

REPEAL M-CORES:

Protect Water, Land, and Wildlife

The widely unpopular M-CORES, the proposed 330 miles of new toll roads through rural Florida, will drain our state's tax dollar coffers and inflict irreversible harm to Florida's natural resources. **The Florida Legislature should repeal M-CORES and redirect the funding to the existing priorities of the people of Florida:**

PROTECT WATER:

- Many Florida waters are already on the verge of collapse from pollution and over-pumping. The proposed M-CORES toll roads and resulting "forced sprawl" will add new pollution sources and increased demand on already dwindling freshwater supplies.
- Florida's springs and coasts are polluted -- many to the point of being health threats, communities are running out of freshwater, cities are being flooded from sea-level rise and extreme weather, and existing infrastructure is unable to meet the demands of our current population and footprint.
- According to estimates from a 2021 report by the Office of Economic and Demographic Research¹ **Florida will need to spend over \$83.5 billion in the near future to protect and restore Florida's waters** and ensure secure water supplies for people and business:
 - \$1.1 billion to ensure future water supplies will be able to meet future demands through 2035.
 - \$665 million to fund projects identified to meet minimum flow and level rules
 - \$270 million to develop total maximum daily loads
 - \$6.1 billion to begin to implement Basin Management Action Plans
 - \$8.4 billion to complete the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan
 - \$40 billion, when adjusted for inflation, to replace, maintain, and expand Florida's aging water infrastructure over the next 20 years
 - \$27 billion to acquire lands identified by the state and water management districts

This list is far from a total accounting of funding necessary to protect water resources. **And yet, in the 2018-2019 fiscal year, state funding on projects to address water supply, water quality, and conserve land was only \$1.1 billion.**

- Florida's economy and Floridian's quality of life depends on our ability to protect and secure our water resources, not to build new toll roads.
- Florida voters could not be more clear on their priorities. While 89% of Orange County voters approved an amendment to the County Charter to protect water resources, 93% of commenters opposed developing the M-CORES toll roads. It's the people of Florida's money that is being spent, we should listen to them on how to spend it.

¹ http://edr.state.fl.us/Content/natural-resources/LandandWaterAnnualAssessment_2020Edition.pdf

PROTECT LAND & WILDLIFE

- **Parts of Florida are still wild and are valuable attractions for visitors to the state.** Florida wildlife depends on a patchwork of connected public and private lands for survival which includes federal, state, and local parks; working agricultural landscapes; conservation easements on private lands, and mitigation banks.
- The three toll roads would slice through some of the remaining natural and agricultural areas, permanently severing connectivity. Coupled with the future development and sprawl these toll roads will inevitably generate, **M-CORES could decimate many of Florida's already endangered and vulnerable species.**
- The devastation roads cause to Florida's native wildlife cannot be overstated. Beyond increasing vehicle collisions and kills, roads play a significant role in isolating wildlife subpopulations and preventing the mingling necessary for long-term vitality and survival. This is true for all animals, big and small.
 - The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission has stated that, "**Roads are impediments to connectivity for bears at local and landscape levels and wildlife structures can decrease, but not remove, those barrier effects.**" Expanding roads or building new ones increases the chance for vehicle collisions with wildlife and could encourage sprawling development that could lead to human-wildlife conflict and further death and extinction for Florida's wildlife.
 - In an assessment of the Southwest-Central Corridor, a biologist from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service wrote that the toll road would "**be a disaster for the panther**" citing that the project's suburban sprawl would encroach upon even more of the panther's already dwindling habitat. While the number one cause of death for panthers is collisions with vehicles, a reduction of habitat will also further squeeze panthers into smaller and more fragmented areas, thereby increasing the frequency of deadly fights between panthers over territory.
 - The Florida panther is an umbrella species, meaning that by protecting panthers and the habitat they rely upon, other species will be protected. Within the Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge, for example, **biologists have recorded at least 126 bird species, 46 species of reptiles and amphibians, and 22 species of fish.**

Repeal M-CORES and redirect the funding to the true needs of our state. Protect agricultural areas, keep the rural character of our communities, maintain boundaries between urban and rural communities, discourage sprawl, protect the ecosystems that provide Floridians the air and water upon which we depend, and support the health of all Floridians.

