

Symbols of Florida

The State Seal

The elements and basic design instructions for Florida's State Seal were established by the Legislature in 1868 as follows:

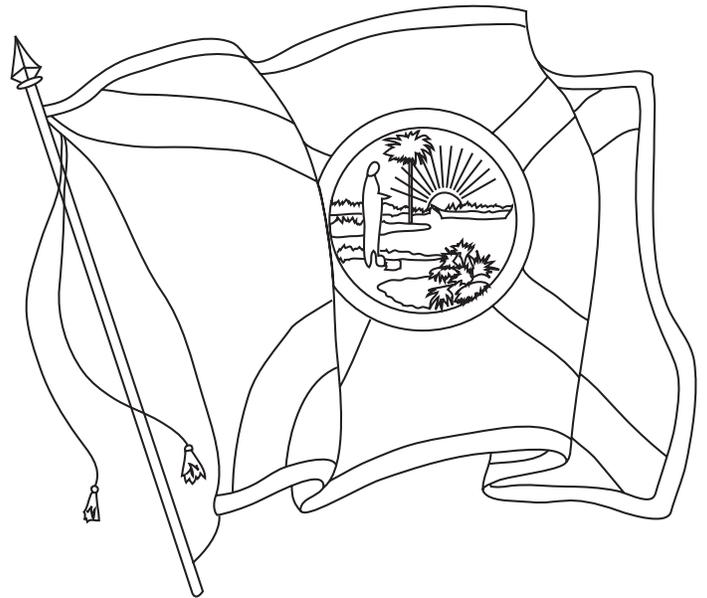
“That a Seal of the size of the American silver dollar, having in the center thereof a view of the sun’s rays over a high land in the distance, a cocoa tree, a steamboat on water, and an Indian female scattering flowers in the foreground, encircled by the words, ‘Great Seal of the State of Florida: In God We Trust’, be and the same is hereby adopted as the Great Seal of the State of Florida.”

The Great Seal of the State of Florida that is used today was revised in 1985. Previous State Seals had errors that have been corrected. The revised Seal doesn’t have a background of mountains in Florida. It has a Seminole Indian woman rather than a Western Plains Indian. The steamboat is more accurate. The cocoa palm has been changed to a sabal palm, the state tree.

The State Flag

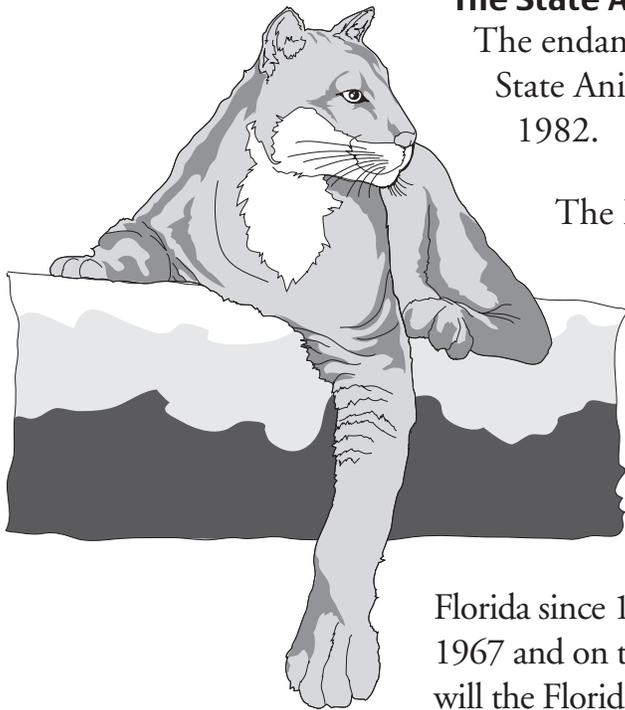
Many flags have flown over Florida since Juan Ponce de León landed in 1513. Among them have been flags of five nations: Spain, France, Great Britain, the Confederate States of America, and the United States.

Between 1868 and 1900, Florida’s state flag consisted of a white field with the state seal in the center. During the late 1890s, Governor Francis Fleming suggested that a red cross be added, so that the banner did not appear to be a flag of truce or surrender when hanging still on a flagpole.



A joint resolution of the legislature in 1899, approved by state voters in 1900, made our current State Flag the official banner of Florida. The official specifications for the flag state that:

“the State Flag shall conform with standard commercial sizes and be of the following portions and descriptions: The seal of the state, in diameter one-half the hoist, shall occupy the center of a white ground. Red bars, in width one-fifth the hoist, shall extend from each corner towards the center, to the outer rim of the seal.”



The State Animal

The endangered Florida Panther (*Felis concolor coryi*) became the State Animal following a state-wide vote of school students in 1982.

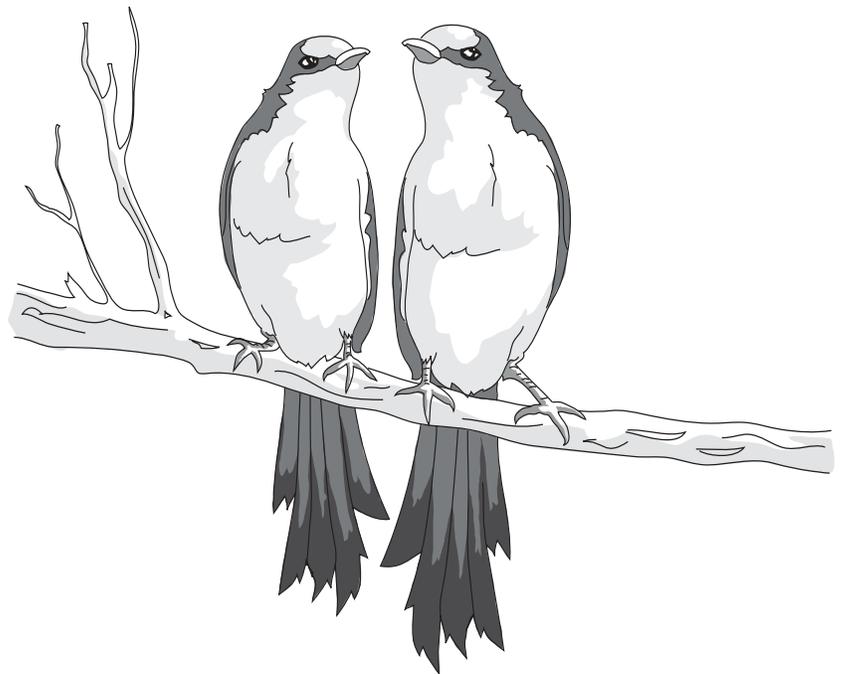
The Florida panther is a large (six feet or longer), long-tailed, pale brown cat. Its habitat is usually the same as that of the white-tailed deer, its main food. Panthers have been persecuted out of fear and misunderstanding of the role these large predators play in the natural ecosystem. Human population growth, however, has been the main threat to the panther.

The panther has been protected from legal hunting in Florida since 1958. It has been on the federal endangered species list since 1967 and on the state's endangered list since 1973. Only with support will the Florida panther remain a part of our unique wildlife community.

The State Bird

The 1927 legislative session designated the mockingbird as the Florida State Bird. The common mockingbird (*Mimus polyglottos*) is a superb songbird and mimic. Mimic means that it imitates (mocks) the songs of other birds. Its own song is pleasant, varied, and repetitive. Often it will sing all night long, especially in bright springtime moonlight.

Mockingbirds are about 10" in length, with a 15" wingspan. They have grayish upper portions, white undersides, and white patches on the tail and wings. The females have slightly less whiteness.



The male and female work together to make the nest. It is a bulky, open cup of grass, twigs, and roots carelessly arranged in a dense tree or bush. The 3-6 eggs per nest are pale blue-greenish with brown spots. This year-round Florida resident is known for its fierce defense of the family nest.

The State Flower

The orange blossom was chosen to be the State Flower by the 1909 Legislature. It is one of the most fragrant flowers in Florida. Millions of these white flowers perfume the air throughout central and south Florida during orange blossom time. The citrus crop, important to the economy of Florida, follows the flowering.

The State Tree

The 1953 Legislature designated the sabal palm as the State Tree. This palm is the most widely distributed palm tree in the state. It possesses a majesty that sets it apart from other trees. It grows in almost any soil and has many uses including food and medicine. It is also used widely for landscaping because of its universal popularity. The sabal palm is on the State Seal.

The State Song

In 1935, “The Suwannee River” was adopted as the official state song. It replaced “*Florida, My Florida*” adopted as the State Song in 1913.

The Suwannee River flows south from the Okefenokee Swamp in Georgia to the Gulf of Mexico in Florida. It separates the Florida panhandle from the rest of the state.

Stephen Foster, one of America’s best-loved songwriters wrote “*The Suwannee River (Old Folks at Home)*” in 1851. He wrote about 200 songs during his career. A memorial center at White Springs, Florida honors Foster.

