

PROTECT WATER

PRESERVE LAND

VOTE FOR BONDS • NOV. 3, 2026

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Water Quality Protection, Overdevelopment Prevention, Natural Lands Preservation, and Public Preserves General Obligation Bond Referendum

Protect Water, Preserve Land

*Protect Our Drinking Water, Bays, Rivers, Lakes and Streams
Preserve Environmentally Significant Land, Wildlife Habitat from Overdevelopment*

On Tuesday, November 3, Manatee County voters can protect our drinking water sources, the water quality of our bays, rivers, lakes, and creeks, fish and wildlife habitats, and working farms and ranches, while preserving natural areas from overdevelopment and reducing flooding by voting **FOR Bonds**.

WHAT DOES THIS REFERENDUM ACTUALLY DO:

- If approved by voters, it will continue and expand the Manatee County Environmental Lands Program by providing additional funds to acquire and protect land with the goal of:
 - Protecting drinking water sources.
 - Protecting water quality of bays, rivers, lakes and creeks, including the Manatee, Little Manatee, Braden and Myakka Rivers.
 - Protecting natural areas from overdevelopment.
 - Preserving land to provide natural floodwater storage to help reduce flooding.
 - Protecting working farms and ranches.
 - Creating and expanding public preserves.

ABOUT THE ENVIRONMENTAL LANDS PROGRAM

- Manatee County operates sixteen preserves, acquiring and protecting 29,000 acres through purchases, donations, grants, and land trust partnership over the past 40 years.
- Since 2023, Manatee County has acquired more than 300 acres of conservation land, with more expected in September 2026.



- The program has protected an **additional 1,483 acres** of working rural lands and habitat through conservation easements.
- Created **2** new county preserves.
- Expanded **4** existing preserves and **1** county park
 - Notable properties include: [Crooked River Preserve](#), [Emerson Point Expansion](#), [Triple Oak Preserve](#)

Several years ago, a grassroots effort, led by individuals and organizations throughout the region, resulted in the successful 2020 Conservation and Parks Projects Referendum, which was approved by more than 70% of Manatee County voters. It levied a 0.15 mill ad valorem tax and authorized up to \$50,000,000 in general obligation bonds. Those bond funds have **now** been spent or committed.

Continuing the program requires additional bonds and millage to acquire more land and ensure that conservation efforts keep pace with the rapid rate of development in Manatee County.

BENEFITS OF THE REFERENDUM & FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Will this protect our drinking water?

- **Yes.** Nothing is more important than having clean water to drink. This referendum purchases land to protect drinking water quality by preventing runoff and toxic chemicals from flowing into Manatee County's water supply.

Will this protect the water quality of our bays, rivers, lakes, and creeks?

- **Yes.** Protecting the land along the Manatee, Little Manatee, Braden and Myakka Rivers keeps runoff and pollution out of the waterways that flow to our bays.

How will this address flooding?

- This referendum provides funds to acquire land for natural protection from flooding by saving it for natural flood storage. Conserving coastal areas that buffer against storms, and the forests and wetlands that naturally absorb floodwaters, reduces inundation risk to homeowners and local businesses. The program looks to protect land near our coasts and rivers, as well as inland, to mitigate flooding from rain.

Why is now the right time to invest in land conservation?

- The window is closing. Manatee County is growing quickly, land prices are rising dramatically, and the amount of available natural land is dwindling rapidly. This referendum permits us to protect the last remaining natural areas and wildlife habitats before they are lost forever to development — so future generations can enjoy Manatee County the same way we do.



Will I be able to visit and use these properties?

- **Yes.** Creating and expanding public preserves is one of the purposes written into this referendum. There will be opportunities for activities like hiking, biking, paddling, fishing, horseback riding, camping, picnicking, and outdoor education programs.

How does this help farms and ranches?

- Manatee County works with willing farmers and ranchers to permanently protect their land from development. Landowners receive funds to keep it in agricultural use. This is entirely voluntary; land is kept in private hands while ensuring it cannot be developed. Already 1,483 acres of working rural lands are protected.

Isn't growth going to happen no matter what we do?

- Growth is inevitable. The question is whether the people of Manatee County will have any say in what gets protected and how it is done. This referendum gives residents an opportunity to make a difference.

Why use a bond vs. acquiring land as funds become available?

- Land often only becomes available once. With land prices rising significantly and the number of natural lands declining swiftly, waiting and saving up often means paying more later — or losing the property altogether. By using bonds and acting now, Manatee County secures land at today's prices and avoids higher future costs.

We approved conservation funding in 2020 – why are we being asked again?

- In 2020, more than 70% of Manatee County voters approved conservation funding, and the program has protected more than 300 acres and an additional 1,483 acres of working rural lands and habitats through conservation easements, while attracting millions in outside dollars. That funding is now almost entirely exhausted. Meanwhile, development has not slowed. This measure keeps the program going, which is the only way the county can continue to protect and preserve land.

ACCOUNTABILITY

How are properties selected for acquisition?

- Property owners who want to sell voluntarily nominate their land, and each property is evaluated against the County's Natural Resource Value Criteria. The citizens' advisory committee (ELMAC) reviews candidates and advises the County Commission, which makes the final decision in an open, public meeting. No land is acquired without the owner's and Board of County Commissioners' approval.

Will there be full public disclosure of how the money is spent?

- **Yes.** There will be full public disclosure of project spending. All meetings reviewing and nominating properties are open to the public.



Will the funds be audited?

- **Yes.** There will be an annual public audit of how the funds are spent — a requirement written into the ballot language itself.

Can the funds be used for anything other than land conservation?

- **No.** The funds from this referendum can **ONLY** be used to acquire, manage, and improve conservation land and **NOTHING** else.

Will local dollars be matched with other funding?

- **Yes.** The funds from this referendum will be matched with federal, state, and private funds — protecting more land at a lower cost to Manatee County taxpayers. Since 2023, the county has brought in \$6.5 million in dollars in grant funding to further land acquisition and protection efforts.

Is there citizen oversight?

- **Yes.** A citizens' advisory committee — the Environmental Lands Management and Acquisition Committee (ELMAC) guides the County Commission in their decision-making, reviewing candidate properties in an open, public process.

Can land be taken from property owners?

- **No.** Manatee County purchases land only from willing sellers.

COST

What will this cost me?

To acquire and preserve land to protect drinking water, water quality, wildlife habitats, working farms, and create public preserves, the measure authorizes an ad valorem tax of **no more than 0.16 mills** and the issuance of **up to \$75 million in bonds, maturing within 20 years.**

For the median Manatee County homesteaded property, that means about **\$34 a year, or \$2.83 a month**, a small price to pay to protect our community and preserve its natural lands.

Amendment 3

How would Amendment 3 affect this conservation funding?

It doesn't. Amendment 3 is a separate, statewide question about the homestead exemption. This referendum is a local Manatee County question that creates dedicated conservation funding — money that can **ONLY** be used for land conservation and **NOTHING** else. Both are on your November ballot, but they are separate decisions.



If Amendment 3 passes, will this cost me more?

No.

Could Amendment 3 stop this program?

No. Amendment 3 does not take natural resource protection or bond debt service off the list of what property taxes may fund. Manatee County keeps full authority to acquire and protect conservation land.

VOTING & THE ELECTION

What exactly will I see on my ballot?

The question will appear as:

**WATER QUALITY PROTECTION, OVERDEVELOPMENT PREVENTION, NATURAL LANDS PRESERVATION,
AND PUBLIC PRESERVES GENERAL OBLIGATION BOND REFERENDUM**

To acquire, improve, maintain, and contribute to the acquisition of lands and other property interests to protect drinking water sources, water quality, wildlife habitat, natural and environmentally sensitive lands from overdevelopment and provide public preserves, shall Manatee County levy an additional 0.16 mill ad valorem tax and issue general obligation bonds not exceeding \$75,000,000, maturing within 20 years, bearing interest not exceeding the legal rate, payable from ad valorem taxes, and provide annual public audits?

FOR BONDS _____

AGAINST BONDS _____

Where on the ballot will I find it?

Near the bottom or last page of your ballot. It will be after statewide and local candidate races. You can check your sample ballot at:

<https://www.votemanatee.gov/sample-ballots/>

When is the election?

Tuesday, November 3, 2026. Polls are open 7:00 am to 7:00 pm.

What is the deadline to register to vote?

Monday, October 5, 2026.

When is early voting?

Monday, October 19 through Sunday, November 1, 2026, 8:30 am to 6:00 pm daily.

See more at: <https://www.votemanatee.gov/early-voting/>



How do I vote by mail?

Request your ballot from the Supervisor of Elections by 5:00 pm on Thursday, October 22, 2026. Completed ballots must be received by 7:00 pm on Tuesday, November 3. Learn more at: <https://www.votemanatee.gov/about-vote-by-mail/>

On Tuesday, November 3

PROTECT WATER, PRESERVE LAND
Vote FOR Bonds