watch bird life is one of the joys of living in and visiting Florida.”

As a result, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy and the Florida Audubon have come together to ask the Florida legislature, including calling on state senators and representatives, to do their jobs and pass a budget that fully funds Florida Forever for important land acquisition for the Everglades, Springs, beaches and trails.

Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, a nonprofit organization with more than 100,000 members, is the nation’s largest trails organization dedicated to connecting people and communities by creating a nationwide network of public trails, many from former rail lines and connecting corridors. Founded in 1986, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy's national office is located in Washington, D.C., with regional offices in California, Florida, Ohio and Pennsylvania. For more information visit [www.railstotrails.org](http://www.railstotrails.org).