



Florida Conservation Voters

# Capitol Report 2017



## Dear Conservation Voter,

The Florida Legislature is a proving ground for our elected officials. It's their chance to transform campaign promises into action. It's a place where environmental heroes are made.

FCV's work at the Capitol plays an essential role in the conservation voter movement's cycle of accountability. For years, our elected officials have voted for bad bills in Tallahassee, then spun their record on the campaign trail to make themselves look like environmental heroes.

Their actions on fracking provide an excellent example. In 2016, the Florida Legislature was perilously close to passing the most egregious pro-fracking bill our state had ever seen. This bill passed easily through the Florida House of Representatives, led by then-**Majority Leader Dana Young (R-Tampa)**.

FCV made fracking and our legislators' actions on this bad bill the core issue during the state House and Senate elections of 2016. And then, something remarkable happened.

This year as a freshman senator, Sen. Young not only sponsored a statewide fracking ban, but she championed this legislation in committee. Sen. Young's ban, and **Rep. Mike Miller's (R-Orlando)** identical bill in the House, garnered widespread bipartisan support in both chambers.

This kind of change is what FCV seeks when we work together to hold politicians accountable for their actions on the environment. Our goal is to bring a conservation ethic back to state politics and ensure that our leaders craft policies that protect Florida's environment, not special interests.

### **And we can't do it without your support.**

I invite you to take a look at some of our wins this session. In the case of fracking, we didn't make it to the finish line, but we're closer to it now than we've ever been before. We hope you'll continue on this journey with us to make conservation not just the right thing to do, but the politically smart thing to do.



Florida's future is in your hands,



Alik Moncrief  
Executive Director  
Florida Conservation Voters

## Making the Sunshine State the Solar State

For Florida to compete and thrive in the 21st Century, our state must begin building a green tech economy and reducing carbon pollution. Harnessing the power of the sun here in the Sunshine State is key to achieving these goals quickly. Pro-solar policies will bring thousands of high-paying, skilled labor jobs to our state and give Floridians energy independence from dirty fossil fuels.

Voters are already two steps ahead of the Florida Legislature. In August, millions supported Amendment

4 to make it more affordable for businesses and utilities to invest in solar.

The continuing battle over the Water and Land Conservation Amendment serves as a reminder that we cannot take implementation of even the most popular constitutional amendments for granted. At the beginning of this legislative session, **Sen. Jeff Brandes (R-St. Petersburg)** and **Rep. Ray Rodrigues (R-Ft. Myers)** offered conflicting bills on Amendment 4, signaling that getting a pro-solar implementing bill

wouldn't be a cake walk.

Sen. Brandes' version of the bill was short and simple, mirroring Amendment 4 and removing property tax penalties on solar panels installed by businesses and utilities. Rep. Rodrigues' bill, on the other hand, included onerous and duplicative regulations that would put a damper on Florida's small but growing solar industry.

We worked with our allies to merge these conflicting bills to meet the intent of solar-hungry voters. **FCV's Alik Moncrief** testified in committee and met with legislators to urge the necessary changes.

Our work paid off. During the last week of session, both sponsors agreed to a clean implementing bill that ultimately passed unanimously in both chambers. While much work on energy policy remains to be done, Senate Bill 90 is a significant policy shift that will begin to open Florida's electricity market to more solar jobs, lower solar energy costs, and put Florida on track to become a leader in the nation's clean energy revolution.



FCV's Alik Moncrief testifies in committee in front of House Majority Leader Ray Rodrigues (R-Ft. Myers) on behalf of good solar policy.

## Fighting to Ban Fracking in Florida

Fracking is not a new issue at the Capitol. The oil and gas industry has been persistently pushing pro-fracking legislation that would put our drinking water at serious risk. But this time, we put them on the defensive.

FCV is non-partisan because we believe that a clean and healthy environment is a core value that unites all Floridians. This legislative session, new fracking ban bills gave us hope that we are not alone in that belief.

At the center of efforts to ban fracking were **Sen. Dana Young (R-Tampa)**, **Rep. Mike Miller (R-Orlando)**, **Sen. Gary Farmer (D-Ft. Lauderdale)** and **Rep. Evan Jenne (D-Hollywood)**, who sponsored legislation to ban fracking once and for all. They deserve high praise for their advocacy and leadership, which paved the way for members of both parties and both chambers to stand up for a statewide fracking ban.

While they cleared the path, FCV successfully rallied thousands of citizens to ask their legislators to co-sponsor the fracking ban—and nearly half the Senate listened! Sen. Young's bill managed to move through its first committee stop—that was the first time in Florida's history that a fracking ban has passed in *any* committee.

Unfortunately, the bills did not make it to a final vote. But thanks to our efforts and those of our partners in the **Floridians Against Fracking Coalition**, we now have a solid foundation to build upon for next year.

Fracking was also the focus of a utility-backed bill sponsored by **Sen. Aaron Bean (R-Jacksonville)** and **Rep. Jason Brodeur (R-Sanford)**. This legislation would have allowed utilities that rely heavily on fracked gas to charge customers for speculative fracking ventures outside Florida.

FCV fought this bill because it would have tightened the grip that fracked gas already has on Florida. The bill was designed to protect monopoly utility profits, locking in fracked gas as our primary energy source, and crowding out opportunities to shift our energy policy towards the sun. As a state that is on the front lines of climate change, we must promote policies that *reduce our carbon pollution*, not increase it.

**FCV's Alik Moncrief** testified in committee against this bad bill and lobbied members to vote no. The good news is that this bill died before making it to a final vote in either chamber.

# Defending the Conservation Amendment

In 2014, Florida voters overwhelmingly stood up for our environment by approving the Water and Land Conservation Amendment. From the Keys to the Panhandle, citizens sent a clear message to the Legislature: protect our remaining natural areas from bulldozers and build more neighborhood parks for our families.

This was a year of mixed results for funding from the Land Acquisition Trust Fund. Because of the Water and Land Conservation Amendment, Everglades restoration efforts will receive a much-needed stream of **\$155.4 million**. Advocates for constructing a water storage reservoir south of Lake Okeechobee saw a big win with the passage of **Senate President Joe Negron's (R-Palm City) Senate Bill 10**. This bill authorizes an additional **\$64 million annually** beginning in 2018 for the reservoir and requires planning to begin by August 1, 2017.

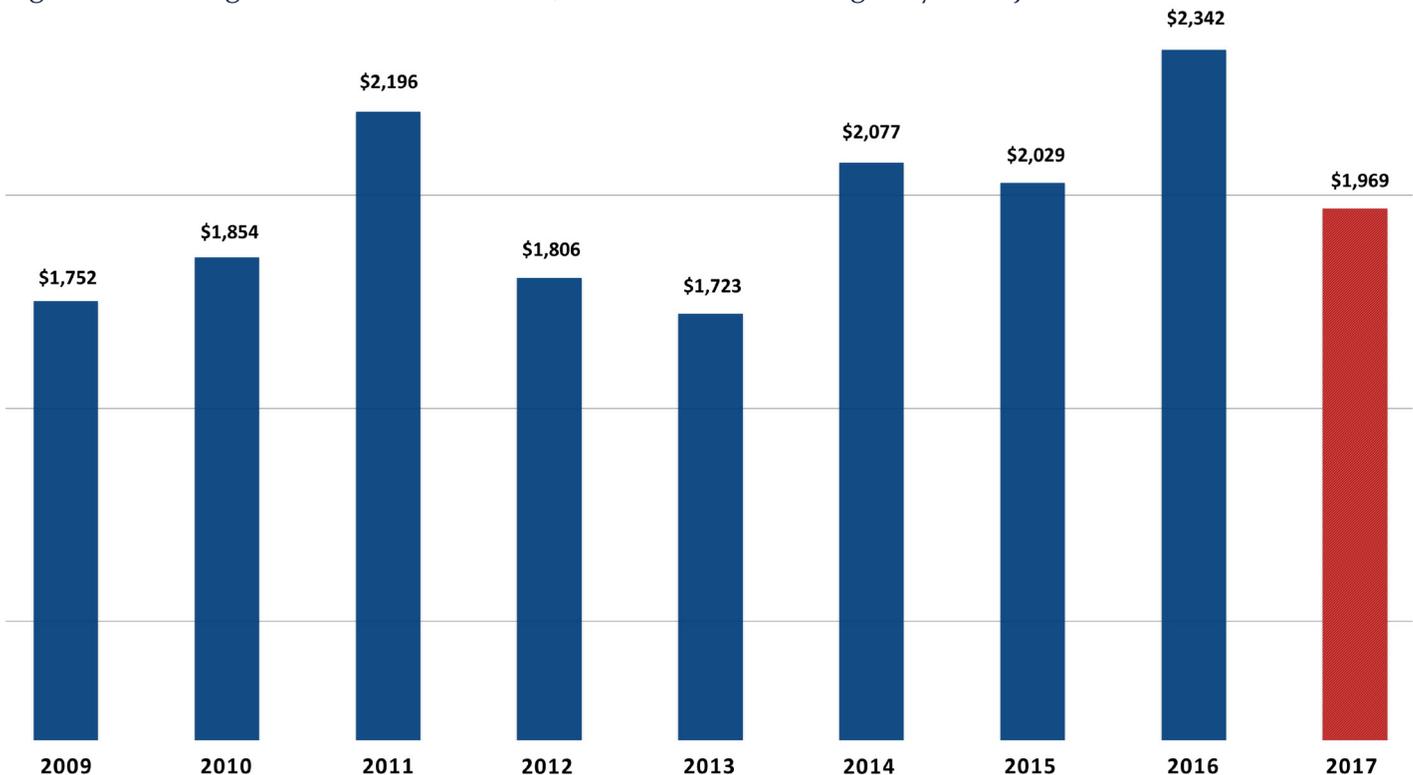
But the road to funding for the southern reservoir was rocky. At one point the bill threatened to dismantle the state's prized land conservation program Florida Forever. FCV quickly stepped into action, providing significant feedback to Senate staff and members on how to best achieve both increased water storage for the Everglades and our estuaries, without

changing statewide conservation programs.

We succeeded in keeping the Florida Forever program intact, but in the end, lawmakers decided not to fund any new land acquisition this year. In a tightly controlled and secretive budget process, **House Speaker Richard Corcoran (R-Lutz), Senate President Joe Negron (R-Palm City)**, and House and Senate Appropriations leaders *zeroed out funding* to acquire important conservation lands and neighborhood parks, ignoring the fundamental purpose and intent of the Water and Land Conservation Amendment. Allocating \$10 million for the Rural and Family Lands conservation easement program was hardly enough salve to heal that wound.

We are grateful to **Representatives Matt Caldwell (R-Lehigh Acres), Thad Altman (R-Melbourne), Lorraine Ausley (D-Tallahassee), and Ben Diamond (D-St. Petersburg)** for voicing strong concerns about the lack of conservation spending on the House floor.

Defending the intent of the millions of voters who supported the Water and Land Conservation Amendment will always be at the core of Florida Conservation Voters' mission. We will not give up on protecting Florida's water and land legacy, and are counting on you to join us.



ENVIRONMENTAL SPENDING SINCE 2009  
COMPARED TO 2017 GENERAL APPROPRIATIONS ACT  
(IN MILLIONS)