***Department of Community Affairs
Recreational Development***

***Policy Issue***

Should there be one state entity that is in charge of administering state funds for the acquisition and development of land for public outdoor recreational purposes?

***Background***

Currently, two state programs focus on increasing recreational activities in Florida. The Department of Community Affairs (DCA) administers the Florida Community Trust (FCT), which focuses on land acquisition. The Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) administers the Florida Recreation Development Assistance Program (FRDAP), which focuses on infrastructure.

Department of Community Affairs - **Florida Communities Trust**

The Florida Communities Trust was created in 1989 by the Florida Communities Trust Act, Chapter 380, Part III, F.S., as a growth management tool to help local governments implement state requirements related to local comprehensive planning. FCT, administered by DCA, is an element of Florida Forever, receiving 21 percent of the total Florida Forever appropriation ($63 million in a typical year) for the Parks and Open Space grant program and 2.5 percent of the total ($7.5 million) for the Stan Mayfield Working Waterfronts Program.[[1]](#footnote-1) FCT is governed by a six-member board that includes the Secretary of DCA (who serves as permanent chair), the Secretary of DEP, and four members of the public appointed by the Governor.

FCT’s Parks and Open Space acquisition program is a competitive grant program that provides funding to local governments and environmental non-profits to help acquire community-based parks, open space, and public water access. These acquisition projects assist local governments in the implementation of the goals, policies, and objectives of the conservation, recreation, and open space elements of their local comprehensive plans. There are also a number of criteria in FCT’s competitive scoring process that foster cultural and historical preservation, trail system development, and public access to water. FCT's mission is land acquisition for local and regional parks, some of which are more than 3,000 acres in size. FCT's Parks and Open Space acquisition grants are capped at $6.3 million per grant.

The Stan Mayfield Working Waterfronts Program, which was established in 2008, is also a competitive grant program, providing financial assistance to local governments and non-profits for the acquisition of land to preserve working waterfronts.

Over the last five years, FCT has provided nearly $335 million to communities throughout Florida for the acquisition of 162 local and regional park projects statewide. The average number of applications received annually is just over 100, generally requesting more than four times the available funds. The FCT Governing Board makes the final determination of funded projects for the Parks and Open Space program and the initial selection of funded projects for the Stan Mayfield Working Waterfronts program, while the Board of Trustees (Governor and Cabinet) may only remove projects from the FCT Board’s list of working waterfront grantees.

FCT has a staff of 16; two Community Program Managers, an Environmental Administrator, two Government Analyst II’s, a Senior Attorney, an Attorney, an OMC I, three Planner IV’s, a Senior Acquisition Review Agent, an Acquisition Review Agent, a Grants Specialist IV, a Public Information Specialist, and an Administrative Assistant II.

Department of Environmental Protection -**Florida Recreation Development Assistance Program**

The Florida Recreation Development Assistance Program, administered by DEP within the Division of Recreation and Parks, is an element of Florida Forever and was established during FY 72/73. Pursuant to Section 375.075, F.S., FRDAP is a competitive grant program that provides financial assistance through grants to local governments for the acquisition and development of land for public outdoor recreation purposes. All incorporated city and county governments that provide outdoor recreational sites and facilities for the use and benefit of the public are eligible for funding.

FRDAP's primary mission is park development, with very small acquisitions being only an incidental activity. FRDAP’s grants are capped at $200,000. For the past 30 years, the State of Florida has invested nearly $320 million to improve local park facilities, funding more than 2,814 projects statewide. Within the last five years, the FRDAP program has funded 968 development projects, 37 acquisition endeavors and 20 trail ventures. The average number of applications received annually is 300. Currently, the existing caseload is over 600 projects amounting to $66 million and at this time there are 195 projects proposed for funding approval for the FY 09/10 grant funding cycle.

The FRDAP funding list is not official until it has been reviewed by the Legislature and the state budget has been signed by the Governor. Most projects are funded at the maximum grant amount, which requires a 50/50 match. A local government may have up to three active projects at any one time. Once the local administration has been awarded the grant, they have three years to complete the project and be reimbursed. After three years unencumbered funds are subject to reverting to the Land Acquisition Trust Fund.

Land owned by the grantee, which is acquired or developed with FRDAP funds, must be dedicated in perpetuity as an outdoor recreational site for the use and benefit of the general public. Land under control other than by ownership of the grantee such as by lease, must be dedicated as an outdoor recreation area for the use and benefit of the general public for a minimum period of 25 years from the completion date set forth in the project completion certificate. The dedications must be recorded in the public property records by the grantee.

Presently, the Office of Information and Recreation Services (OIRS) oversees the FRDAP program with an office of seven; one Program Administrator, one Administrative Assistant and five Community Assistant Consultants.

Additionally, OIRS supervises the management of the Federal funded Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF.) This grant is similar to FRDAP in nature and is also a reimbursement grant with a 50/50 match ratio requirement. Over the past three fiscal years (2006-07 through 2008-09) this program received an average of 25 applications and awarded $1.3 million annually.

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|  | **DCA - FCT** | **DEP - FRDAP** |
| Primary Mission | Land Acquisition for Parks | Park Development |
| Partners | Local Government | Local Government |
| Grant Cap | $6,300,000 | $200,000 |
| FTE | 16 | 7 |
| Average # of Applications Received Annually \* | 111 | 227  |
| Average # of Applications Approved Annually \* | 29 | 194  |
| Average of total Applications Funded Annually \* | $94 million  | $29.3 million |
| Applications Scored and Ranked | Yes | Yes |
| Applications Approved by | Board | Legislature |
| Performance over Past 5 Years | $335 million for the acquisition of 162 local and regional parks projects  | Funding for 968 development projects, 37 acquisition endeavors and 20 trail ventures.  |

\* Three year average for fiscal years 2006-07 through 2008-09.

Source: Departmental responses to specific information requests.

The attached document provides each program’s grants by county.

***Findings***

Currently, two state agencies provide grants for the acquisition and development of land for public outdoor recreational purposes.

The agencies have similar application processes and scoring.

* However, FCT projects are approved by a board and FRDAP list is approved by the Legislature.

FCT's mission is land acquisition for local and regional parks, some of which are more than 3,000 acres in size. FRDAP's primary mission is park development, with very small acquisitions being only an incidental activity.

Both agencies require continual communication and monitoring of grant recipients.

* FTC monitors into perpetuity.
* FRDAP monitors for three years.

Combining the programs would reduce redundancy and foster a seamless process and allow for the creation of a single application for the land and recreational improvements.

* It would not preclude separate applications for land acquisition or improvements when appropriate.

***Options***

**Option 1:** Continue to administer the Florida Community Trust and the Florida Recreation Development Assistance Program in separate agencies.

Option 2: Consolidate the Florida Community Trust and the Florida Recreation Development Assistance Program and administer in DCA.

**Option 3:** Consolidate the Florida Community Trust and the Florida Recreation Development Assistance Program and administer in DEP.

***Recommendation***

Consolidate the Florida Community Trust and the Florida Recreation Development Assistance Program and administer in DCA. This would reduce redundancy and foster a seamless process. DCA has the larger of the two programs and the FCT program was envisioned primarily as an instrument of an overall growth management strategy by assisting local governments in implementing their comprehensive plans.

1. Florida Forever did not receive an appropriation for FY 2009-10. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)