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## **DEP APPLAUDS FLORIDA FOREVER LEGISLATION**

*--New law extends successful land acquisition program for another decade--*

**TALLAHASSEE** - Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Secretary Michael W. Sole today applauded Senate Bill 542, legislation signed into law yesterday by Governor Crist relating to land acquisition and management.

"I applaud Governor Crist and the Florida Legislature for their leadership and commitment to Florida's environment, recognizing the importance of our landmark land preservation program," said DEP Secretary Michael W. Sole. "Acquiring environmentally-sensitive lands is conserving diverse natural habitats, protecting lands for recreation and preserving natural and historical resources."

Senate Bill 542, sponsored by Representative Stan Mayfield and Senator Burt Saunders, extends the state's premier land acquisition program, *Florida Forever*, for another decade. The law builds upon the successful conservation program by improving land management activities, increasing monitoring and reporting requirements and encouraging and accelerating public recreational access on state-owned lands.

"Thanks to the support of stakeholders, particularly the Florida Forever Coalition, the nation's largest land acquisition program will continue the important work of protecting the best of Florida's natural resource lands and recreational opportunities for future generations," said DEP Deputy Secretary for Land and Recreation Bob Ballard. "Through *Florida Forever*, we are preserving vital habitat for threatened and endangered species and providing unmatched opportunities for education and recreation in our state's natural environment."

Originally established in 1999, the 10-year, \$3 billion *Florida Forever* program is the largest land-buying initiative in the nation, conserving environmentally sensitive land, restoring water resources and preserving important cultural and historical sites. More than two million acres throughout the state have been placed in public ownership under *Florida Forever* and its predecessor program, Preservation 2000 (P2000).

For more information on the *Florida Forever* program, visit <http://www.dep.state.fl.us/lands/acquisition/FloridaForever/>.