

By Senator Brodeur

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Senate Resolution

A resolution affirming the importance of the Florida Wildlife Corridor and its significant environmental, cultural, economic, and tourism value as a unique natural resource and recognizing February 17, 2026, as "Florida Wildlife Corridor Day."

WHEREAS, the campaign to establish the Florida Wildlife Corridor began 16 years ago, and supporters saw their vision become reality with the passage of the Florida Wildlife Corridor Act of 2021, and

WHEREAS, the Florida Wildlife Corridor establishes a geographic area of more than 18 million acres of land, of which 10 million acres are public conservation lands that could be permanently disconnected from each other without the additional conservation of nearly 8 million acres of currently unprotected opportunity areas connecting them, and

WHEREAS, Florida's population has grown from 21.8 million when the Florida Wildlife Corridor Act was signed to more than 23.8 million today, resulting in urban and suburban sprawl consuming rural and natural land within and adjacent to the corridor, and

WHEREAS, the nearly 8 million acres of opportunity areas that still need protection consist largely of working ranches, farms, and forests, the majority of which can be protected through conservation easements with willing landowners, thereby supporting the state's agricultural economy and contributing to the long-term food security of this state and the nation, and

WHEREAS, the Legislature has appropriated significant

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30 funding for the state's conservation programs, providing
31 incentive for conservation and sustainable development while
32 preserving the green infrastructure that is the foundation of
33 this state's economy and quality of life, and

34 WHEREAS, since July 2021, more than 400,000 acres of land
35 in the Florida Wildlife Corridor have been approved for
36 protection by Governor Ron DeSantis and the Cabinet, including
37 Commissioner of Agriculture Wilton Simpson, who made the
38 corridor a priority during his term as Senate President, with
39 funding appropriated by the Legislature from the Department of
40 Environmental Protection's Florida Forever program and the
41 Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services' Rural and
42 Family Lands Protection Program, and

43 WHEREAS, the nearly 62,000-acre Raiford to Osceola Greenway
44 project, made possible through the voluntary conservation
45 easement by Weyerhaeuser Forest Holdings, Inc., is located
46 within the Florida Wildlife Corridor and serves as a historic
47 example as the largest conservation easement completed in
48 Florida's history, led by the Department of Environmental
49 Protection's Florida Forever program, helping to permanently
50 connect an urgent and vulnerable gap by utilizing the designated
51 funding for the Ocala to Osceola Wildlife Corridor, and

52 WHEREAS, the Florida Forever program continues to bolster
53 its statewide success, having closed on 210 conservation
54 easements totaling 464,846 acres and maintaining a robust
55 pipeline of interested landowners dedicated to land
56 conservation, as evidenced by the current portfolio of 138
57 projects totaling 2,088,443 acres, and

58 WHEREAS, since 2023, the Department of Agriculture and

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Consumer Services' Rural and Family Lands Protection program has experienced a 90 percent increase in interest from willing landowners seeking to conserve working agricultural lands within the Florida Wildlife Corridor, as demonstrated by the submission of more than 500 applications from Florida landowners representing over 600,000 acres at an estimated value exceeding \$2.1 billion, which highlights the growing commitment and enthusiasm of landowners to participate in conservation efforts, and is supported by the expansion of delegated authorities, resulting in the successful protection of more than 224,000 acres of land since the program's inception, advancing both conservation and agricultural viability, and

WHEREAS, together, the Florida Forever program and the Rural and Family Lands Protection program empower landowners to do their part, making these programs critical to ensuring the long-term protection and connectivity of the Florida Wildlife Corridor by safeguarding both natural and working landscapes for the benefit of future generations, and

WHEREAS, the state's prioritization of the Florida Wildlife Corridor has prompted many federal and local programs to increase their investment in Florida conservation, and

WHEREAS, these programs share the state's goal of protecting an additional 600,000 acres in the Florida Wildlife Corridor by 2030, balancing the state's commitment to urgent conservation with the demand for development to accommodate the more than 2 million new residents projected to move to this state within the next 5 years, and

WHEREAS, public access to the Florida Wildlife Corridor was greatly expanded in 2023 when the Legislature passed and

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88 Governor Ron DeSantis signed legislation that connected the
89 corridor to the Florida Greenways and Trails System and the
90 Florida Shared-Use Non-motorized (SUN) Trail Network, as well as
91 additional pathways to heritage small towns throughout this
92 state, and

93 WHEREAS, with the state's funding commitment in recent
94 years to such projects, the Department of Environmental
95 Protection and the Department of Transportation have coordinated
96 the establishment of multiuse trails, including investment in
97 the planning, design, and construction of the SUN Trail Network
98 and the campaign to recognize various communities as "Trail
99 Towns," in conjunction with Visit Florida's promotion of trail-
100 based tourism, and

101 WHEREAS, connecting trails with the Florida Wildlife
102 Corridor creates a means to preserve many natural areas and
103 provides expanded access for Floridians and visitors to hike,
104 run, and bike between trail destinations and see firsthand this
105 state's unique natural habitat and picturesque small towns, and

106 WHEREAS, the Florida Wildlife Corridor provides strong
107 protection of other tourism and recreation destinations, such as
108 spring vents, rivers, estuaries, fisheries, and wetlands, which
109 support carbon sequestration, nutrient capture and cycling,
110 water storage, and groundwater recharge, which is critical to
111 water supply, and

112 WHEREAS, the Florida Wildlife Corridor is a nature-based
113 solution that supports the state's resilience against
114 strengthening storms and provides billions of dollars' worth of
115 flood hazard protection by keeping the current 10 million acres
116 of the state's floodplains located within the corridor

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117 undeveloped, NOW, THEREFORE,

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119 Be It Resolved by the Senate of the State of Florida:

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121 That the Senate affirms the importance of the Florida
122 Wildlife Corridor and its significant environmental, cultural,
123 economic, and tourism value as a unique natural resource and
124 recognizes February 17, 2026, as "Florida Wildlife Corridor
125 Day."