



# Chapter 6: Natural Resources & Conservation



## ***Why this matters***

Just like people, natural areas and ecosystems face increasing challenges to surviving and thriving in a changing climate. Rising temperatures, more intense rainfall events, and extended periods of drought can destroy and degrade natural resources and the benefits they provide, such as shade, flood protection, wildlife habitat, and carbon storage. Urban development pressure and poor land management practices can compound and accelerate adverse impacts to humans, including hotter days and nights and increased wildfire, flooding, and public health risks.

## ***What's happening here?***

Alachua County's springs, forests, wetlands, and prairies are treasured natural resources that support our local economy, air quality, water quality, and community health. Population growth and associated land development, habitat loss, invasive species, and pollution pose the greatest threats to these natural resources. As weather intensifies and wildfires become more frequent, plant and animal biodiversity — a key indicator of ecosystem resilience — is lost while infrastructure and human populations are also threatened.

The CAP focuses on two approaches for enhancing natural resource resiliency:

**Protect and restore natural areas, trees, and landscapes**

**Improve capacity of lands to withstand and buffer human risks from climate impacts**

## ***What does the CAP include?***

Alachua County has a strong history of natural resource protection and is already conserving ecologically significant land and waters countywide, but there is more to protect. In addition to continuing to support existing programs, priority natural resource strategies include:

- **Protecting 30% of County land and freshwater by 2030 and 50% by 2050**
- **Developing an integrated Community/Urban Forest Management Plan**
- **Expanding the number of trees and biodiversity of tree canopy**
- **Encouraging landscaping that enhances soil health, saves water, and supports native wildlife and pollinator species**

*Program Highlight*

Alachua County Forever, the County's land conservation program, has protected over 36,000 acres of land since its founding in 2000, generating economic benefits while protecting water quality and reducing wildfire and flood risks.

## ***How can residents contribute?***

### **Join conservation efforts**

- Participate in tree planting and clean-up events
- Volunteer for local environmental programs or apply to serve on a County or City advisory committee

### **Create habitat at home**

- Diversify your yard and reduce input needs with native plantings
- Create drought-tolerant landscapes that invite and support wildlife and pollinators