

FLORIDA'S

County Land Conservation Programs



A Trust for Public Land Survey of 35 Florida Counties



Conserving Land for People

Thank you

The Trust for Public Land is very grateful to the county personnel and conservation program managers who participated in our Land Acquisition survey and made this publication possible.

Acknowledgements

Project Director:

Will Abberger
Associate Director
Conservation Finance
Trust for Public Land

Project Supervisor:

Anne Nelson
Senior Public Affairs Associate
Florida Office
Trust for Public Land

Research/Surveys:

Karen Girard
Cody Scarp, Inc.

with assistance from

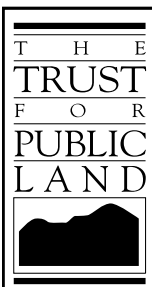
Wendy Muzzy
Program Manager/Conservation Finance
Trust for Public Land

Writer/Editor:

Julie S. Bettinger

Design:

Faye Howell
Meacham Howell Design



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For additional information, contact:
Trust for Public Land – Florida Office
306 N. Monroe Street
Tallahassee, Florida 32301-7622
(850) 222-7911
www.tpl.org



Dear Friends and Colleagues:

The Trust for Public Land is pleased to bring you “Florida’s County Land Conservation Programs,” the results of a comprehensive survey of 35 Florida county land conservation programs conducted between August and November 2001.

This report provides an overview of Florida’s county land conservation efforts and suggestions for helping to ensure the success of such efforts in the future.

In selecting counties to survey, the Trust for Public Land chose the 25 counties that have a dedicated source of funds for land conservation and ten additional counties, mostly within major metropolitan areas.

Our survey confirmed results from other national studies that have shown Florida is a leader in funding for conservation and recreation land acquisition. In fact, over the past five years alone the counties surveyed have protected an estimated 169,000 acres with a total county expenditure of \$459.6 million. To achieve this impressive result, the counties surveyed have leveraged \$371.7 million in state, federal, and other funding for a total expenditure of \$831.3 million.

It’s also significant to note that citizens in these counties have voted to tax themselves as much as \$2.25 billion for land conservation efforts, mostly through bond measures.

Of course, this report’s main purpose is not to hail Florida’s efforts for conservation. The state’s population growth and development continue to degrade water quality, threaten open space, and diminish our quality of life. Many of Florida’s fastest growing counties don’t have active land conservation programs and some that have taken this step will soon exhaust available funding.

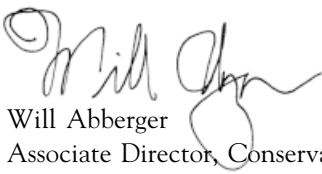
For counties contemplating creating their own land conservation programs, this report offers our advice for success. Our survey shows that counties with enviable land conservation track records usually have the following characteristics in common: forward-thinking leadership, a definitive title for a funding proposal, a well-defined initiative, well worded referendum, an extensive public awareness campaign, accountability/fiscal safeguards built into the measure, an organized project selection and acquisition process, funding partnerships, and a plan for land management.

We hope that you will take the time to review this report and the case studies on Jacksonville-Duval, Hillsborough, Flagler and Miami-Dade counties. They provide a good primer on the creativity behind some of Florida’s most successful efforts to date.

When you’re ready to start your own initiative, or to expand an existing program, there are many organizations available to help. The Trust for Public Land’s Conservation Finance Program offers a comprehensive package of technical assistance, from feasibility research, to polling, to running campaigns.

It’s our intent to update this survey periodically, with the help of Florida’s county governments. We look forward to hearing about your successful efforts in future surveys.

Sincerely,



Will Abberger
Associate Director, Conservation Finance
The Trust for Public Land



The counties surveyed have protected an estimated 169,000 acres at a total cost of \$831.3 million – with the county’s portion equaling approximately \$459.6 million.



Land Conservation and Acquisition a Priority for Florida Counties

Florida local and state governments lead the nation in funding for conservation and recreation land acquisition. In fact, the 1999 Florida Forever Act is the largest conservation land acquisition program in the nation.

When referenda for new parks, natural greenway areas, and open spaces are placed on the ballot, voters overwhelmingly support them.

Pinellas County's five successful referenda since 1972 have averaged a strong majority of 64 percent voting "yes." In 1996, when Miami-Dade County voters approved a measure to fund improvements for park and recreational facilities by 67 percent of the vote, it was the highest margin of support for a fiscal measure in the county's history.

Still Far To Go

Despite an enviable track record, local and conservation program planning and funding are not keeping pace with development. The state's rapid growth rate is causing many communities to fall behind in securing adequate land for parks, natural areas, open space and public recreation. In Florida's fast-growing metropolitan areas, especially, development is outpacing efforts to conserve open lands and natural resources for public use.

Now, more than ever, communities need to assess their past efforts toward preservation and formulate a plan for preserving land to maintain a balance – before it's too late.

Surveys indicate that future efforts will receive voter support. A 1998 statewide poll of Florida voters, taken by the Trust for Public Land, found that nearly four

out of five people want to continue Florida's conservation land-buying programs and more than 70 percent want to expand these programs to create more parks, greenways and open spaces in urban areas.

City and county governments are adding to the favorable environment, as they recognize that conservation is more than an environmental issue – it can boost local economies, help guide growth and development, reduce crime, protect water quality, and provide a safe haven for family recreation.

Communities are also discovering new ways of utilizing conservation and recreation open spaces, including: stormwater management, brownfield redevelopment, and landfill reclamation.

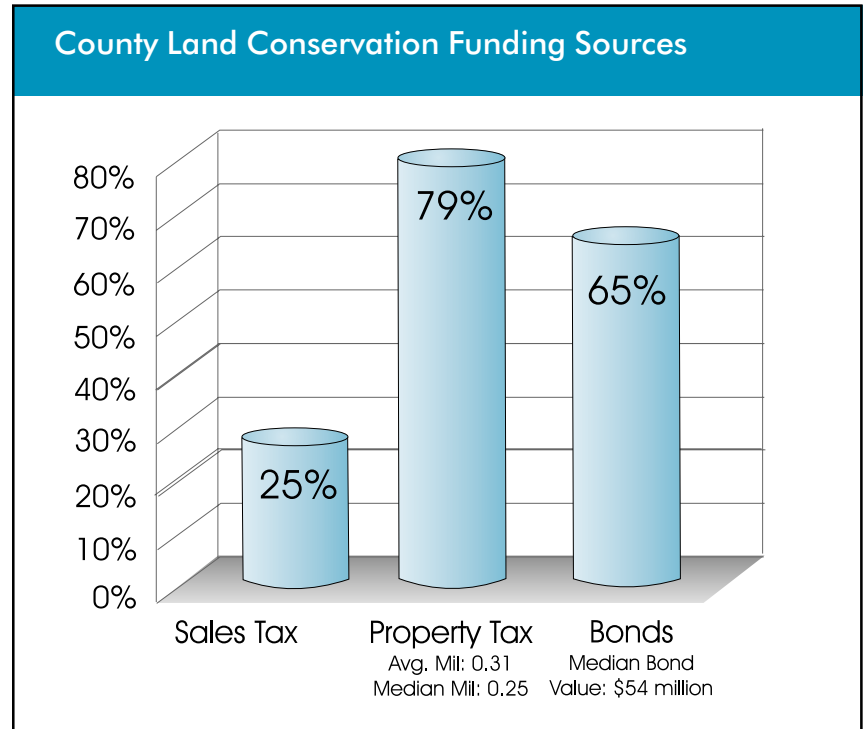
Nationwide, it has been proven that preservation of open spaces is not a luxury, but a necessity.

Still, recognizing the need for a land acquisition program, creating a funding mechanism, and implementing the program pose major challenges – no matter how supportive the climate.

Documenting Success

To learn more about who's doing it, how they're doing it, and what it takes for a land conservation and acquisition program to be successful, the Trust for Public Land surveyed 35 Florida county conservation programs and documented their efforts. The goal was to compile the information and determine best practices that might be shared with others. At the same time, TPL hoped to identify funding options communities are using which might be considered by other local governments.

In compiling the results, TPL also planned to gain insight into what motivates voters, what benefits they deem worthy of taxation, and how much they are willing to spend to achieve those benefits.



Convincing voters to tax themselves for land conservation doesn't just happen — building a winning effort requires a carefully designed measure and a lot of political expertise. The campaign must be well designed, well timed, and well executed.

Local Revenue Sources Available For Land Conservation In Florida

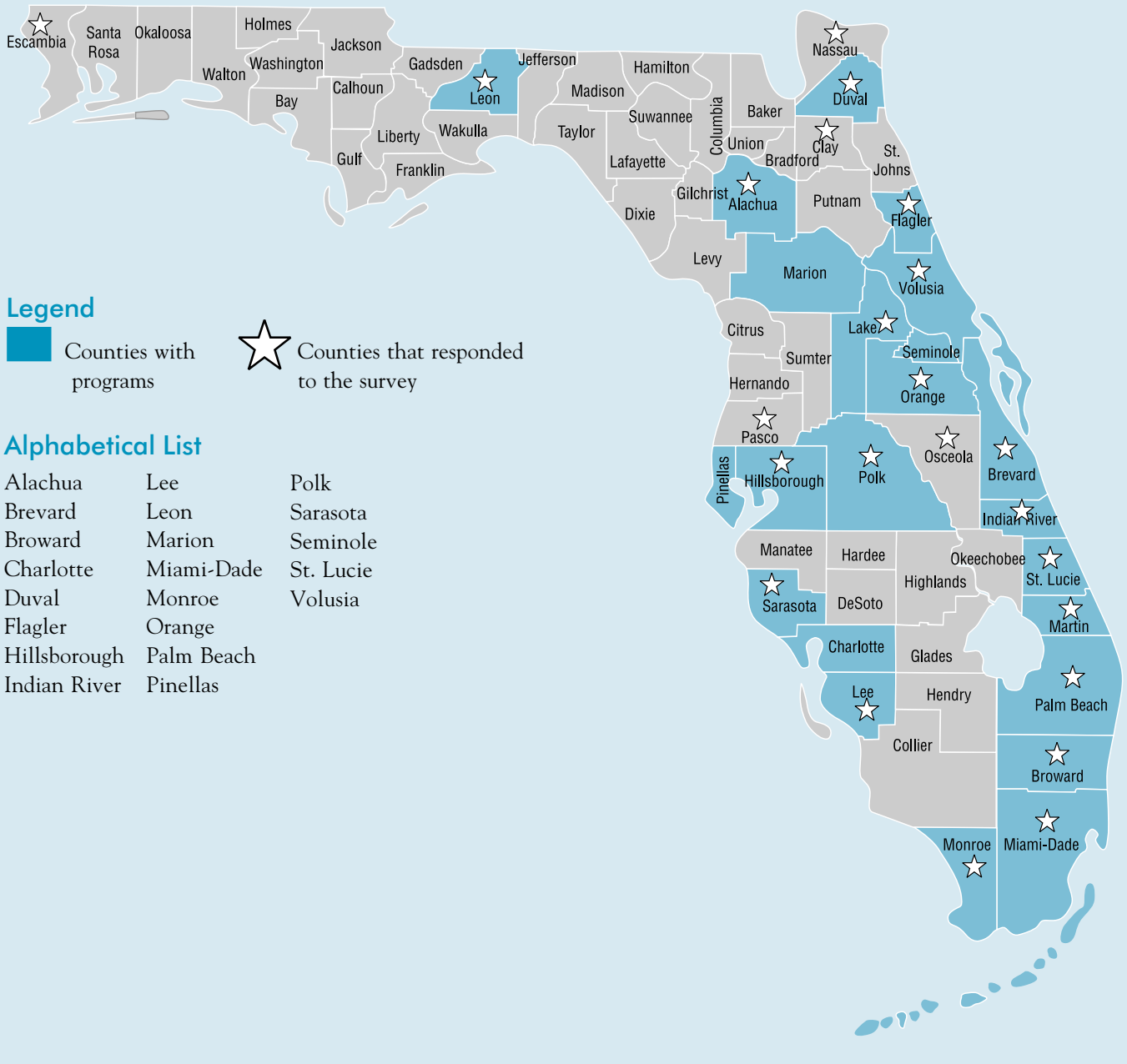
When considering land conservation and acquisition, it's important to look at what funding sources are available.

State law limits the funding options available to local governments to pay for these types of programs and restricts the taxing amount and the types of expenditures. The primary sources are: ad valorem or property taxes, local government sales taxes, small county sales taxes, tourist impact fees, and general obligation bonds.



Surtax: Authorized for Operation and Maintenance

Since 1988, 25 Florida counties have established dedicated sources of funding for local land conservation. Most have created these programs through voter-approved referenda. The counties surveyed between August and November 2001 had protected an estimated 169,000 acres at a total cost of \$831.3 million — with the county’s portion equalling approximately \$459.6 million.



Property Tax

Property taxes are the single most important revenue source for local governments in Florida, funding schools and locally-provided government services. On average, property taxes account for approximately 38 percent of a local government's budget.

The average total millage or property tax rate in Florida (including all taxing entities) is 21.88 mills (one mill is \$1 per \$1,000 of taxable property; 21.88 mills is \$21.88 per \$1,000 of taxable property value). Cities, counties, and school districts are subject to a constitutional limit of 10 mills each for operating purposes. One exception authorized by local voters is debt service millage.

Though not usually the case, counties may choose to place a referendum on the ballot for an ad valorem tax increase. For example, in 1996, Lee County asked voters to approve an advisory referendum for a county levy of up to 1/2 mill annually for seven years to purchase and manage conservation lands. Voters indicated strong support and the county commission established the Lee County Conservation 2020 Program, which was funded by the property tax increase.

Local Government Infrastructure Sales Tax

All counties are eligible to levy an infrastructure sales tax, commonly known as the local sales tax, at the rate of 0.5 or 1.0 percent. This levy may be enacted following an ordinance adopted by a majority of the members of the county's governing body and approved by the voters in a countywide referendum. A municipality that represents the majority of a county's population also may propose a surtax through adoption of a uniform resolution calling for a county referendum on the issue.

Authorized purposes for the tax include planning and constructing



Helping Communities Conserve Land

The Trust for Public Land has been helping communities throughout the U.S. conserve land for people for more than 30 years.

TPL is a national nonprofit land conservation organization created to protect land for public enjoyment. Founded in 1972, the organization has worked with public agencies, landowners, and citizen groups to protect more than 1.2 million acres in 45 states valued at over \$1.8 billion.

TPL's experts in law, finance, real estate, fundraising, government, and public relations work nationally to help citizens and government agencies identify lands they want to see protected and help them accomplish their land-saving goals.

TPL's Conservation Finance program conducts a thorough and insightful assessment of the community, then recommends ways to build public support for a land conservation measure. It offers a comprehensive program to help communities design, pass and implement public funding measures for conservation.

TPL also will help identify the most appropriate new funding sources for a community – such as general obligation bonds, real estate transfer fees or local option sales taxes – and then work closely with community leaders to design a measure that meets legal requirements, attracts public and political support, and protects priority conservation lands.

Since 1996, TPL's Conservation Finance Program has helped pass more than 140 local and state ballot measures that have generated over \$26 billion in new funding for parks and open spaces nationwide.

Jacksonville

Fast Fact: At 840 square miles, Jacksonville is the largest city in the continental United States.

Vital Statistics

Population: 778,879

Increase 1990-2000: 15.7%

Ranking: 7th most populous of 67 counties

Median income (1999): \$26,868

In Brief

Preservation efforts by the City of Jacksonville/Duval County (a consolidated local government) were initiated by Mayor John Delaney in 1999 and partially funded by the city council through bonds and a general budget appropriation. Funding was enhanced through a much larger sales tax package supported by voters that included road improvements, better drainage, cleaning contaminated lands, targeted economic development and building a new main library, arena, baseball park and courthouse, as well as land conservation.

Historical Record On Land Conservation Funding

In January 1999, Jacksonville Mayor John Delaney established a \$312 million land acquisition program called the **Preservation Project Jacksonville** to manage growth, preserve environmentally sensitive lands, improve water quality, and provide access to the city's natural areas. To fund it, the Jacksonville City Council passed a resolution issuing \$16 million in general obligation bonds and a year later adopted a Budget Stabilization Ordinance authorizing a \$5 million general budget appropriation. The balance of the funds have been raised from state, federal and private sources.

In July of 2000, the city council passed an ordinance establishing the **Better Jacksonville Plan** "for growth management, road improvements and construction, environmental protection and preservation, targeted economic development and public facilities." The Plan was funded by a 1/2 cent sales tax increase that included \$50 million in bonds for the Preservation Project to acquire land. The surtax was subject to a referendum, which was approved by voters (by a three-to-one majority) in September 2000.

The 1/2 cent surtax started in January 2001 and has a maturity date of December 31, 2030 – though it is expected to be retired in less than 20 years.

The Trust for Public Land has worked with Jacksonville since Mayor Delaney's initial efforts and has partnered with the city to acquire over 2,500 acres of land throughout Duval County.

Goals

In five years, the **Preservation Project** plans to acquire 10 to 20 percent of the city's remaining developable lands and set them aside for conservation.

Organization

The **Preservation Project Jacksonville** is administered by the Mayor's office.

The Project was founded based on four key principles:

1. Manage growth
2. Protect environmentally sensitive lands
3. Improve water quality
4. Improve public access to the city's natural areas

These four principles were broadly applied to nearly 300,000 parcels of property within the City of Jacksonville. The result was identification of four conceptual, land-acquisition corridors based on one (or a combination) of the four principles and the unique characteristics of land ownership.

The Preservation Project follows three governing concepts in acquiring land:

1. Willing sellers

The city will not condemn land for preservation.

Note: All numbers are based on a survey conducted between August and November 2001

infrastructure and acquiring land for public recreation, conservation or protection of natural resources.

Only 30 counties in Florida are authorized to use the proceeds plus any interest accrued to also fund *operational* expenses of infrastructure. These are counties that have 40 percent or more of the just value of real property exempt from ad valorem taxation.

The Local Government Infrastructure Surtax is subject to a combined rate limitation. It may not be levied along with the Small County Surtax, Indigent Care & Trauma Center Surtax or County Public Hospital Surtax in excess of a combined rate of one percent.

Forty-seven of Florida's 67 counties levy either the local government infrastructure sales tax or the small county sales tax, though many do not use this funding source for land conservation.

Small County Sales Tax

Counties with a total population of 50,000 or less are authorized to levy the Small County Surtax at a rate of 0.5 or 1.0 percent. This surtax is also limited to the combined rate with taxes mentioned previously as well as the Local Government Infrastructure Surtax.

Of the 31 small counties eligible to levy the Small County Surtax, 17 currently levy the full 1.0 percent. Another 12 small counties levy the Local Government Infrastructure Surtax at one percent. The remaining two counties (Franklin and Gulf) do not currently levy either surtax.

County governments may impose the Small County Surtax by either an extraordinary vote of the government body – if the proceeds are to be used for operating purposes – or by voter approval in a countywide referendum, if the proceeds will be expended to pay debt service.

Case Study

Jacksonville-Duval County, continued

2. Partners

The city will seek a funding partner – another agency or non-profit organization – for each land acquisition.

3. Public access

The city envisions public access for all of the preservation properties it purchases.

City staff and its consultants evaluate each potential site. Projects recommended as eligible are then submitted to a citizen oversight committee for approval. The Preservation Project maintains a substantial list of properties eligible for acquisition, though they are not prioritized. Jacksonville City Council and the governing bodies of other public agencies partnering with the city have the ultimate authority to approve proposed acquisitions.

Management of the **Better Jacksonville Plan** consists of two committees – a Financial Administration Committee and the Project Administration Committee, both of which are made up of city staffers and citizens not affiliated with the project.

Results

In 2000, Jacksonville purchased 20,093 acres with a city expenditure of about \$17.8 million and a total expenditure of about \$89 million.

Tourism Impact Tax

Counties containing designated areas of critical state concern may levy a tax of 1.0 percent in transient rental transactions (bed tax). To be eligible, these counties must adopt a local comprehensive plan that meets the requirements of Chapter 380 Florida Statutes and create a land authority to implement the plan. They may use revenues to purchase property in designated areas and to offset ad valorem taxes lost to the county due to those purchases.

The four areas of critical state concern are: the Florida Keys (Monroe County), the Big Cypress (mostly Collier County), the Green Swamp (Central Florida), and the Apalachicola Bay area (Franklin County). To date, only Monroe County is levying the tax.

Building a winning effort requires a carefully designed measure and a lot of political expertise. The campaign must be well orchestrated, well timed, and well executed.

Hillsborough County

Fast Fact: Hillsborough's average annual ELAPP budget is \$12.5 million. The county has acquired 34,729 acres since 1987.

Vital Statistics

Population: 998,948

Increase 1990-2000: 19.8%

Ranking: 4th most populous of 67 counties

Median income (1999): \$27,304

In brief

Hillsborough's efforts in environmental land preservation go back to 1987. Voters have overwhelmingly supported two referenda for funding.

Historical Record On Land Conservation Funding

In March 1987, Hillsborough County voters overwhelmingly supported (by more than 70 percent of the vote) a bond referendum for \$10.7 million funded by a 0.25 mil ad valorem tax. Voter approval triggered the county's creation of the **Environmental Lands Acquisition and Protection Program (ELAPP)**. In 1990, the program was extended by a second bond referendum (with over 72 percent of the vote) for \$100 million, also funded by a 0.25 ad valorem tax. The bonds will mature in 2011. The average annual ELAPP budget is \$12.5 million.

Goals

Hillsborough County's ELAPP program acquires lands to conserve and protect environmentally unique, irreplaceable, and valued ecological resources. All lands are open for public use and enjoyment, as long as the use is compatible with conservation and protection of the lands.

Organization

To be considered for acquisition, land must meet one or more of the following criteria:

- Contains native, relatively unaltered flora and fauna including wetlands, uplands and transitional systems, representing a natural habitat unique to or scarce within the State of Florida or Hillsborough County
- Provides or could provide a significant habitat important to the support or protection of endangered or threatened plants or animals
- Contains an unusual, outstanding or unique geological feature
- Plays a vital role in the enhancement and protection of water quality and quantity — including groundwater resources — or which provides protection for fish and wildlife habitat that cannot be adequately protected through local, state and federal regulatory programs
- Provides valuable access, land links, buffer zones or additions to existing environmentally sensitive lands or forms part of a natural greenway system which functions as a habitat corridor associated with such lands and which is essential for protection and management of those environmentally sensitive lands
- Contains significant archaeological sites
- The project has been approved to receive at least 50 percent acquisition funding through a Preservation 2000 or related preservation program such as: Southwest Florida Water Management District, Save our Rivers, State Conservation and Recreation Lands Program or Florida Communities Trust, provided the qualifying criteria remains consistent with the ELAPP

Results

Since the program's inception, Hillsborough County has acquired 34,729 acres and spent \$119 million. Approximately 34 percent was funded from other sources.

From 1996 to 2000, the county acquired 16,436 acres at a total cost of \$55 million, of which the county's share was \$35.5 million.

Note: All numbers are based on a survey conducted between August and November 2001

General Obligation Bonds

Florida counties are authorized to finance capital improvements through general obligation bonds, not to exceed 40 years. Once the bonds are issued, county commissioners must levy an additional tax (increased millage or surtax) on property to pay the debt service and interest on the bonds.

Bonds must be approved by the majority of voters. A county also may choose to include a separate question about increased millage or surtax to repay the debt in the referendum. The ballot used in the bond referendum must include a description of the bonds and a separate statement giving the amount, the interest rate, and other details necessary to inform the electors. At least twelve counties in Florida have issued voter-approved general obligation bonds for conservation land acquisition.

Land Conservation and Acquisition – Trends/Best Practices

In Florida's 2001 elections, all four measures put before voters for land conservation passed, raising an additional \$42.4 million to create parkland, preserve beach access and protect plant and wildlife habit in Florida.

Despite competing issues – such as education – and a strained economy, voters are still saying “yes” to public finance measures that protect cherished local landscapes and provide parks and open space for people and wildlife.

Results from this survey indicate that in the majority of cases, if voters support a referendum for conservation land acquisition initially, they'll support continued funding in subsequent years.

Pinellas County voters, in particular, have demonstrated a willingness to tax themselves for preservation. The county's environmental land acquisition program



was launched in 1972, supported by a referendum that passed by a 67 percent majority. In 1984 and 1986, voters passed additional referenda with 62 and 76 percent voter approval, respectively. In 1989, voters passed *A Penny for Pinellas* 1.0 percent infrastructure sales surtax (which included a land acquisition element) by a 51 percent majority. Then in 1997 voters agreed to extend the sales surtax for another 10 years – by a 65 percent majority.

Monroe County voters have supported two measures to acquire land for conservation and recreation. The first, passed in 1988, was a Tourist Impact Tax. The second, a 1.0 percent local infrastructure sales tax, passed in 1989.

Seminole County's efforts began in 1990 with voters supporting a \$20 million bond referendum to acquire environmentally significant lands. A second bond referendum – raising \$25 million to acquire land and improve trails, greenways, and blueways – was passed in 2000.

TPL has worked with public agencies, landowners, and citizen groups to protect more than 1.2 million acres in 45 states valued at over \$1.8 billion.

Vital Statistics

Population: 49,832

Increase 1990-2000: 73.6%

Ranking: 42nd most populous of 67 counties

Median income (1999): \$22,144

In Brief

Flagler's efforts toward preservation go back to 1988, when citizens voted to tax themselves to fund land acquisition. A year later, the county formed a committee to oversee purchase and management. Flagler County has partnered with other organizations to generate additional funding for purchases.

Historical Record On Land Conservation Funding

In November 1988, Flagler County voters approved a referendum that levied ad valorem taxes not to exceed 0.3333 mil to fund the acquisition of environmentally sensitive lands, recreation areas and water recharge areas. The referendum authorized the issuance of not more than \$7.6 million in bonds to fund the plan. Bonds were issued in 1989. In April of that same year the Board of County Commissioners passed an ordinance to establish the Flagler County Land Acquisition Selection Advisory Committee (LASAC).

By 1998, the LASAC determined that the Environmentally Sensitive Land funds were not adequate to continue the program and presented a draft referendum to extend the levy of ad valorem taxes for an additional 10 years to 2019. However, commissioners voted to refinance the current bond issue without a referendum and obtain additional funding within the Environmentally Sensitive Lands (ESL) millage cap. The refinancing resulted in \$1,521,000 additional funding for land acquisition.

The ESL fund is budgeted at a millage rate of 0.3333 with an additional payment applied to the principal in an effort to retire the bonds early. The bonds will mature in 2009. The ESL appropriation for fiscal year 2001 was \$1,047,714.

Goals

The primary goal of the LASAC is to acquire environmentally sensitive lands that preserve the natural environment, promote sustainable patterns of development, and provide opportunities for environmentally-conscious activities.

Organization

Preservation efforts are overseen by the Flagler County Land Acquisition Selection Advisory Committee (LASAC).

In 1998, recognizing the program could not be expanded beyond its original bonding limits, the LASAC focused on gaps within the existing park system and coastal greenways. The committee prioritized a list of 21 potential land acquisitions based on:

- Accessibility to natural resources and public facilities
- Rarity of wildlife habitat and natural communities
- Significance of cultural resources
- Opportunity for rare/unique recreational activities and greenway connections
- Enhancement of the coastal greenway

The committee narrowed the list to 12 potential sites. These sites were then evaluated for their natural and cultural significance and according to their management needs. The Board of County Commissioners has final approval for all acquisitions.

Results

Since the program's inception, Flagler County has acquired approximately 3,019 acres at a total cost of \$13.5 million, of which the county's share was \$4.8 million. The remaining monies came from Preservation 2000, St. Johns River Water Management District, Florida Communities Trust, and other non-county funding sources.

In the past two years, the county acquired 199.5 acres at a total cost of \$9.3 million, with no county money expended.

Note: All numbers are based on a survey conducted between August and November 2001



Since 1996, TPL's Conservation Finance Program has helped pass more than 140 local and state ballot measures that have generated over \$26 billion in new funding for parks and open spaces nationwide.

Survey Says

What are these and other counties with well-funded land acquisition programs doing right?

Traditionally, counties with track records of success in passing funding measures have done thorough research up front before placing the measures on the ballot, including identifying: what voters want (reduced crime, water quality protection, wildlife habitat preservation, etc.); how much voters are willing to spend; and how long they're willing to contribute. Government officials and citizen groups also have determined the best time to seek voter support, taking into account previous initiatives and the overall political climate.

The TPL survey revealed some similarities among successful counties. Most with land conservation and acquisition programs had the following in common:

Forward-thinking leadership

Most land conservation initiatives are placed on the ballot for voter approval following a city or county commission resolution or ordinance. Some efforts start at the grassroots level, such as Leon County's *Blueprint 2000*, which is the

result of a unique partnership between business leaders and environmental groups.

A definitive title

A succinct, benefits-oriented title is often used to help voters relate to the purpose for the proposed funding. Repeat exposure to the theme also helps citizens recognize the referendum on the ballot. Examples include: *Alachua County Forever*, *A Penny for Pinellas*, *Seminole County's Natural Lands* program, *Broward's Safe Parks & Land Preservation* and, *Martin's Lands For You*.

Jacksonville's conservation land acquisition efforts started with *Preservation Project Jacksonville*, initiated by Mayor John Delaney. The program gained additional funding through the *Better Jacksonville Plan*, a comprehensive package that included road improvements and economic development, which voters supported with a 1/2 cent sales tax.

Well-defined initiative and well-worded referendum

Some counties, such as Broward, propose referenda based on very specific projects, while others create a general fund that will be used for land acquisition. And *Continued on page 16*



Vital Statistics

Population: 2,253,362
Increase 1990-2000: 16.3%
Ranking: The most populous of 67 counties
Median income (1999): \$24,733

In Brief

Miami-Dade’s acquisition program built in a land management aspect from the beginning, which has added to its success. Funding was initially established in 1990 and expanded in 1996 with a bond measure geared to building and renovating parks and natural areas and enhancing public safety.

Historical Record On Land Conservation Funding

In 1990, Miami-Dade County voters approved a two-year ad valorem tax of 0.075 mil for a two-year period from 1990 to 1992 to fund the acquisition, protection, and maintenance of environmentally endangered lands. A total of \$90 million was raised for land acquisition.

Miami-Dade County established an Environmentally Endangered Land (EEL) program to administer the funds. The county set aside \$10 million of the \$90 million to pay for site management. Each year, the interest from this \$10 million is used to secure, restore, and care for the sites acquired by the EEL.

In November 1996, voters approved the Safe Neighborhood Parks bond referendum for \$200 million bond measure organized by the Trust for Public Land. The funds are to renovate existing public parks, and acquire and build new parks. The bonds are funded by an ad valorem tax increase that will cost the average homeowner \$8.34 annually.

Organization

The Environmentally Endangered Lands program is administered by the county’s Department of Environmental Resources Management (DERM). The EEL program reviews sites that are proposed by the public on an annual basis and reviews sites that are proposed by government agencies on a semiannual basis. County staff evaluates the proposals and citizen volunteers, who are members of the Land Acquisition Selection Committee (LASC), inspect sites and review the staff evaluations. Following a public hearing, the LASC recommends sites for purchase to the Board of County Commissioners. Once approved for acquisition, a purchase is negotiated with the owner. The program works only with willing sellers and uses matching funds and partners whenever possible.

Miami-Dade County’s Department of Recreation and Parks administers the Safe Neighborhood Parks funds. Safe Neighborhood outlines specific allocations, distribution and oversight of the capital bond funds for county and municipal park projects in the following categories: cities, unincorporated area, county regional, other and regional/challenge grant.

An oversight committee, created by a Miami-Dade County ordinance, ensures that bond monies are used only for projects approved by voters. The Board of County Commissioners chose the Oversight Committee from a slate of candidates representing the racial, ethnic, gender and geographical composition of the community.

Goals

The Environmentally Endangered Lands program’s goals are to:

- Acquire environmentally-endangered lands that contain irreplaceable natural forest and wetland communities, native plant communities, rare and endangered flora and fauna, endemic species, endangered species habitat, a diversity of species or outstanding geologic or other natural features
• Acquire environmentally-endangered lands that function as an integral and sustaining component of an existing natural system

- Protect environmentally-endangered lands that are publicly owned by acquiring adjacent properties that, if not acquired, would threaten the environmental integrity of the existing resource
- Implement the objectives and policies of the Comprehensive Development Master Plan for Metropolitan Dade County, which have been designed to preserve environmental protection areas designated in the plan and other natural forest resources, wetlands and endangered species habitat
- Identify Dade County's best and most endangered environmental lands for acquisition and management by evaluating the biological characteristics and viability of each proposed resource, the vulnerability of each proposed resource to harm or destruction and the feasibility of managing each proposed resource to maintain its natural attributes
- Manage environmentally-endangered lands with the primary objective of maintaining and preserving their natural resource values by employing management techniques that are most appropriate for each native community so that the natural heritage may be preserved for future generations
- Use the acquired sites, where feasible within financial constraints and without risk to the environmental integrity of the site, to educate Dade County's school age population and the general public about the uniqueness and importance of Dade County's subtropical ecosystems and natural communities
- Cooperate actively with other acquisition, conservation and resource management programs, including – but not limited to – such programs as the state's Conservation and Recreation Lands program, Land Acquisition Trust Fund and Save Our Rivers program, where the purposes of such programs are consistent with the purpose of the EEL program

The Safe Neighborhood Parks' goal is to acquire new park space in under-served neighborhoods, and to improve parks, natural areas, and recreation facilities throughout the county.

Note: All numbers are based on a survey conducted between August and November 2001

Results

Since the **EEL** program began, Miami-Dade County has brought 15,551 acres of wetlands, tropical hardwood hammocks, and globally endangered rockridge pinelands into public ownership at a total cost of \$74.1 million. The county's portion was \$43.6 million thanks to successful acquisition partnerships with the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD), the State's CARL, Florida Forever, and Florida Communities Trust programs and private donations. Among EEL's most significant acquisitions in partnership with the State have been the addition of 70 acres of bayfront to the Charles Deering Estate, a riverfront inholding in Oleta State Recreation Area, and the largest privately owned rockridge pineland remaining in the county. In conjunction with SFWMD, EEL has acquired thousands of acres of wetlands that will contribute to the restoration of the Everglades.

November 2002 marks the 5th anniversary of the **Safe Neighborhood Parks** Bond Program. During that time, the Oversight Committee approved \$141,470,000 in SNP grants for park improvements, including \$21.6 million for park land acquisitions; \$25.6 million to build recreational and heritage facilities; \$7.9 million to fund restoration of park buildings; \$4.4 million for beach restoration projects; \$10.7 million for access control and paving projects; \$6.4 million to irrigate and landscape parks; and \$5.8 million for ball courts, recreation fields, security and recreational lighting.

Under the \$15 million challenge grant portion of the Safe Neighborhood Parks program, the oversight committee required dollar-for-dollar cash match resulting in more than \$30 million in park improvements. The committee also has awarded \$6.9 million in interest earnings grants, and \$5.4 million for land acquisitions and other park improvements. Grantees have leveraged SNP funds with more than \$70 million in municipal, state, federal and private funding.

Ongoing projects receiving SNP funding include the Metrozoo Aviary, Virrick Water Sports Center, Murray Park Recreational Complex in South Miami, Miami Children's Museum at Watson Island, Fairchild Tropical Gardens Visitor Center, Homestead Air Reserve Park, West Kendall Regional Park and the Gateway Park at the new Performing Arts Center in downtown Miami.

Continued from page 13

though there are legal limitations governing ballot wording, proponents for successful land conservation initiatives usually survey voters prior to choosing the exact ballot wording to prevent confusion at the polls.

Extensive public awareness campaign

Virtually all successful referenda in recent years have included easy-to-read brochures, fact sheets, direct mail programs, and advertising campaigns. Most have also included public forums or debates as well. Palm Beach County's 1999 proposed land acquisition measure included a five-page fact sheet on conservation efforts, complete with maps identifying projects that would benefit from the \$150 million program. In Broward County, land conservation proponents used cable television and high-impact direct mail to inform voters of the link between clean water and open space protection.

Accountability/fiscal safeguards built into the measure

This includes letting voters know exactly how funds will be spent. Prior to or following a referendum, government leaders of successful measures usually create an oversight committee often consisting of a combination of city/county staffers and citizens. Miami-Dade County created an

Oversight Committee to ensure that bond monies would be used only for projects approved by voters. The Board of County Commissioners chose the Oversight Committee from a slate of candidates representing the racial, ethnic, gender, and geographical composition of the community.

An organized project selection and acquisition process

These programs usually include:

- A process for land to be nominated and considered (including proposals from the public);
- Specific criteria for evaluating land (benefits to the community such as protecting water quality, managing growth, preserving endangered plants or animals);
- Guidelines for acquisition (i.e., willing sellers, available funding partners, opportunity for public access).

Alachua County has an extensive "Decision Matrix" it uses to evaluate land. Counties like Brevard are very strict in their criteria while others, such as Jacksonville, use much broader evaluation standards.

Funding partnerships

Virtually all counties that have acquired land for conservation and recreation purposes have leveraged private and other public resources to make the purchases. In the past two years, Flagler County has acquired 199.5 acres without any county funds expended. Palm Beach County has acquired 25,022 acres at a total cost of \$153.8 million, of which the county contributed about \$112 million. In the last five years, Indian River has acquired 6,265 acres at a total cost of almost \$32 million, of which the county's share was \$12.9 million.



Land management planning

Because restrictions on the funding source can limit how funding can be spent, counties that do not consider cost of management can be caught short. Purchasing the land is significant, but assuring those lands are properly managed also can be costly.

Lee County's 1996 Conservation 2020 allotted 10 percent of the monies raised for management and oversight, while Pinellas County created a division of the county's Environmental Management Department and uses general operating funds to support it.

When asked to offer advice to other counties considering a land acquisition program, several representatives suggested building management costs into the original funding where possible.

The Land-Water Connection

More and more conservation land acquisition programs are including a water quality element, especially in Florida. Why? Voters have shown broad support for funding measures that seek to protect water. Citizens recognize that protecting land helps protect the water we drink, swim in, and depend on to nourish healthy ecosystems.

In counties where clean water is one of the highest priorities of residents, proponents usually adopt a theme and messages that underscore the water quality protection benefits inherent in a land conservation measure. Public awareness campaigns emphasize the preservation of watershed lands and the creation of greenways along rivers and streams to help control run-off from development.

In Alachua County, for example, protecting water resources was built into the prioritization process for evaluating land for acquisition.

Indian River's Environmental Lands Program includes "protect groundwater quality and quantity," and "provide flood protection," in its objectives. Martin County's 1998 initiative, called *Lands for Healthy Rivers and Natural Resource Protection*, included funding to acquire lands identified in the Everglades study and restoration and preservation of the St. Lucie River and Indian River Lagoon.

Palm Beach County's purpose for acquisition included land for water resources. One of the five criteria for evaluating lands for purchase in Sarasota County was "the site's importance to maintaining water quality in a natural stream system, recharge area or estuarine environment."

Virtually all counties that have acquired land for conservation and recreation purposes have leveraged private and other public resources to make the purchases.



	Main Revenue Sources								
	Local Sales Tax			Ad Valorem Tax					
	Local Sales Tax	Used for Conservation	Sales Tax Generated in FY 2000-2001	Ad Valorem Tax	Used for Conservation	Gov. Operating Mills	Debt Service Mills	Total County Mills	Real Property Taxable Value
Alachua	Yes, 1%	No	Begins in 2002	Yes	Yes	8.7500	0.0150	21.9400	\$5,736,461,212
Brevard	No	—	—	Yes	Yes	4.1042	0.0000	14.9242	\$15,099,317,545
Broward	No	—	—	Yes	Yes	6.8903	0.6347	17.2183	\$68,367,751,320
Clay	Yes, 1%	No	\$11,629,464	Yes	No	8.9885	0.0000	18.4015	\$3,757,050,346
Escambia	Yes, 1.5%	Yes	\$44,593,148	Yes	No	8.7560	0.0000	18.8020	\$6,306,600,794
Flagler	Yes	No	\$3,259,824	Yes	Yes	4.9612	0.1479	15.1181	\$2,520,956,017
Hillsborough	Yes, 1%	No	\$107,180,051	Yes	Yes	7.5336	0.1486	17.5312	\$31,700,181,127
Indian River	Yes, 1%	No	\$14,070,485	Yes	Yes	4.1014	0.2165	17.0975	\$6,808,830,076
Jacksonville-Duval	Yes, 1%	Yes	\$45,341,032 (1&2 2001)	Yes	No	10.5498	0.0225	20.3433	\$26,958,519,843
Lake	Yes, 1%	Yes	\$17,423,564	Yes	No	5.1170	0.0000	15.1320	\$6,612,555,343
Lee	No	—	—	Yes	Yes	6.3031	0.0000	16.2334	\$25,887,251,492
Leon	Yes, 1%	Yes	\$27,972,987	Yes	No	8.5800	0.0000	18.2420	\$7,354,230,417
Martin	Yes, 1% exp 12-31-01	Yes	\$16,705,976	Yes	Yes	5.6210	0.5490	15.6367	\$8,990,188,951
Miami-Dade	Yes, 0.5%	No	\$130,256,947	Yes	Yes	5.7510	0.6520	16.7580	\$87,524,619,500
Monroe	Yes, 1.5%	Yes	\$29,752,147	Yes	No	4.2181	0.0000	10.7632	\$9,542,975,051
Nassau	Yes, 1%	No	\$4,910,234	Yes	No	6.9545	0.0000	16.7167	\$2,667,596,028
Orange	No	—	—	Yes	No	5.1639	2.1234	17.0333	\$43,811,621,836
Osceola	Yes, 1%	No	\$22,544,729	Yes	No	5.9945	0.0000	16.4225	\$7,470,361,984
Palm Beach	No	—	—	Yes	Yes	4.600	0.3362	14.5512	\$66,634,028,047
Pasco	No	—	—	Yes	No	9.1320	0.0000	18.8950	\$9,622,494,808
Polk	No	—	—	Yes	Yes	7.7270	0.0000	17.1900	\$12,495,332,605
St. Lucie	Yes, 0.5%	No	\$7,631,228	Yes	Yes	7.7694	0.0000	21.1617	\$6,706,339,048
Sarasota	Yes, 1%	No	\$44,955,377	Yes	Yes	4.3770	0.0813	14.1198	\$22,267,984,717
Volusia	No	—	—	Yes	Yes	6.3670	0.0000	16.0380	\$14,451,214,277

Land Acquisition
Land Acquisition

Recreation/Cons. Funding					Land Acquisition		
Recreation/ Conservation Land Acquisition Funding	Bonds Issued with this source	Year established	Year expires	Acres protected in 2000	County's expenditure	Total expenditure	
0.25 Mil	\$29 million	2001	2020	None			
0.25 Mil	\$55 million	1991	2011	1,453 (1st-3rd quarter 2001)	\$24,551,611	\$47,297,750	
Unspecified \$ of Ad Valorem tax	\$230 million	2000	2020	None			
None	—	—	—	None			
\$4,760,000 One time appropriations for all expenses.	No	1992	2007	87	\$30,500	\$280,500	
0.3333 Mil, Gen. App. for 2002 of \$1,047,714	\$7.6 million to 2009	1989	Refinanced	4.5	\$0.00	\$860,926	
0.25 Mil	\$20.7 million &\$100 million	1987 1990	1991 2011	1050	\$4,800,000	\$4,300,000	
0.5 Mil	\$26 million	1995 (1st) 2001 (2nd)	2010 (1st) 2016 (2nd)	67	\$912,880	\$1,668,350	
0.5 percent of sales tax	\$50 million	2001	2030	20,093	\$17,771,250	\$89,000,000	
Gen. App. /project; after 2003, \$2 Mil/year	No	1988	2017	20	\$25,000	\$50,000	
0.5 mil	No	1997	2003	2075.30	\$15,182,803.44	\$15,182,803.44	
Gen App/project	No	1989	2019	876	\$0.00	\$5,042,000	
1/2 Sales Tax Rev &0.625 mil Ad Valorem \$20 million	Ad Valorem tax	1989	2011	Unknown*			
0.075 mil Ad Valorem/1990-92 Ad Valorem/1996	\$20 million/	1990/EEL 1996		674.5	\$5,484,342	\$11,910,945	
State park surcharge tourist tax & sales tax	No	1987 1988&1989	2018 Sales tax	197	Unknown	\$3,100,000	
None	—			None			
Publix Services Tax	\$25 million	1992	When depleted	49 in 2000 1,460 in 1999	\$7,500,000 in both years	\$7,500,000 in both years	
None				40	\$0.00	\$3,300,000	
Unspecified increase in Ad Valorem tax	\$150 million	1999	2019	1,254.04	\$7,426.894	\$7,426.894	
Impact fee	—	1994	—	None			
0.20 Mil, \$2.7 million annually	No	1995	2015	2,180	\$4,980,076.68	\$8,667,614.36	
0.25 Mil	\$20 million	1994	2010	295	\$656,818	Unknown	
0.25 Mil	\$53 million	1999	2019	1,465	\$8,355,022.70	\$13,067,444.00	
0.20 Mil	No*	2001	2021	None	—	—	



Voters are still saying "yes" to public finance measures that protect cherished local landscapes and provide parks and open space for people and wildlife.

For More Information

The following organizations frequently assist counties in their land conservation efforts:

Florida Association of Counties
P.O. Box 549
Tallahassee, FL 32302
Phone: 850-922-4300
www.fl-counties.com

Florida Communities Trust
Department of Community Affairs
Sadowski Building
2555 Shumard Oak Boulevard
Tallahassee, FL 32399-2100
Phone: 850-922-2207
www.dca.state.fl.us/ffct/

Florida Department of Environmental
Protection
Division of State Lands
Office of Environmental Services
3900 Commonwealth Blvd.
Tallahassee, Florida 32399
Phone: 850-488-2976
www.dep.state.fl.us/lands/oes/index.htm

Florida Local Environmental Resources
Agencies
www.flera.org

Land Trust Alliance
1331 H Street NW, Ste. 400
Washington, DC 20005
Phone: 202-638-4725
www.lta.org

The Nature Conservancy
4245 North Fairfax Drive, Suite 100
Arlington, VA 22203-1606
Phone: 800-628-6860
www.nature.org

Trust for Public Land – Florida Office
306 N. Monroe Street
Tallahassee, Florida 32301-7622
Phone: 850-222-7911
www.tpl.org



Conserving Land for People

Trust for Public Land – Florida Office
306 N. Monroe Street
Tallahassee, Florida 32301-7622
(850) 222-7911
www.tpl.org