

Improving, Restoring, and Managing Natural Resources in Florida: Sources of Technical Assistance for Urban Homeowners ¹

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Introduction

Over the last decade approximately 100,000 new single-family, detached homes have been built annually in Florida, making it one of the most active areas of new residential community development in the United States. In the face of this rapid growth, many Florida communities are looking for support in how to preserve (and even enhance) their local quality of life. Collectively, urban communities can greatly affect our natural resources.

Decisions made by each homeowner interact in unique ways to affect the use and conservation of water, energy, and our plants and animals. The quantity and quality of water, wildlife habitat, and energy are closely tied to one another. For example, planting several native trees near a house can have several positive impacts. First, native trees provide food for wildlife. Second, they provide shade for the house to conserve energy. Plus, they conserve water because native trees are adapted to the local climate and do not need much watering. As a result, a homeowner saves time and money because he or she is not using as much water or energy. If each homeowner plants native trees, more local water and energy resources are conserved.

In fact, the way people design and manage their homes, yards, and neighborhoods can impact surrounding natural areas. For example, invasive exotic plants in individual yards can spread to surrounding natural areas. Also, watering lawns can cause the water table to draw down, drying up nearby wetlands.

The purpose of this document is to summarize sources of information from federal, state, and non-governmental organizations that provide technical assistance to urban landowners interested in conserving natural resources (Table 1). Additional information regarding natural resource conservation on properties is available on the UF/IFAS Extension Electronic Data Information Source (EDIS—<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/>). Some highlighted EDIS documents are provided below:

1. Tips on landscaping for wildlife: http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/TOPIC_Landscaping_for_Wildlife
2. Energy conservation tips: http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/TOPIC_Saving_Energy
3. Environmental landscaping: http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/TOPIC_Enviroscaping

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4. Water conservation in the yard: http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/TOPIC_Lawns_and_Water_Conservation
5. Overall environmentally friendly living: http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/TOPIC_Environmentally_Friendly_Living
6. Water conservation tips: http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/TOPIC_Lawns_and_Water_Conservation
7. Conservation options (easements, etc.) for private landowners: <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/UW194>
8. Evaluating private lands for conservation: <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/UW195>
9. The Green Leap: A Primer for Conserving Biodiversity in Subdivision Development. <http://www.ucpress.edu/book.php?isbn=9780520271111>

Table 1. Organizations and programs available to urban communities to provide technical assistance for conservation of natural resources.

ORGANIZATION	CONTACT INFORMATION	COMMENTS
Federal		
Environmental Protection Agency	Energy Star http://www.energystar.gov/	Assistance to property owners to conserve energy within a building
	Office of Pollution and Prevention, Community Assistance Programs http://www.epa.gov/opptintr/cahp/	An educational resource to find out about environmental facts concerning land, air, and water
	Envirofacts http://www.epa.gov/enviro/	An educational resource to find out about environmental facts concerning land, air, and water
	Water use efficiency program http://www.epa.gov/watersense/index.html	Information on water efficient tools and management strategies
	Reduce solid waste http://www.epa.gov/osw/wycd/index.htm	Tips on simple ways to reduce the amount of solid waste
US Department of Agriculture	Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/	Multiple programs that provide technical and financial support to assist homeowners and communities to conserve natural resources
State		
UF/IFAS	UF/IFAS Extension Electronic Data Information Source http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/	Searchable database for technical information on many topics related to management of natural resources
	Department of Wildlife Ecology & Conservation - Backyard landscaping for wildlife http://www.wec.ufl.edu/extension/landscaping/	Information and program that help property owners evaluate their landscape for Florida wildlife
	Florida Yards & Neighborhoods http://fyn.ifas.ufl.edu/	Helps residents to establish environmentally friendly yards
	IFAS Assessment of Non-native Plants in Florida's Natural Areas http://plants.ifas.ufl.edu/assessment/	Information about Florida non-native invasive plants
Florida State University	Florida Natural Areas Inventory http://www.fnai.org	Information about conserving Florida's biodiversity
Non-governmental		
National Wildlife Federation	NWF Backyard Wildlife Program: http://www.nwf.org/Get-Outside/Outdoor-Activities/Garden-for-Wildlife/Create-a-Habitat.aspx	Has information about ways to design a wildlife-friendly yard and also a certification program
Humane Society	Humane Society's urban wildlife program: http://www.humanesociety.org/animals/resources/sanctuary_program_1.html#id=album-28&num=content-487	Has information about ways to design a wildlife-friendly yard and also a certification program
Florida Native Plant Society	http://www.fnps.org/	Lists of native plants, tips on using native plants in your landscape, and locations of native plant nurseries
Florida Exotic Plant Council	http://www.fleppc.org/	Information, programs, and identification tips on how to identify and eradicate Florida exotic invasive plants