

# Foreword

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Florida is home to an amazing array of fish, wildlife, and the habitats in which they live and thrive. With over 700 terrestrial animals, more than 200 freshwater fish, more than 1,000 marine fish, numerous other aquatic and marine vertebrates, and many thousands of terrestrial insects and other invertebrates, Florida literally is teeming with wildlife. These multitudes of species are dependent upon the highly productive natural systems of Florida, ranging from the tropical coral reefs of the Keys and the magnificent Everglades “river of grass” to the awe-inspiring array of first magnitude springs and quiet beauty of the rolling sand hills. Florida also is home to more than 17 million people, 1,250 golf courses, 370,000 hotel rooms, and has a gross state product of more than \$490 billion. At first glance, it would seem that these two worlds would be incompatible, but the impressive thing about Florida is that there is room for both humans and wildlife; it just takes careful action to find the appropriate balance. This type of considered coexistence is what Florida’s Wildlife Legacy Initiative and Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy are all about.

The goal of the Initiative is to sustain the vast and wonderful fish and wildlife resources of the state for the enjoyment and use of our citizens and visitors through implementation of a sound comprehensive strategy, development and expansion of cooperative partnerships, and strategic use of State Wildlife Grants to leverage greater resources. The aim is to achieve this goal proactively through a voluntary, incentive-based process that clearly identifies what needs to be done and enables action by those best suited to undertake it.

With creation of the State Wildlife Grants Program, Congress has challenged each state and territory to craft a comprehensive strategy that conserves the broad array of wildlife and habitats within its boundaries. This effort is a pioneering undertaking at the national level that has been years in the making. Starting with early nongame endeavors and growing into wildlife diversity programs and the Teaming With Wildlife coalition, these efforts have culminated in the State Wildlife Grants Program and the comprehensive strategies being developed and implemented across the country. Although a national effort, strategies are being developed by each state and territory individually so that they will be tailored to the unique resources and circumstances of each. Florida has enthusiastically embraced this challenge by developing Florida’s Wildlife Legacy Initiative.

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) is committed to a transformation that will take us from being a good wildlife conservation agency to being a great one. Having a comprehensive strategy that builds a common blueprint for conserving our fish and wildlife provides a path for all of Florida to follow on a similar quest for excellence in stewardship of our natural resources. While the effort needed is great and challenges must be overcome, the benefits of achieving continued improvement are profound. Only through striving to achieve and through successful partnering at all levels can we reach our full potential. I encourage and challenge everyone to stay engaged and assist us in this effort to develop and implement the best strategy possible. As we travel this course, we will continue to review the strategy, evaluate effectiveness, and revise it as part of our ongoing update process. Whether we succeed or fail at this endeavor will be determined less by how much the FWC alone can do, and more by how

effective we all become at building the meaningful partnerships that will be needed to take advantage of the often elusive but very tangible conservation opportunities at hand and on the horizon.

The incredible resources that support our magnificent fish and wildlife also support fishing and hunting, nature viewing, recreational activities, boating, and commercial enterprises. The combined revenues from these activities exceed \$25 billion in value annually, helping to form the foundation of Florida's economy. There is no denying that the economic prosperity, quality of life, and satisfaction of Floridians and the large number of visitors to our great state all are dependent upon a healthy environment. Florida's Wildlife Legacy Initiative and comprehensive strategy are geared toward finding the delicate balance between human needs and the needs of our fish and wildlife resources.

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Executive Director