

# What Floridians Don't Know About Florida

by Madeline Strong, Advisory Council on Environmental Education,  
Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission

There is a high level of concern about the environment among Floridians, right? Right! And because of this high level of concern, Floridians know a lot about environmental issues, right? Wrong! After conducting a needs assessment for the Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission's Advisory Council on Environmental Education, Mark Duda and Associates found that while there is a very high level of concern about the environment among our state's residents, there are very low levels of awareness or factual information about a broad range of issues.

The final report for the needs assessment contains a wealth of information and insight for those interested in the environment and environmental education. For example, endangered species is considered a top environmental issue in Florida yet most Floridians (75%) do not see habitat loss, habitat fragmentation, or development as the most important problem when it comes to endangered species. Eighty-six percent of Floridians cannot name an endangered species native to Florida other than the Florida panther or manatee. However, Floridians want more information on endangered species than any other topic (aside from water resources).

Duda and Associates conducted focus groups, interviews, and telephone surveys of Florida environmental educators, scientists, natural resource adminis-


trators, adult Floridians, and tourists to determine their opinions, attitudes, behaviors, and levels of knowledge about environmental issues and environmental education in Florida. The goal of the needs assessment was to assist the Advisory Council on Environmental Education in guiding state-supported environmental education opportunities and in soliciting and recommending projects that will represent the best use of available funds.

Among the findings are the following:

- Direct mail, television, and newspapers are considered by Floridians to be the best way to provide them with information on environmental issues.
- Floridians who hunt, sail, fish, boat, visit a park, have a college degree or higher, or are between the ages of 45 and 54 are more likely to act on behalf of environmental issues than other groups.
- Water resource issues are considered by more Floridians to be the most important issues facing Florida.
- A majority of Floridians feel that Florida's environment is healthy, although about a third feel it is somewhat unhealthy. Tourists are more likely to feel that Florida's environment is healthy.
- More than two-thirds of Floridians support increased funding for the State of Florida to prevent and cor-

rect environmental problems and for environmental education.

- Florida environmental educators, scientists, and natural resource administrators feel that slightly less than half of environmental education efforts should focus in formal settings (schools, colleges, and universities).
- Floridians are not putting together the fact that Florida's population growth and subsequent development are an important cause of environmental problems in Florida. This is in stark contrast to the fact that growth issues and management was a top concern for Florida environmental educators, scientists, and natural resource administrators.

For more information about the needs assessment, call (850) 487-0123 or write to: Environmental Education Grant Program, Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission, 620 S Meridian St, Tallahassee FL 32399-1600. 

Hear more about the results of this study from Jerrie Lindsey, an associate of the author, at the Environmental Education session of the FNPS Conference program, Saturday, May 8. [See page 12 for details.]

Madeline Strong is the contract administrator for the Hispanic outreach grant-funded program, *La Flora de la Florida*, being performed by FNPS with assistance from our Dade Chapter. The Paynes Prairie Chapter also works with Ms. Strong via their *Conquer the Cogan and Tear out the Tallow* grant-funded program.