

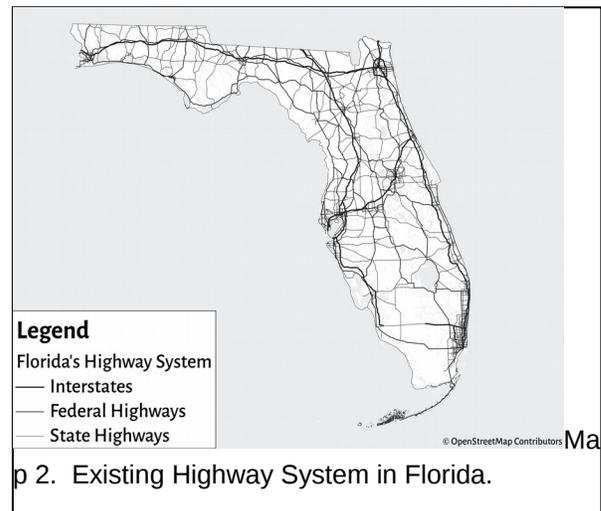
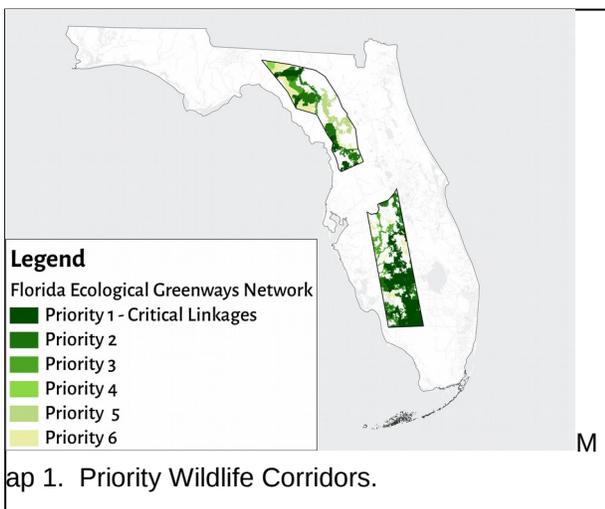
Dear Florida Native Plant Society Members,

This alert is sent to you by the Policy and Legislation Committee. The legislature just sent Senate Bill 7068 (CS/SB 7068) to Governor DeSantis. If the Governor signs it into law, it would contradict his early statements about protecting Florida's environment by literally paving the way for construction of three major toll roads through some of Florida's most significant remaining natural areas and agricultural lands. Please call or email his office and ask him to veto this horrible legislation.

Many of us felt encouraged by Governor DeSantis' early statements about restoring the Everglades and degraded springs, improving water quality in regions ravaged by algae blooms, and funding Florida Forever. He recognized the natural environment as a major pillar of Florida's economy. Now we are at an inflection point where we will see if his words are matched by actions.

This bill proposes that we spend many billions on toll roads that would not meet any real transportation need. In the name of promoting economic development, the legislation would simply replace natural greenspace and agricultural land with suburban sprawl and exacerbate our current challenges to protect water resources and conserve natural areas. Florida already has more miles of toll road than any other state – more than we need based on toll receipts for many of them - and FNPS strongly opposes the proposed construction of more unnecessary toll roads through sparsely populated regions as proposed by CS/SB 7068.

The maps below help illustrate the massive scale of what the legislature is proposing. Map 1 delineates the 1.4 million acres of officially designated priority wildlife corridors located within the so-called "study areas", which together encompass a land area of over 6 million acres! Map 2 delineates the state's existing highway network and illustrates why there is no actual transportation need for the roads – a basic fact acknowledged by the legislature.



Consider the following:

- 1) **The springsheds of at least 13 of the 30 Outstanding Florida Springs lie within the Northern Turnpike Connector and Suncoast Connector areas.** These two toll roads would bisect some of the highest groundwater recharge zones in Florida – a major

reason those springs, already degraded by nutrient pollution and declining flows, would be put at even greater risk by the development the roads will spawn.

- 2) **More than 1 million acres of protected conservation land, and more than 1.4 million acres of land in already-approved Florida Forever projects, is located in the proposed corridors**, underscoring the immense conservation value of these regions that include panther habitat in south Florida; rare scrub along the Lake Wales Ridge that is home to dozens of critically imperiled plant species; and the extensive forests of the Big Bend.
- 3) **Claims that the roads would bring important infrastructure, like high speed internet, to isolated rural areas and help speed up hurricane evacuation have no real validity.** High speed internet could be extended to those areas without investing hundreds of billions on unneeded roads, and Florida's Department of Emergency Management prefers improved evacuation planning that would allow evacuees to remain close to home as a safer and more cost-effective solution than building new roads.
- 4) **Agriculture's contribution to our economy is second only to tourism. Collectively, the three corridor study areas encompass huge swaths of Florida's agricultural land base**, including the commercial forests of the Big Bend (more than 300,000 acres in Taylor County alone), the renowned thoroughbred horse ranches of Marion County, and the large cattle ranches of the Peace River and Kissimmee River valleys. The sprawl promoted by the toll roads would compromise the future viability of agriculture in those regions. Why trade valuable agricultural land, and the perpetual economic and national security benefits of viable large-scale agriculture, for expensive suburban sprawl?
- 5) **The Florida Department of Transportation's systematic approach to planning for our transportation future has not identified a need for these roads.** They coordinate with local governments to identify and solve our actual transportation needs in the most cost efficient way possible. Siphoning billions from FDOT's budget to study and build these toll roads will only delay progress on real transportation needs and keep us mired in the outdated focus on roads as the solution to all our transportation problems. Enhancing the existing network of roads, and providing alternatives to the use of automobiles, should be the focus of our future transportation investments.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

Please telephone Governor DeSantis' office at (850)488-7146 right away and ask him to remain true to his words about valuing Florida's environment by vetoing CS/SB 7063 – the Multi-Use Corridors transportation bill and the toll roads it would allow. Choose the option to leave a voice mail if you are unable to speak directly with someone. If you prefer email, you can reach him at GovernorRon.Desantis@eog.myflorida.com. There is no time to delay in taking this action! He could sign the bill any day. Let him know it is a destructive and wasteful project, and that planning for our future transportation needs should be left to the professionals at the Florida Department of Transportation – not legislators offering a generous gift to developers.