



# **Florida Federation of Garden Clubs, Inc.**

## **PROTECT AQUATIC ECOSYSTEMS**

### **Position Statement**

Adopted May 10, 2012

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**Florida Federation of Garden Clubs, Inc. is committed to the protection, conservation and restoration of our coastal waters, coral reefs, bays, estuaries, wetlands, aquifers, watersheds, springs, lakes, rivers and streams.**

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Florida is renowned for its rich abundance of distinctive freshwater (lakes, bays, rivers and streams, groundwater, and wetlands) and marine (coastal waters, estuaries, salt marshes, seagrass beds, coral reefs, and mangrove forests) ecosystems. Unique to Florida, the Everglades are part of the most complex mosaic of wetlands found anywhere in the world. Florida has the largest concentration of first-magnitude freshwater springs, and the only complete tropical marine ecosystem in North America. Millions of tourists visit Florida each year to bask in the sun on world-class beaches, soak in the restorative waters of the springs, dive the tropical coral reefs or underwater caverns, swim with the dolphins, ride a swamp buggy in search of alligators, fish for largemouth bass, or paddle a canoe down a lazy river. More than just scenic waterscapes offering opportunities for recreation and enjoyment of nature, these aquatic ecosystems are critical components of the natural environment and invaluable natural resources.

Functionally intact and biologically diverse aquatic ecosystems perform important ecological functions and provide essential goods and services that sustain the very basis of life on Earth. Aquatic ecosystems are integral to the hydrologic cycle, the processes that drive the movement of water throughout the hydrosphere. Aquatic ecosystems recharge groundwater, filter and purify water, provide drinking water, as well as water for agriculture, industry and sanitation. Aquatic ecosystems mitigate drought and floods, detoxify and decompose wastes, produce oxygen and absorb carbon dioxide, act as biological filters to absorb and sequester heavy metals and other pollutants, recycle nutrients, generate and renew soils, regulate climatic extremes and sustain biodiversity. Aquatic ecosystems teem with life. A vast number of species depend on aqueous environments for habitat, forage, spawning, nursery and refuge. Aquatic ecosystems are the source of huge quantities of food and a wide variety of marketable goods. Aquatic ecosystems contribute substantially to local economies. Major industries in Florida are dependant on healthy aquatic ecosystems.

Yet despite their value and importance, our aquatic ecosystems are being severely altered or destroyed at an unprecedented rate for agriculture, dairy farming and cattle ranching, phosphate mining, urban and residential development and flood control. The integrity and resilience of many of our aquatic ecosystems are threatened as a consequence of disruptions to the natural hydrology (the diversion of freshwater flows), the introduction of invasive species, nutrient enrichment (excess phosphorous and nitrogen), untreated stormwater discharges, saltwater intrusion, groundwater withdrawals, and atmospheric deposition. As a consequence, many native plant and animal species are in decline or have disappeared altogether. Loss of critical wetland habitat has reduced wading bird populations by 95 percent, and polluted runoff and siltation from coastal areas has contributed to the loss of 93 percent of living coral. Noxious aquatic weeds crowd out native plants and choke lakes, springs and rivers impeding navigation and restricting swimming and other recreational activities. Harmful algal blooms kill fish or stunt their growth. Industrial effluents, chemical fertilizers and pesticides pollute our surface water, degrade the quality of our groundwater and endanger the safety of our drinking water resources.

Florida Federation of Garden Clubs, Inc. recognizes that the provisioning, regulating and economical benefits provided by aquatic ecosystems afford us the very necessities of life. To protect, conserve and restore aquatic ecosystems, FFGC supports the following:

#### **To Protect, Conserve and Restore Aquatic Ecosystems**

- Preserve aquatic ecosystems and the natural biodiversity of aquatic plant and animal communities
- Prevent further degradation of our ground, surface and coastal waters and interconnected and interrelated watersheds
- Restore the natural structure, function and the physical, chemical and biological integrity of aquatic ecosystems

#### **To Improve Our Effectiveness**

- Reauthorize, strengthen and fully enforce the Clean Water Act
- Provide adequate and reliable funding for the protection, conservation and restoration of our aquatic ecosystems
- Utilize a comprehensive watershed based or systems approach for land and water use planning and resource management
- Incorporate "best available science" in all models, methods, and management decisions
- Develop strategic partnerships and collaboration among federal and state agencies, local municipalities and stakeholders
- Promote public awareness, understanding and appreciation of Florida ecosystems with educational outreach programs

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**Charter Member of National Garden Clubs, Inc.**

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