

DELEGATION

Indian River County's Legislative Delegation consists of State Senator Erin Grall and House Representative Robert (Robbie) Brackett.

CONTACT

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ISSUES

Land Conservation Funding

Background: From 1990-2000, the primary land conservation program was called *Preservation 2000*. In 2000, the successor program called *Florida Forever* started. Those programs were similar, and both had been funded at \$300m+ from 1990-2009. Then the legislature mostly stopped funding land conservation from 2010-2017. Funding ticked back up in budget years 2020-2024 thanks to leadership that valued protecting the environment.

Last year the legislature only funded Florida Forever at \$18M, and that was because of a Senate "sprinkle." The House zeroed out funding. Worse, both the House and Senate approved budgets that would have stripped out funding from our Wildlife Corridor Land Conservation Program and allowed over \$100M in funding to go to special interest projects under the guise of land conservation.

For 2026, which budget is still being formalized in overtime, the House budget once again zeroed out funding for Florida Forever. The Senate has proposed only \$35M.

Local consensus is that our delegation does not adequately support land conservation programs and routinely ignores communications regarding this issue.

Growth Management

Background: Florida once had one of the nation's most vaunted growth management regulatory frameworks. However, starting around 2010 and continuing through the current legislative session, the legislature has nearly completely gutted those regulations. What remains does little in terms of ensuring quality growth. State laws are now geared towards protecting developers and special interests. Laws preventing local governments from enacting new growth management rules are the norm.

This current legislation session once again saw many anti-growth management bills introduced. One such bill (HB 299 / SB 354), called the "Blue Ribbon Projects" bill in their respective chambers, would have gutted protection for rural lands. Representative Brackett voted yes for this bill when it passed in the House. Senator Grall voted yes on this bill TWICE in committee. The second vote came when several Senators of both parties objected to it, and it passed out of committee by one vote. Grall's vote could have helped kill the bill, but instead she once again voted for a bill to harm Florida's ability to manage growth. This bill eventually was not brought to the Senate floor due to objections from many Senators.

While there were several anti-growth management bills introduced this legislative session, environmental and smart growth advocacy groups were able to mostly beat back those bills. Unfortunately, our delegation often does not respond to emails or phone calls regarding growth management bills, and they routinely vote for these bills that undermine protecting Floridian's quality of life in favor of developers and other special interests.

ACTION TO BE TAKEN

In general... While it can be discouraging to observe our legislative delegation repeatedly vote against protecting both our natural environment and our quality of life, the answer is to put more pressure on them to do the right thing. The legislature operates in the shadows, so the answer must be to put a brighter spotlight on their votes. We can do this by emailing and calling them so that our voices are heard, and to encourage our friends, family, and neighbors to do the same.

Right now... While the legislature is going into overtime to pass a budget, we can email/call Senator Grall and Representative Brackett and tell them to fund *Florida Forever* at no less than \$100m, to fund Rural and Family Lands Protection Program (*RFLPP*) at \$300m, to fund *Florida Communities Trust* (a statewide matching grant program for local land conservation programs) at no less than \$15m, and tell them not to raid previously budgeted *Florida Wildlife Corridor Funds*.

STATE LEVEL ORGANIZATIONS WORTH FOLLOWING

- Audubon Florida: <https://www.audubon.org/florida>
- 1000Friends of Florida: www.1000friendsofflorida.org/
- Votewater.org: <https://votewater.org/>

LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS WORTH FOLLOWING

- Clean Water Coalition of Indian River County: <https://www.cwcirc.org/>
- Pelican Island Audubon Society: <https://pelicanislandaudubon.org/>
- Indian River Neighborhood Association: <https://www.indianriverna.com/>
- Friends of St. Sebastian River: <http://www.fssr.org/>