

## Florida Landowner Incentive Program<sup>1</sup>

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*The purpose of the Florida Landowner Incentive Program is to improve habitat conditions for threatened or endangered species on private lands.*

Florida is recognized as one of North America's most important reservoirs of biodiversity. However, due to a surge in population growth and development, habitat loss in Florida is accelerating. This habitat loss has led to significant population declines in many species (Figure 1), including 110 vertebrate, 8 invertebrate, and 542 plant species.



**Figure 1.** The gopher tortoise, a species at risk due to habitat loss. Credits: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. (2006).

The key to conserving these species involves maintaining or enhancing habitats that exist on private lands. Accordingly, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) is working with private landowners to educate and encourage land management actions that will maintain or enhance habitat conditions that benefit at-risk species (Figure 2).

### Financial Assistance for Landowners

The Landowner Incentive Program (LIP) is an annual competitive grant awarded by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) through the Land and Water Conservation Fund. The program's main objective is to benefit both species at risk and associated habitat on private lands. Through this program, Florida's Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission is working to provide science-based recommendations and financial assistance for conserving and enhancing the state's habitat resources on private lands.

To apply, interested landowners must complete a LIP application (see

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**Figure 2.** Properly managed forest ecosystems provide excellent wildlife habitat, while allowing landowners to meet other objectives such as timber production. Credits: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. (2006).

[http://www.myfwc.com/lip/pdf/LIP\\_Application.pdf](http://www.myfwc.com/lip/pdf/LIP_Application.pdf) that includes the enrolled property location, boundary, and proof of ownership. There are no acreage limitations and any private (non-governmental) landowner is eligible to receive up to \$20,000 in cost-shares for approved habitat improvement practices. Cost-shares require a 50% non-federal match and are reimbursed based on established flat rates for each approved practice (see <http://www.myfwc.com/lip/financial.htm>).

Landowners will be reimbursed for approved practices based on extent completed, established cost-share rates, and invoices/receipts submitted by the landowner documenting expenditures. In compliance with practice standards, landowners will have twelve months to complete approved practices, with six-month extensions approved on a case-by-case basis.

## Property Scoring and Evaluation

Funds are distributed to private landowners whose properties have the greatest potential benefits for imperiled species. To accomplish this task, the FWC is using a Geographic Information System (GIS) computer model to numerically rank properties (see <http://www.myfwc.com/lip/scoring.htm>). This computer model includes previously developed or recorded environmental information such as land

cover imagery, currently listed species habitats, wildlife occurrence data, and potential listed species habitat models. Applications will be accepted on a continuous basis, evaluated for natural resource value, and ranked based on the resulting natural resource value score.

FWC biologists will conduct a primary needs assessment (initial site visit) to applicant properties according to rank, with high scoring properties receiving priority (Figure 3). FWC biologists can then recommend appropriate cost-sharing practices based on a combination of GIS analysis and site visitation (Figure 4).



**Figure 3.** Project needs assessments will be conducted by Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission biologists on an applicant's property. Credits: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. (2006).



**Figure 4.** Landowners will be reimbursed for approved practices. Credits: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. (2006).

## For More Information on the Landowner Incentive Program or an Application

<http://www.myfwc.com/lip>