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Court thwarts Florida voters' will in conservation land-buying case

State agencies have improperly spent tax money that voters directed to land-buying

TALLAHASSEE FL – The First District Court of Appeals [today disregarded the will of a majority of Florida voters](#) again in a key conservation land-buying case.

In 2014, 75 percent of voters approved the Water & Land Conservation Amendment to the Florida Constitution (Amendment 1), which directed that a portion of state real estate taxes – about \$750 million per year - go to buy and manage conservation land.

Instead, the Legislature used accounting gimmicks to use the money from the state's Land Acquisition Trust Fund for agency overhead and other expenses, including computer monitors, Direct TV service, agriculture equipment, insurance premiums, computers, and – in one case – 1,000 ball caps for agricultural operators.

Conservationists had been seeking a legal declaration that the voter-approved constitutional restrictions on the Land Acquisition Trust Fund could not be violated, but the appeals court opinion considered only whether the misappropriated money could be refunded to the state trust fund.

“This is a disappointing result for the people of Florida, who clearly directed that their tax money go to preserving land for future generations,” said Earthjustice Attorney Alisa Coe.

Earthjustice sued the state in 2015 on behalf of **Sierra Club, St. Johns Riverkeeper, Florida Wildlife Federation, and the Environmental Confederation of Southwest Florida** when it became clear that the state was mispending tax dollars from the Land Acquisition Trust Fund. Since then, the case has worked its way through the courts.

"The ruling engenders some alarming questions: What happened to the rule of law? How can the court so easily render the will of the voters meaningless? Who is going to pay the price?" said Cris Costello, Senior Organizing Manager for Sierra Club Florida.

“This ruling turns a blind eye to the voice of the people of Florida. By prioritizing technicalities over the merits, they've undermined the very essence of democracy,” said Sarah Gledhill, President and CEO, Florida Wildlife Federation.

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