

STUDENT SENATE BILL 2025-1050

TITLE: Resolution Advocating for the Addition of Conservation Management Experts at the University of Florida

AUTHOR(S): Senator Austin Britton, Senator Cassandra Urbenz

SPONSOR(S):

WHEREAS, the University of Florida (UF) owns and manages 31 Conservation Areas spanning over 400 acres [1]; and,

WHEREAS Conservation Areas play a vital role in preserving biodiversity and providing natural spaces for campus and community use [1]; and,

WHEREAS, The University of Florida was the first university in the country to set university wide environmental planning standards with Audubon International through its Cooperative Sanctuary Program [2]; and,

WHEREAS, the University of Florida's Conservation Areas are home to valuable wildlife species, including otters, alligators, and numerous native plants, which require active and continuous management to thrive [1]; and,

WHEREAS, the University's Conservation Area Land Management (CALM) Plan outlines critical issues that hinder the effective management and preservation of these areas [1]; and,

WHEREAS, the CALM Plan states that conservation efforts are hindered by ongoing challenges such as the unchecked growth of invasive non-native plants, which have overrun significant areas like Wilmot Gardens, transforming it from a memorial garden into an overgrown thicket of vines [1]; and,

WHEREAS, the CALM Plan has not been updated since 2004, and no public progress toward updating the plan has occurred since November 2022 [1]; and,

WHEREAS, the 2020-2030 Campus Master Plan highlights that most of UF's Conservation Areas have not been actively managed, with all sites still suffering from invasive species and other degradation [3]; and,

WHEREAS, despite UF's pledge to address invasive species and improve conservation management, these issues persist, undermining the integrity and ecological value of the Conservation Areas [3]; and,

WHEREAS, as a result of these ongoing challenges dedicated and professional conservation management experts are necessary to ensure that UF's Conservation Areas are properly managed,

restored, and maintained for future generations of students, faculty, staff, and the community;
and,

WHEREAS, the addition of such experts will support UF's broader sustainability goals and demonstrate a long-term commitment to the preservation of these important ecological resources;
then,

THEREFORE, LET IT BE RESOLVED that the University of Florida Student Senate supports the addition of conservation management experts to existing and applicable committees towards the following goals:

1. Actively managing and restoring the University's Conservation Areas, including monitoring and controlling invasive species, preventing erosion and sedimentation, removing trash, and addressing unauthorized parking issues.
2. Finish developing and updating the Conservation Area Land Management (CALM) Plan, with a focus on addressing the current management deficiencies outlined in the 2020 Campus Master Plan.
3. Promoting public awareness of these Conservation Areas by adding amenities for visitors, such as signage, educational materials, and improved access to the spaces.
4. Collaborating with faculty, staff, and students to engage the broader UF community in conservation efforts through education, volunteer opportunities, and research initiatives related to the preservation of UF's natural areas.

THEREFORE, LET IT FURTHER BE RESOLVED that the University of Florida Student Senate supports that these experts work closely with other University departments, including Facilities Services and Sustainability, as well as with relevant University Committees to ensure the long-term ecological health and educational value of UF's Conservation Areas.

THEREFORE, LET IT FINALLY BE RESOLVED that the University of Florida Student Senate urges these committees to contribute to the current state of the conservation areas and progress towards restoring these issues to the student body as often as is feasible.

Proviso: A copy of this resolution shall be sent to Sustainability Director Matt Williams, Director of Grounds and Natural Resources Thomas Schlick, Interim Vice President of Business Affairs Brandi Renton, Associate Vice President for Enterprise Projects Colt Little, and Assistant Vice President of Facilities Services Mark Helms

[1] <https://sustainable.ufl.edu/campus-initiatives/land/calm/>

[2] <https://www.facilityservices.ufl.edu/departments/utilities/cleanwater/pollution-prevention/audubon-cooperative-sanctuary/>

[3]<https://facilities.ufl.edu/campus-planning/campus-master-plan/campus-master-plan-2020-2030/>

