

Please Vote “No” on the “Right to Fish and Hunt” Amendment

The Lake County Conservation Council, Inc. urges Floridians to vote “No” this fall on the proposed “Right to Fish and Hunt” amendment to our State Constitution. According to the Florida Legislature, this amendment would “preserve forever fishing and hunting, including by the use of traditional methods, as a public right and preferred means of responsibly managing and controlling fish and wildlife.”

At present, our Florida Constitution preserves many rights, including the right to bear arms, and creates the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, but it does not create a right to fish and hunt. Creating such a constitutional right is a bad idea for three reasons.

First, the language of the proposed “Right to Fish and Hunt” amendment is very broad and therefore difficult to interpret. Does “public right” mean that hunters can pursue their quarry across protected conservation lands and across private property? Will foreign ships have the right to fish in Florida’s rivers? Does “use of traditional methods” include methods that are now illegal, such as the use of gill nets? Does declaring that fishing and hunting are the “preferred means of responsibly managing and controlling fish and wildlife” weaken the ability of the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission to implement other solutions, such as creating wildlife corridors?

Second, Floridians already have the right to fish and hunt. Florida statute 379.104 provides:

The Legislature recognizes that hunting, fishing, and the taking of game are a valued part of the cultural heritage of Florida and should be forever preserved for Floridians. The Legislature further recognizes that these activities play an important part in the state’s economy and in the conservation, preservation, and management of the state’s natural areas and resources. Therefore, the Legislature intends that the citizens of Florida have a right to hunt, fish, and take game, subject to the regulations and restrictions prescribed by general law and by s. 9, Art. IV of the State Constitution.

Third, inserting a right to fish and hunt into our State Constitution is problematic. Our Florida Constitution should guarantee our most important civil rights. As our human population increases and our animal population decreases, the wisdom of having a “forever right” to fish and hunt may diminish. The need to protect human safety and to preserve animal species could eventually outweigh the economic benefit and the recreational value of hunting and fishing in certain locations, at certain times, and under certain circumstances. If that day comes, a future Florida Legislature should not be limited in its response to a crisis by an unnecessary constitutional provision that is very difficult to change.

Please vote "No" on the proposed "Right to Fish and Hunt" amendment this fall. It will appear as amendment 2 on your ballot.