

Floridians care about endangered species, want to know more, according to survey

July 24 2015, by Beverly James

Floridians are passionate about conserving and protecting plants, animals and their habitats, but they feel woefully uninformed, according to a survey by the UF/IFAS Center for Public Issues Education in Agriculture and Natural Resources.

"People seem to want to do the right thing, but don't necessarily know what that is or how to go about it," said Ricky Telg, PIE Center director. The center conducts four public opinion surveys every year that focus on key issues to Floridians.

An online survey of 502 Floridians showed that only a quarter of residents believed they had seen news coverage of [endangered species](#) in the past month. But, 85 percent said they would pay attention to future coverage.

More than half of those surveyed didn't know what species were endangered in Florida, while many were also unaware of government, industry or policy impacts on endangered species.

Despite feeling uninformed, a majority of Floridians surveyed—people who harm endangered species. Also, 88 percent agreed with imposing fines on those who harm habitats of endangered species.

When respondents were asked to prioritize which native species should be conserved, 90 percent agreed that mammals should be saved, followed by birds at 85 percent, and fish and plants at 84 percent.

Floridians felt reptiles, amphibians, invertebrates and microorganisms were the least important to protect.

In addition, 79 percent of Floridians agreed that the importance of maintaining a diverse ecosystem was the most important criteria to consider when prioritizing which species to protect. More than 70 percent identified the severity and urgency of the threat to endangered species as major concerns, but fewer than 30 percent prioritized the size, intelligence or attractiveness of the species.

Survey respondents said they were more likely to engage in conservation by donating to organizations and visiting zoos and museums compared to joining an organization. Floridians also showed mixed results when evaluating current policies and punishments for interfering with endangered species. More than half believed that lighting restrictions protecting sea turtles should be strengthened, while almost 60 percent felt penalties for harming gopher tortoises or their habitat were adequate.

Provided by University of Florida

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