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Citizens for a Scenic Florida, Inc. is dedicated to preserving and enhancing Florida's scenic heritage. But it needs your support. This newsletter comes to you free whether you are a member or not. But we hope you will join us to work together to keep Florida the scenic place it is. Joining is easy and rewarding.

[Join Here](#)



### National News:

The billboard article posted below is as relevant to Florida as it is to Texas where it was written. As a coincidental sidebar, if you want to hear what Lady Bird Johnson's husband really thought about the billboard industry, [click here](#) for a secretly taped recording of a conversation between LBJ and fellow Texan, Jim Wright. Note - this is a very old recording and the quality is not that good. It seems to open ok in Windows Media Player but QuickTime has problems with it.

If you are interested in effective ways to fight billboard blight, Scenic America has a publication for you.

### Fighting Billboard Blight: An Action Guide for Citizens and Public Officials



This document is an important tool for anyone concerned about the proliferation of billboards. Fighting Billboard Blight is a comprehensive, step-by-step guide to help you develop a campaign to fight this litter-on-a-stick in you state and in your own community. Reclaiming the beauty of your community from the billboard operators won't be easy. But, with hard work and a good plan, you can win and add your community to the growing list of pro-beauty places with tough billboard controls. Fighting Billboard Blight is the tool you need. Scenic America, 1999. 85 pages. [Click here](#) for this and more useful information from Scenic America

### Billboards

[Law to restrict billboards allows them to flourish](#)

[By Darren Meritz / El Paso Times](#)

Posted: 04/05/2009 12:00:00 AM MDT



(Vanessa Monsisvais / El Paso Times)

EL PASO -- Lady Bird Johnson famously embedded in motorists' minds images of Burma-Shave ads and billboard clutter across America.

Her worries about pristine landscape being ruined by signs led Congress to pass the Highway Beautification Act of 1965.

Now, more than 40 years later, the law that was supposed to limit billboards allows for more of them than when the beautification act was crafted.

But in El Paso, the number of billboards may be limited.

About 325,000 billboards dotted roadsides and highways in 1966, according to industry estimates. Today, the number is closer to 500,000.

Billboard advertising has become a \$6.7 billion business in the United States, according to Scenic Texas, a nonprofit organization committed to preservation of natural beauty along roadways.

"Lady Bird Johnson had really great intentions, and saw as she and President (Lyndon B.) Johnson drove between Texas and Washington, D.C., junkyards and billboards coming across a brand-new highway system," said Margaret Lloyd, policy director of Scenic Texas. "She was shocked and wanted to do something about it."

But the former first lady's effort to slow or reduce the number of billboards lining U.S. highways might have been futile.

Throughout Texas, as many as 45,000 billboards line roadways -- an increase of 10,000 from a decade ago, Scenic Texas estimates. El Paso has about 1,200 billboards.

So why didn't the Highway Beautification Act work?

Opponents of billboards say the act created a codified system that allowed the signs to flourish. Written into the law was a compromise provision that permitted billboards not only in municipalities, but also in commercial and industrial areas. One business on a rural road or two businesses on a federal highway can qualify a spot as a commercial or industrial area.

"What the Highway Beautification Act ended up doing, unfortunately, was legitimize a business that probably never should have been legitimized," Lloyd said. "Now what we have are legal, legitimate billboards up everywhere."

In El Paso last week, a legislative review committee recommended an ordinance that would ban new

construction of billboards within the city. New digital billboards have added a special wrinkle to the debate.

City officials want to require billboard companies to remove 16 traditional billboards for every digital one that goes up. The city's proposed ordinance would limit billboards to one for every two miles of highway. The ordinance also would limit to 40 the number of digital billboards allowed within the city and would prohibit billboards within 550 feet of residential areas.

The proposed billboard ordinance comes as the city is in a protracted fight with Clear Channel Outdoor -- a giant among billboard owners -- which has signs throughout El Paso. The city contends that Clear Channel put up 14 digital billboards without specifying on its permit that the signs would be electronic.

"We're doing a lot from the city's perspective and the public's perspective to really improve the way we appear to ourselves and the rest of the world," said West-Central city Rep. Susie Byrd, who wants to prohibit more billboards. "When Clear Channel, especially, took policy in their own hands, what we decided to do is open up the whole billboard conversation again."

Clear Channel executives said they did everything by the book.

"Beautification is an aesthetic judgment. There's no getting around that. Whether someone considers them ugly or not, that's a personal decision," said Tim Anderson of Clear Channel Outdoor. "As far as Clear Channel, when we determined that we wanted to put up digital displays in El Paso, we came to the city. We came to the same people we've been dealing with for years on billboards and asked them, 'How do we do this?'"

More important, Anderson said, is the benefit small and big businesses alike can receive from billboards. Advertisers can reach a broad demographic with billboards and can often do it cheaper than with TV and radio. Advertisers also have an array of options with billboards, which could include a digital display along a highly traveled interstate or a small, 72-square-foot sign along a busy neighborhood street.

Lloyd said Texas, California, Florida and Michigan are seeing billboards pop up everywhere. Four states remain true to Lady Bird Johnson's vision: Alaska, Hawaii, Vermont and Maine are billboard free.

Dispute over regulating billboards isn't limited to El Paso. In Houston, RTM Media put up nearly 60 billboards without permits and then sued when the city ordered them to come down. Granite State Outdoor Advertising sued several municipalities in Georgia and other states after being told its billboards went up illegally. And Clear Channel Outdoor last week lost a case after suing New York City for infringing on First Amendment rights when the city ordered the signs to be taken down.

In each of those cases, outdoor billboard companies made big profits while litigation dragged on for months and often years, said Bill Brinton, of Jacksonville, Fla., a national expert on sign law.

As to the sign companies, he said, "there is no pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. You're at the rainbow stuffing your pockets with coin while you litigate."

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[http://www.elpasotimes.com/news/ci\\_12074966](http://www.elpasotimes.com/news/ci_12074966)

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**Scenic Things to Do**

**Scenic travel calendars**

The Sun-Centinel publishes monthly travel calendars of interesting things to do in Florida. Some of you sent your own calendars to be included. Time and space prevents researching every city so if you would make sure your local events are included in the Sun-Centinel calendars then the rest of the state will know about them. Here are links to the upcoming May events:

[North Florida & the Panhandle Travel Calendar for May](#)

[South Florida Travel Calendar for May](#)

[Central Florida Travel Calendar for May](#)

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## **Farmland Protection**

### **Program would pay farmers not to sell land to developers**

To keep his family's farmland in Hastings working, Wayne Smith may sell off his right to do anything else.

The family's 400 acres in western St. Johns County is a top pick for a long-delayed state program to protect farms in high-growth areas by paying the farmers to surrender their development rights.

Gov. Charlie Crist and the state Cabinet could vote this month on a package of land preservation deals that would let state forestry officials begin negotiating for those rights.

"This is not the ideal way to go. ... I hate to give up rights to anything," said Smith, whose great-grandfather started farming the same land in 1920.

It may be the best option on the table, however, to help farmers feeling pressured on several fronts.

Having new housing on property that used to be farmland has led to complaints around the state about agricultural dust, smells and noise. At the same time, overseas farm production has limited prices and demand for some Florida crops, making it harder to stay in business.

Trading building rights for cash "may be a way to save the farm from being lost, no matter what," said Smith, 60, a University of Florida graduate who works with two of his sons growing sod, organic vegetables and a plant called perennial peanut that can be sold for hay and cattle feed. To help meet costs, he runs side businesses, including applying pesticides on other farms.

Smith said he hopes his grandchildren will farm his land someday.

The same hope underlies Florida's Rural and Family Lands Protection Program, which lawmakers created in 2001 to help stem a loss of farmland to expanding suburbs. Close to 5 million acres was converted out of agriculture between the mid-1960s and '90s, according to the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services.

Losing farmland hurt environmentally, too, because wetlands and wildlife habitat were lost along with row crops. The Smith farm is near land used by protected black bears, and putting a housing development there would add risks of cars hitting bears and bears foraging in garbage cans, said Manley Fuller, president of the Florida Wildlife Federation.

Until last year, land around the farm near Cracker Swamp Road was targeted by a developer to be part of Mariposa, a 3,200-home community that was proposed on the Putnam-St. Johns county line. A state planning agency opposed it, but the developer was planning a legal fight, then ultimately dropped the matter.

The land-protection program was designed to buy easements from farmers who applied to make a deal.

But that idea has never been tested until now, because lawmakers never approved any money for it.

The Legislature allotted \$10.5 million for it last year through Florida Forever, a large land conservation project. Lawmakers then axed that money this year because of the state's budget crisis, but Crist vetoed the decision and restored it.

Assured of having the money, a panel in the state Division of Forestry examined 35 applications and in late March selected Smith and 10 others as the most promising candidates.

That top tier included a cattle ranch in Flagler County that also farms trees. Two tree farms in Baker and Clay counties were included in a second-priority group of applicants.

A land-acquisition panel that reviews all Florida Forever projects examined the farm recommendations Friday.

Crist and the Cabinet could vote on a round of Florida Forever projects that includes the farm easements at the end of this month, said Jim Muller, an environmental consultant in Tallahassee who worked on Smith's application.

The state's first choices for the program cover more than 34,000 acres. A lot of that probably won't end up being protected through agreements this year, because signing them all up with the money available would mean farmers accepting an average payment of just over \$300 per acre for permanent loss of development potential.

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[http://www.jacksonville.com/news/metro/2009-04-12/story/program\\_would\\_pay\\_farmers\\_not\\_to\\_sell\\_land\\_to\\_developers](http://www.jacksonville.com/news/metro/2009-04-12/story/program_would_pay_farmers_not_to_sell_land_to_developers)

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## **Other Scenic Views**

### **Tom Hctor: Florida Forever, an essential investment**

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We are in danger of losing our outstanding land conservation program, Florida Forever, for a year or more because of the short-sightedness and lack of appropriate political will from the Florida Legislature. This lack of political will is not shared by the people they are supposed to represent. Across this state and through the years Floridians have overwhelmingly supported our conservation land acquisition programs and constitutional amendments that strengthened the protection of such

Alachua Sink at Paynes Prairie



[Click to enlarge](#)

Ron Cunningham

conservation lands, and have even been willing to tax themselves to support local conservation land acquisition programs in many counties and municipalities.

The Florida Legislature needs to realize that environmental protection is not something that you only fund when economic times are good. Florida Forever protects services and values that we should not take for granted, and is an extremely wise and strategic use of our public dollars. Environmental protection is a core, essential value that supports a viable and sustainable economic future. We spend a lot of time and money on our built infrastructure including transportation, housing, commercial development, and other human-built structures. The Florida Legislature

continues to support such development even in situations where it is clear that we have enough or even where it may not be appropriate. In addition, Florida spends billions of dollars each of transportation infrastructure yet the majority in the Legislature claim that we cannot afford to spend \$15-20 million on the bonds needed to fund Florida Forever.

In comparison, Florida's natural and rural ecosystems provide economic and other values that surpass the value of our built infrastructure. This "green" infrastructure can be defined as our natural support system that maintains native species and ecosystem processes, sustains air and water resources, and contributes to the health and quality of life for human communities. Green infrastructure provides values called ecosystem services which include water supply and purification, flood control, carbon sequestration, storm protection, maintenance of productive soils,

fiber, food, scenic values, and nature-based recreation. The economic value of these services is extremely significant. Estimates by scientists and economists indicate that ecosystem services are worth more than \$33 trillion dollars a year globally, significantly more than the combined global gross national product. In addition, money spent protecting nature results in a return on investment of 100 to 1 in ecosystem services provided.

We were far-sighted to have started the Florida P-2000 program in 1990 and renewing that commitment with the Florida Forever program in 2000. Together these land conservation programs have been immensely successful in protecting jewels of Florida's green infrastructure that will continue to provide the valuable ecological services we depend on. However, there is much work still to be done and there are many willing sellers of critical lands for protecting Florida's wildlife, ecosystem services, and natural heritage. For many special places we may never get another chance to protect them and once gone they are gone forever.

Science makes clear that protection of natural and rural lands, ecosystem function, and the health of human communities are inextricably linked. If we want a healthy, sustainable economy and culture we

must continue our commitment to Florida Forever. And instead of shelving or cutting Florida Forever we should be talking about significantly increasing its funding based on the very real and essential long term economic and societal values conservation lands provide. Florida Forever, while costing very little compared to many other things in Florida's budget, provides a great

opportunity to ensure protection of our green infrastructure as part of a properly integrated approach to protect and provide all parts of the support system that will keep our state healthy and vibrant.

Tom Hctor

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<http://www.gainesville.com/article/20090415/NEWS/904159923/-1/SPORTS03?Title=Tom-Hctor-Florida-Forever-an-essential-investment>

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Wilton Rooks

Scenic Watch Editor