

2025 ANNUAL REPORT



Friends *of the* Everglades



**“FLORIDA HAS MADE GREAT STRIDES, BUT
THE DEGRADATION OF THE ENVIRONMENT
HAS BECOME INSTITUTIONALIZED,
EMBEDDED IN THE NATURE OF THINGS.”**

– MARJORY STONEMAN DOUGLAS

Tricolored Heron, Loxahatchee Slough Natural Area



Marjory Stoneman Douglas

A YEAR OF DETERMINED ACTION AND SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS

Friends of the Everglades didn't anticipate taking on "Alligator Alcatraz" in 2025. But when the plans for a mass detention center targeted the same landscape that shaped our founding, we had no choice but to defend it. Faster than we could say, "What would Marjory do," we found ourselves at the forefront of a legal battle that has since catapulted our mission and organizational impact to new heights.

The Everglades have long been threatened — first dismissed as a wilderness to be tamed, then exploited by development and Big Sugar. The pressures have only increased over time, and damaging new proposals have left the remaining Everglades more at risk than ever. Today we face new questions and urgency: Twenty years from now, will the once unmarred wilderness be a pocked landscape of hasty development, rock mines and prisons? Or will we seize this opportunity to truly Rescue the River of Grass?

The legal fight against "Alligator Alcatraz" isn't over. In this monumental effort we feel dutybound to stand up for bedrock environmental laws that were born of earlier battles in this very place. The decisions we make now will define us for generations. We at Friends of the Everglades are proud to do this work, and buoyed by those of you who stand with us in memory of our founder, Marjory Stoneman Douglas, and her fighting spirit.





A breeding Tricolored Heron, Wakodahatchee Wetlands

OUR MISSION

The mission of Friends of the Everglades is to **PRESERVE, PROTECT** and **RESTORE** the only Everglades in the world.

OUR GOALS

Compel government agencies to comply with existing environmental laws, and resist any efforts to weaken such laws.

Encourage politicians to recognize the long consequences of their actions.

Spread awareness of the importance of the Everglades to the South Florida ecosystem.

Friends,

2025 was a year of tremendous growth for Friends of the Everglades in both capacity and impact. It is a testament to you, our supporters, that when the plan to develop an ICE detention center in the heart of Big Cypress National Preserve arose in the summer, Friends was in a strong position to pivot priorities and take a leading role in the legal challenge.

Make no mistake, that lawsuit is not something Friends wanted to spend bandwidth on, but with our origin rooted in stopping development in Big Cypress in 1969, we were more than willing to take on the challenge. We also recognized the dangerous precedent the current project could set for the National Environmental Policy Act and future environmental review for federal projects.

We hope you appreciate the tremendous work that this year’s annual report represents and look forward to continuing the “Alligator Alcatraz” lawsuit to its conclusion. At the same time, we are committed to growing our Young Friends of the Everglades education program, continuing our policy and advocacy work and advancing our campaign to Rescue the River of Grass in 2026. We couldn’t do it without you!

Sincerely,

Philip Kushlan
Board of Directors Chair





Dear Friends,

Marjory Stoneman Douglas was 79 years old when she founded Friends of the Everglades. It was 1969 and she had already led a remarkable life as a journalist, author and advocate. She wasn't looking for another challenge to tackle — but when plans emerged to build a massive jetport in one of the most sensitive areas of the Everglades, Marjory felt compelled to act.

Working alongside dedicated allies including the Miccosukee Tribe, our organization won that first battle in 1970, stopping the Everglades Jetport after a single runway was built. We never imagined we would be called to defend the same land half a century later. Yet in 2025, when the proposal for “Alligator Alcatraz” surfaced, we once again took swift action with our partners.

The first Everglades Jetport fight proved to be an environmental turning point. It led to the creation of the first national preserve in 1974, Big Cypress National Preserve. It also prompted Congress to pass a bedrock law — the National Environmental Policy Act — that requires the government to carefully study the environmental consequences of its actions.

It is both fitting and sobering that NEPA is the law we relied on again in 2025, as we sued to stop an ICE detention center in the heart of the Everglades. We will not give up until this land — and the laws that protect it — are safeguarded.

Because of your support, Friends of the Everglades continues the work Marjory Stoneman Douglas began: standing up to powerful interests, defending environmental laws and protecting the River of Grass for future generations.

This report tells the story of the impactful work we accomplished in 2025 and the collective power we have as Friends of the Everglades.

For the Everglades,

Eve Samples
Executive Director



OUR IMPACTS IN 2025, POWERED BY YOUR SUPPORT

HALTED OPERATIONS AT EVERGLADES DETENTION CENTER WITH PRELIMINARY INJUNCTION

In 2025, Friends of the Everglades achieved a milestone legal victory to protect Big Cypress National Preserve from a new ICE detention center known as “Alligator Alcatraz.” On August 21, a federal judge ordered the state and federal government to halt construction, stop bringing in new detainees and begin winding down operations — a clear message that even the highest levels of government must follow environmental laws. Working alongside co-plaintiffs the Center for Biological Diversity and Miccosukee Tribe, our legal team presented evidence of habitat destruction and threats to the endangered Florida panther, among other environmental harm. This temporary victory, bolstered by widespread public support, demonstrates our collective power to defend America's Everglades. The fight continues in 2026 as we challenge the state and federal governments' appeal of the injunction. We are not backing down. To ensure we have the resources to mount our strongest case in court, we launched the Everglades Defense Fund in 2025.



THE EVERGLADES
DEFENSE FUND

“ALLIGATOR ALCATRAZ”

The Everglades are under attack, and we’re fighting back. Friends of the Everglades created the Everglades Defense Fund to protect this irreplaceable ecosystem from destructive projects like the detention center in the heart of Big Cypress National Preserve.

To counter the tremendous resources of our adversaries, this fund fuels our landmark lawsuit against “Alligator Alcatraz” — and ensures we’re ready to take on future threats to the Everglades.

In its inaugural year, the Everglades Defense Fund raised over \$1 million through more than 1,000 generous gifts from supporters worldwide. Giving from 40 states and five nations helped jumpstart the fund.

Support the Everglades
Defense Fund:



BIG CYPRESS BATTLE BY THE NUMBERS

1969



Year Marjory Stoneman Douglas founded Friends of the Everglades to halt destructive development in Big Cypress, at the same site where “Alligator Alcatraz” was built in 2025.

3.5 MILLION



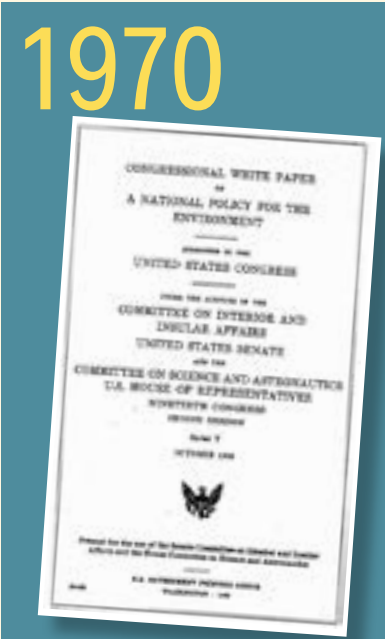
Number of social media accounts reached in summer 2025, cementing us as advocacy leaders during this viral moment.

2,000



Estimated acres of Florida panther habitat lost due to impacts from “Alligator Alcatraz.”

1970



Year the National Environmental Policy Act was signed into law.

1974



Year Big Cypress National Preserve was established as the first national preserve in the U.S.

>43,000



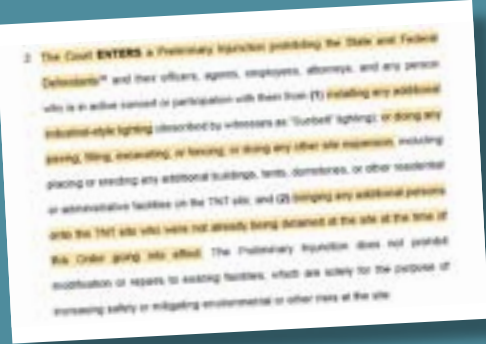
Emails sent to Gov. DeSantis and Florida’s Attorney General, demanding closure of “Alligator Alcatraz.”

>15



Miles away from “Alligator Alcatraz” from which high-intensity lighting became visible in late June 2025.

14



Days of halted activity at the detention center in summer 2025, as a result of the preliminary injunction we secured in court.





Jonathan Dickinson State Park

SAFEGUARDING FLORIDA’S STATE PARKS

On July 1, 2025, the State Park Preservation Act officially became law — a landmark win for Florida’s public lands and a clear example of advocacy driving real policy change. The legislation emerged after widespread public backlash to a 2024 proposal that would have opened state parks to damaging development. In response, thousands of Floridians, grassroots advocates and environmental groups rallied to defend the places we cherish. Friends of the Everglades helped shape the bill language, working to close loopholes, strengthen protections and secure lasting safeguards that keep Florida’s state parks off-limits to future development threats.





A NEW VISION: RESCUE THE RIVER OF GRASS

In 2025, we introduced Rescue the River of Grass — a science-based, solutions-focused campaign to secure public acquisition of key land in the Everglades Agricultural Area (EAA). This campaign is our North Star, addressing a longstanding, unmet need in Everglades restoration: more public land in the EAA. The only way to achieve water-quality for the southern Everglades and prevent harmful discharges in the northern Everglades is to **BUY THE LAND**. The money is available through voter-approved land acquisition dollars. Public momentum has been undeniable. More than 34,000 allies have already signed the Rescue petition. Together, our voices signal a powerful commitment to protecting the River of Grass.



“For decades, people have acknowledged the need for substantially more land in the EAA area... Now we must act before it's too late.”

— Terrence “Rock” Salt, former commander of the Jacksonville District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers



Stormwater Treatment Area 1 West



FOUGHT TO KEEP THE SOUTHLAND ROCK MINE OUT OF THE EVERGLADES

Friends of the Everglades joined forces with statewide allies to oppose a controversial rock mine backed by Big Sugar — a project that threatens more than 8,000 acres in the Everglades Agricultural Area south of Lake Okeechobee. This proposal provides no demonstrated environmental benefit, appears nowhere in official Everglades restoration plans and risks undermining decades of work to heal this fragile ecosystem. Thousands of supporters added their voices, sending letters urging the Palm Beach County Commission to reject the project that could jeopardize restoration efforts for generations. Although the proposal was approved by county commissioners, Friends of the Everglades remains resolute in our opposition and prepared to mobilize advocates to defend the River of Grass. We need restoration — not exploitation — on the land south of Lake Okeechobee.



FOUGHT TO BRING AN END TO LAKE OKEECHOBEE “RECOVERY” DISCHARGES

After nearly four months of damaging wintertime discharges from Lake Okeechobee, Friends of the Everglades celebrated a key victory in March 2025 when the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers closed the gates to the St. Lucie River and reduced flows to the Caloosahatchee River to a beneficial level. Nearly 3,000 supporters joined our call to action, and our advocacy was publicly acknowledged in the Corps’ decision. This success demonstrates the power of collective action, while also underscoring the urgent need for lasting solutions — including acquiring land south of Lake Okeechobee to store, clean and send water south — to truly rescue the River of Grass.



GROWING MINDS, GROWING IMPACT

The Young Friends of the Everglades program is celebrating a standout year defined by innovation, engagement and measurable success. The growth of our program has surged thanks to the outstanding contributions of our Miami-based contract educator, Nayibe Padilla, the valuable collaboration of the Young Friends committee members and the generous financial support of donors.

This year, our professional educators led 178 interactive in-house field trips for schools and summer camps throughout South Florida. Through a new partnership with Palm Beach County's 21st Century Community Learning Centers, we provided teacher training and engaging science lessons and resources for 38 schools. Raising community awareness is central to our mission, and Young Friends highlighted Everglades conservation at 16 public events.

Young Friends' crowning achievement in 2025 was earning a \$100,000 grant from Impact100 Martin to develop the Everglades Edudome Experience. This new initiative features dome projection of a 360-degree film, produced in partnership with Odyssey Earth, a first-of-its-kind 16-by-20-foot walkable satellite map of the Everglades and an array of tactile animal and plant replicas. This immersive experience debuted at JD Parker Elementary in November and is expected to reach at least 20 Martin County schools in 2026.



YOUNG FRIENDS SCHOLAR SEES THE EVERGLADES THROUGH A BIRDER'S EYES

In 2025, we welcomed Sophia Lima as our third Karen Mashburn Environmental Scholar. A Miami native and honors Wildlife Ecology and Conservation student at the University of Florida, Sophia brought passion and hands-on experience in wildlife education and research to her Young Friends of the Everglades internship.

She energized our youth education program with interactive lessons that highlighted Everglades birdlife, helping young learners notice and connect with the wildlife all around them, and inspiring a new generation of Everglades stewards.

This \$10,000 scholarship and internship is made possible each year by a generous gift from Jerry Mashburn in memory of his wife — longtime Friends of the Everglades board member Karen Mashburn, whose vision helped shape the Young Friends program.



Florida Bay



GUIDED BY SCIENCE. DRIVEN BY NATURE.

Friends of the Everglades remains steadfast in a simple principle: sound science must guide restoration. In 2025, that meant doubling down on our reliance on research, expert analysis and nature-based solutions to shape our positions on every major issue facing the River of Grass.

Our Science and Policy Committee continues to anchor this work. With deep expertise in water management, engineering, wetlands law, ecology and climate resilience, committee members provide trusted guidance that keeps our advocacy grounded in evidence. Their insights help us push for restoration projects that work with natural systems, elevate ecological integrity and deliver real, measurable benefits to the Everglades.

By letting science lead the way, we strengthen our ability to hold institutions accountable, advance responsible restoration and protect this ecosystem for generations to come.



Jennifer Rehage



Thomas Van Lent

Science and Policy Committee Members

Blanca Bernal	Christopher McVoy
Jason Evans	Dave Preston
Alan Farago	Jennifer Rehage
Royal Gardner	Todd Thurlow
Casey Darling Kniffin	Peter Upton
Philip Kushlan	Thomas Van Lent
Jaclyn Lopez	Carol Waxler



Gil Smart, Executive Director



Lasting restoration requires more than scientific consensus — it requires political courage. That's why our partnership with VoteWater remains one of our greatest strengths. Together, we form a rare, complementary team: Friends of the Everglades is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit that builds public understanding through education, research and science-backed advocacy, while VoteWater — operating as a 501(c)(4) — confronts the political forces that shape Florida's water future.

Working in tandem, within legal limits, we bridge the gap between science, policy and political accountability in a way few organizations can. By uniting complementary strengths, this partnership expands what either organization could achieve alone and strengthens our ability to defend the Everglades.



Marjory's Circle members are a dedicated group of supporters whose steadfast generosity to Friends of the Everglades embodies the bold and enduring spirit of Marjory Stoneman Douglas and helps drive the transformational change she fought for. In 2025, we celebrated these dedicated stewards with an exclusive guided swamp walk through Big Cypress National Preserve, which followed an intimate tour of Clyde Butcher's celebrated photography gallery. Experiences like these deepen members' personal connections to the Everglades while underscoring the tangible impact of their support.

Members of Marjory's Circle contribute a minimum of \$1,200 annually to help sustain the legacy of environmental hero, celebrated author and Friends of the Everglades founder, Marjory Stoneman Douglas. By joining Marjory's Circle, supporters play a vital role in sustaining programs, shaping the future of the Everglades and standing alongside fellow stewards of this unique ecosystem. This support ensures a continued role in preserving the future of our River of Grass and its connected waterways.



All members enjoy invitations to exclusive experiences, discounts on events, insider updates, annual recognition and more.

To learn about benefits, join, or upgrade, visit everglades.org/marjorys-circle. Donations can be made in honor or memory of loved ones.

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Blair Wickstrom
Carine Williams
Helen Wohl
Lynn Woods
Beverly Young

Members in 2025, * Founding Member



The newly established River of Grass Legacy Society honors visionary individuals who have included Friends of the Everglades in their estate plans through a will, trust, life income gift or other planned contribution.

Established to recognize these forward-thinking supporters during their lifetimes and beyond, the society celebrates those whose generosity creates an enduring impact, ensuring Friends' mission to preserve, protect and restore the world's only Everglades thrives well into the future.

Do you already have Friends of the Everglades in your estate plans or wish to learn more on how to be recognized as a member?

Please contact
Scott Brown, Development Director at
scott.brown@everglades.org, call
(305) 669-0858 or go to
everglades.org/river-of-grass-legacy-society
for more information.



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Anthony Sleiman, and cover photo by
Andy Morgan

Graphic Design

Sabrina Roemisch Glover

Printing

Southeastern Printing

EVERGLADES CHAMPIONS

We are deeply grateful to these special friends whose exceptional support helps power our work across the Everglades.

Anonymous

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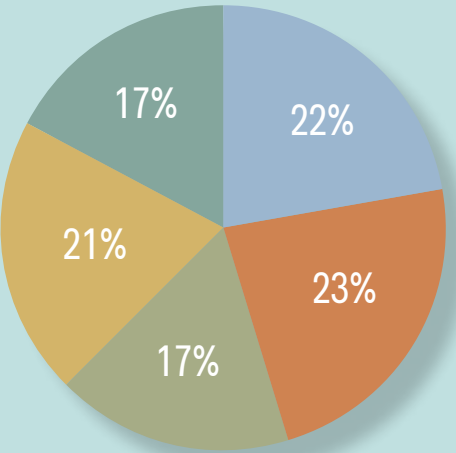
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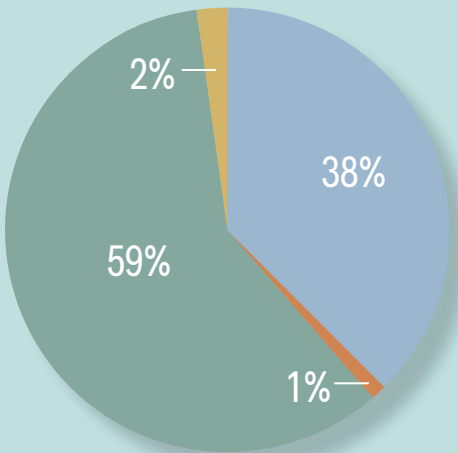
FINANCIAL REVIEW

2025 EXPENDITURES



EXPENDITURES	AMOUNT	PERCENTAGE
Education and Outreach	\$405,800	22%
Legal/Research	\$416,395	23%
Policy	\$311,586	17%
Administration	\$385,140	21%
Fundraising	\$313,592	17%
Total	\$1,832,513	100%

2025 SUPPORT



SUPPORT	AMOUNT	PERCENTAGE
Individuals	\$1,165,352	38%
Corporations	\$23,848	1%
Trusts/Foundation	\$1,825,640	59%
Earned Income	\$51,194	2%
Total	\$3,066,034	100%



Southeastern Sunflowers in bloom, Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary



“Protecting the Everglades is a multi-generational passion in our family. It was a joy to see our daughter Jinny choose to dress up as Marjory Stoneman Douglas for biography day at her school. Jinny was so excited to share Marjory’s inspiring story with her classmates and raise awareness of what’s possible as we continue Marjory’s fight to protect this incredibly important ecosystem.” – Claire and Jay Robertson

Photo: Jay & Jinny Robertson



Anhinga, Everglades National Park

BE THE CHANGE THE EVERGLADES NEEDS!



Your donations fuel our fight for lasting solutions.

By donating to Friends of the Everglades, you are championing one of the planet’s most vital ecosystems. Every penny counts in our grassroots movement to safeguard this magnificent gift of nature.



BE THE CHANGE



Fuel our work to preserve, protect and restore the only
Everglades in the world. Make a donation now.



Friends *of the* **Everglades**

everglades.org

Cover photo by Andy Morgan
Tamiami Spoonbills