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REGIONAL CONSERVATION PRIORITY: NORTHEAST FLORIDA

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From Nassau to Flagler along the coast, and Marion to Hamilton counties inland, the Northeast region covers sixteen counties and is served by seven Audubon chapters and two Audubon staff – one based on the coast, one inland. The region harbors unique water resources, a variety of ecosystems, and climate strongholds that support resident wildlife and the birds of the Atlantic Flyway.

The beaches and dunes of the region’s coastal strand are the last significant nesting sites for shorebirds and seabirds on the East Coast of Florida. Extensive coastal marshes are essential nurseries for fish and invertebrates, while coastal scrub and maritime hammocks are home to resident bird species and provide essential breeding and foraging areas for migrating birds. Birds of conservation concern include the Least Tern, American Oystercatcher, Black Skimmer, Gull-billed Tern, Piping Plover, Red Knot, Worthington’s Marsh Wren, Clapper Rail, Reddish Egret, Roseate Spoonbill, Wood Stork, Burrowing Owl, Bald Eagle, Swallow-tailed Kite, and Painted Bunting.

Special places in Northeast Florida include some of the largest magnitude springs in the world whose outflows feed rivers such as the Ichetucknee, Ocklawaha, St. Johns, Silver, and Suwannee. Large sandhill lakes provide for recharge of the Floridan aquifer. These systems are being severely impacted by excessive nutrients and over-pumping of the aquifer. Mining, surface-water withdrawals, and dredging pose additional threats in the region. Local communities, dependent on nature-based economies, are suffering from the degradation of these water resources.

Special places such as the Ocala and Osceola National Forests, state forests, parks, and preserves are home to bird species of conservation concern such as the Red-cockaded Woodpecker, Florida Scrub-jay, Southeastern Kestrel, Bachman’s Sparrow and Northern Bobwhite. Adequate monitoring and habitat management measures are critical for long term protection of wildlife in these areas as pressures from human activity continue to increase.

*Therefore be it resolved:*

*The Audubon chapters in the Northeast Florida Region, in alignment with Audubon Florida and the Atlantic Flyway program, and using information derived from sound science, will work together to strengthen Audubon’s role as a conservation leader in Northeast Florida using the following strategies:*

1. Share resources, ideas, “tool kits,” successes, and failures among chapters in the RCC to facilitate shared conservation goals including

- using conservation messages in social media and chapter activities,
- educating resource managers and the public in the use of eBird, and
- promoting the value of treatment wetlands.

2. Engage partners to achieve regional conservation goals including

- climate change education and resiliency planning,
- creation of native, bird-friendly communities,
- state and local policies that improve bird conservation, and
- improved management of conservation lands.

3. Continue to participate in Audubon monitoring and stewardship programs, including EagleWatch, Jay Watch, Climate Watch, Kestrel box monitoring, and local shorebird partnerships.

4. Chapters will consider their current practices and policies as they relate to equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility. Chapters will work to ensure a welcoming, inclusive, and safe environment for people to engage with the chapter, especially in nature-based and conservation activities, and to remove barriers and create opportunities for increased participation, representation, and leadership from local communities of color.