

COMMENTARY

Amendment 1 poised to improve our water

Water. Clean water. We all need it — to drink, to wash, to cook. We count on it for boating, for swimming, for fishing. And we need to protect it. Yet the protection of our vital water resources and the land supporting them is often complicated, and expensive. Meanwhile, our state's land and water resources are increasingly threatened. That's why everyone should consider supporting Amendment 1 on the ballot on Election Day this November.

Voters will be asked to approve the Florida Water and Land Legacy Amendment to Florida's Constitution. This proposed amendment is designed to set aside existing state revenues for protecting environmentally sensitive land and restoring our critically important water resources and wildlife habitat.

Amendment 1 will not generate new taxes. Instead, it calls for one-third of the mandatory state documentary stamp tax paid on real estate transactions to be designated for state conservation



spending programs, including the protection of critically important areas susceptible to development. These existing funds would otherwise be directed by the Legislature to a wide range of non-conservation purposes, including building roads and other infrastructure that would encourage new development.

It is expected Amendment 1 will generate approximately \$10 billion over 20 years for conservation programs. When approved, the measure will run for 20 years starting July 1, 2015.

From 1990 to 2009, Florida led the nation in environmental land purchases with programs such as Preservation 2000 and Florida Forever, both of which were financed by

using documentary stamp taxes. These programs provided \$300 million a year for conservation efforts across the state. However, despite a growing need to protect our land and water resources across Florida, funding for land protection was sharply cut in 2010; over the last four years only 3 percent of former funding levels have been allocated annually for conservation programs. Amendment No. 1 should provide a statewide allocation of approximately \$500 million annually for the protection and restoration of natural resources important to the citizens of our state.

How will the Florida Water and Land Legacy Amendment improve the Indian River Lagoon, the ecological and economic spine of our region? Annual allocations that result from the passage of this amendment will include protection for not only the Everglades, underground aquifers and springs that provide us with clean drinking water, but the Indian River Lagoon and

its adjacent shoreline. The amendment will reinforce current efforts to enhance fish and wildlife habitat and help restore the lagoon to its original health. This, in turn, will bolster ecotourism and help attract clean businesses to our coast.

Many of us are weary from the number of proposed constitutional amendments we have to wade through each year. However, the Florida Water and Land Legacy Amendment is essential because it accomplishes a necessary goal and provides a tremendous opportunity to make an investment in our future. Moreover, it would benefit the entire state.

So if the thought of another constitutional amendment makes your head spin, it shouldn't be anything a glass of clean water cannot fix. This year there are only three amendments on the ballot, and Amendment No. 1 will help ensure your glass of water remains clean and full.

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