

Executive Summary

Public Opinion of Endangered and Invasive Species in Florida
July 2015

Introduction

Managing invasive species and endangered species populations in a way that maintains biodiversity and ecological health are key issues for a tourism-heavy and natural-resource rich state like Florida. This survey captured responses from 502 Florida residents to explore the Florida public's opinions, attitudes, and knowledge about (1) general endangered species and invasive species topics, (2) how to prioritize efforts related to conservation, and (3) management practices for endangered and invasive species populations.

Findings

- Sixty-nine percent of respondents considered environmental conservation to be highly or extremely important. Compared to nine other Florida issues, environmental conservation ranked sixth out of 10.
- Eighty-two percent of respondents were likely or very likely to vote to support land conservation programs and seventy-five percent of respondents were likely or very likely to vote for candidates who support environmental conservation.

Endangered Species

- Few participants (14% or less) considered themselves either highly or extremely knowledgeable about threats to endangered species, how to prevent endangerment, and what species are currently endangered.
- Sixty-six percent of respondents believe the Endangered Species Act should be strengthened.
- Ninety percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed it is important to conserve mammals, compared to 50% who agreed or strongly agreed it is important to conserve microorganisms.
- When asked whether they thought Florida state leaders and agencies had the right amount of influence to impact policies affecting endangered species, respondents indicated they thought Florida citizens had too little influence (61%) and 38% indicated they thought political leaders in Florida had too much influence.
- Eighty-nine percent of respondents would support or strongly support imposing fines on those who harm endangered species in Florida and 88% would support or strongly support imposing fines on those who harm endangered species' habitats in Florida.
- Eighty-three percent of respondents would support or strongly support restricting residential development of areas that are habitat for endangered species, and 83% would support or strongly support restricting commercial development of the same areas.
- Seventy-eight percent of respondents would support or strongly support the state of Florida purchasing endangered species' habitat so it can be protected.
- Sixty percent of respondents would like to learn more about the types of species that are endangered.

Invasive Species

- Sixty-five percent of respondents reported they felt they were either not knowledgeable or only slightly knowledgeable about the topic of invasive species.
- Sixty-six percent of respondents considered themselves not knowledgeable or only slightly knowledgeable about the types of invasive species living in Florida and 68% were not knowledgeable or only slightly knowledgeable about how they could prevent invasive species from entering Florida.

- Half of the respondents believed “we should use management strategies to control invasive species only in areas that are most affected” while 46% believed “we should do all we can to completely eradicate invasive species.”
- Fifty-five percent of respondents would support a 1% sales tax increase to prevent and eradicate invasive species in Florida, but only 21% would support a 5% sales tax increase for the same purpose.
- Seventy-three percent of respondents indicated they thought the penalties for owning and selling Burmese pythons as pets should be strengthened.
- Fifty-five percent of respondents would like to learn about the types of species that are invasive.