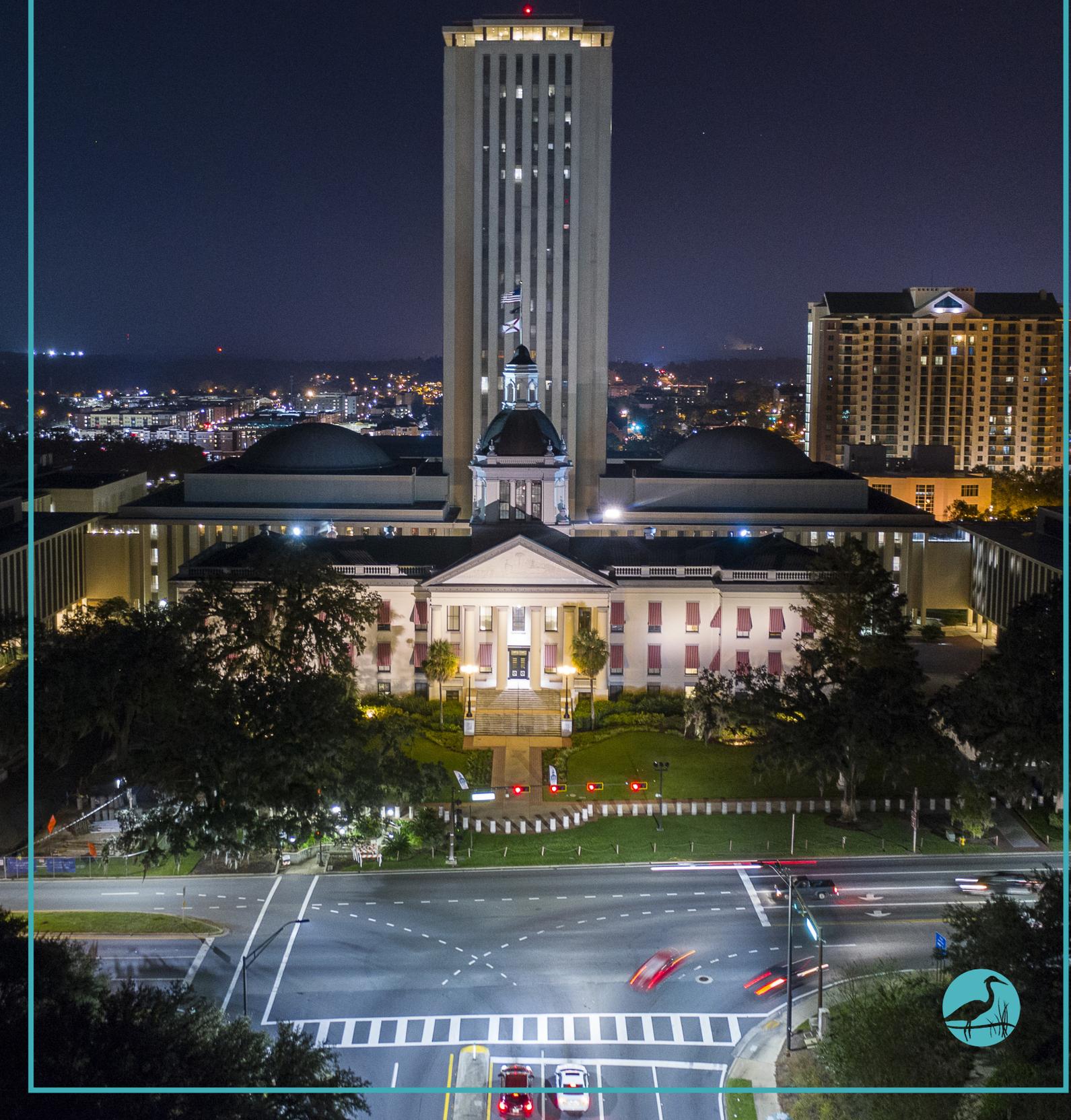


FLORIDA CONSERVATION VOTERS

2019 LEGISLATIVE REPORT



Dear Conservation Voter,

Floridians have been through a lot over the past year: a coastal water crisis that plagued our state for months, a Category 5 hurricane that devastated the Panhandle, and a closely-watched election that changed the tone at the Capitol, just to name a few. Thanks to you, there is now a renewed sense of urgency in Tallahassee to protect and defend our state's fragile environment.

But, old habits die hard, especially in the Florida Legislature. Leaders in the Florida House and Senate missed their opportunity this year to strengthen our environmental laws, failing to pass a single piece of legislation (outside of the budget) to bring more clean, renewable energy to Florida or improve our wetlands, waterways, and public lands.

To say we are disappointed would be an understatement. But, the Conservation Voter Movement does not stop. We aren't swayed by the day to day setbacks or gains. We are in this for the long-haul, and our progress is measured over years.

The most important thing you can do right now is to stay engaged with this process. I encourage you to review our 2019 Legislative Report on the following pages. I think you will find that FCV's work is more important, empowering, and relevant than ever before.

Thank you for all that you do for Florida.



A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Alik Moncrief". The signature is stylized and includes a long horizontal flourish at the end.

Alik Moncrief
Executive Director
aliki@fcvoters.org

THE BUDGET

The good news from this session is that the state budget reflects another record year for funding Everglades restoration and water quality projects up and down the coast. Much of this funding initially was made available by the voters who approved the 2014 Water & Land Conservation Amendment. This progress would not have been possible without your votes and your advocacy on behalf of our environment.

The bad news: unfortunately, the legislature has, once again, severely underfunded our state's most-important suite of land conservation programs, which is commonly referred to as Florida Forever. Leadership decided to spend only \$33 million on this program and limited funding so that rural and family lands and local parks received zero dollars. This year's amount is a far cry from the \$300 million this program received for decades. It is also well short of both last year's \$100 million appropriation and Governor Ron DeSantis' budget recommendation this year of \$100 million.

Florida State Parks also took a hit on funding this year. Despite suffering extreme damage in the Panhandle from the intense winds of Hurricane Michael, our world-renowned park system only received \$31 million of the \$50 million requested by Governor DeSantis and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection.

As a percent of the total state budget, this year's environmental funding is only 0.003% more than last year. Anyway you look at it, this year was a monumental disappointment considering the growing environmental needs of our state.

CLIMATE AND CLEAN ENERGY

Climate change is the single biggest environmental threat facing Florida and our living planet. Despite the immense needs of our state, the 2019 Florida Legislature did not make much progress when it comes to reducing our reliance on dirty fossil fuels. But that doesn't mean we are without legislators who care. Members in both chambers sponsored or fought for good, clean energy legislation.

KEY ISSUE: FRACKING

Last summer, something happened in Florida that has never happened before: the gubernatorial candidates from both major parties agreed that banning fracking was in the best interest of our state. To be clear, bold statements like this don't just happen out of the blue. Conservation voters like you made this an electoral issue that couldn't be ignored any longer. Unfortunately, the legislature didn't get that memo.

Although Senator Bill Montford (D-Tallahassee), Senator Linda Stewart (D-Orlando), and Rep. Heather Fitzenhagen (R-Ft. Myers) all brought good legislation that would completely ban fracking in Florida, House and Senate leadership decided they wanted to sponsor other bills that only partially banned the practice in Florida.

There are three main types of fracking: hydraulic fracturing, acid fracturing, and matrix acidizing. Because of Florida's unique geologic makeup, matrix acidizing is the most likely form of fracking that oil and gas exploration companies would use in Florida. Matrix acidizing dissolves underground rock formations to release oil and gas deposits, as opposed to "fracturing" the rock. The leadership bills deliberately left out matrix acidizing.

Every piece of legislation that we have supported over the years has included all three types of fracking. The Floridians Against Fracking Coalition, of which FCV is on the Steering Committee, publicly asked Governor Ron DeSantis to back up his campaign pledge with a statement in support of the good bills. He declined to do so before the legislative session ended. None of the good fracking bills made it through the legislature to his desk. FCV remains hopeful that the good bills will be refiled next year.

GOOD BILLS BLOCKED BY LEADERSHIP

Florida Climate and Resiliency Research Program (HB 1369) - Rep. Ben Diamond (D-St. Petersburg)

Public Financing of Construction Projects (SB 78/HB 169) - Sen. Jose Javier Rodriguez (D-Miami)/Rep. Javier Fernandez (D-Miami)

Heat Illness Prevention (HB 1285/SB 1538) - Rep. Carlos Guillermo Smith (D-Orlando)/Sen. Victor Torres (D-Kissimmee)

Community Solar Program (SB 1156) - Sen. Lori Berman (D-Boynton Beach)

State Renewable Energy Goals (HB 1291) - Rep. Anna Eskamani (D-Orlando)



Rep. Diamond



Sen. Rodriguez



Rep. Guillermo Smith



Sen. Berman



Rep. Eskamani

PUBLIC LANDS AND NATURAL AREAS

Florida's natural lands are some of the most beautiful in the world and also some of the most endangered. Development pressures, pollution, and invasive species threaten our pristine natural lands and the wildlife that rely on them for survival. Florida's drinking water also depends on the adequate protection and management of natural lands, as wetlands and other areas are vital for aquifer recharge.

KEY ISSUE: BILLIONAIRE BOULEVARD BOONDOGGLE

In the final week of session, the legislature passed a bill that could result in the largest expansion of Florida's highway system since the 1950s. The bill, touted as the number one priority of Senate President Bill Galvano (R-Bradenton), creates a new program within the Department of Transportation that will study the feasibility of creating three new, massive toll road highways through the heart of Florida springs country and our last remaining rural and natural lands.

But, the bill is not just a study. Hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars are also included in the bill to create a so-called "nest egg" to help pay for the eventual construction of the highways. This money comes from general revenue: the same pot of money that funds our schools, healthcare, and every other major section of the budget. The plan also includes construction of utilities, sewer connections, and even broadband internet, which are precisely the types of infrastructure needed for unrestricted urban sprawl into our most rural counties where wetlands, forests, and other natural systems remain intact and undisturbed by development.

Some of the most rural and vital natural areas of Florida have been targeted for construction of the highways. Focus areas include extending the Suncoast Parkway from Hernando County on the Gulf Coast north to the Georgia state border (where it will dead-end), connecting the Suncoast Parkway to the northern terminus of the Florida Turnpike (where it meets I-75), and creating the Heartland Parkway from I-4 in Central Florida south to the Naples area.

Media outlets have rightly pointed out that the main financial benefactors of this highways plan would be billionaire landowners (who are also mega-political donors), asphalt and highway construction lobbying groups, and the Florida Chamber of Commerce.

Thank you to Representatives Margaret Good (D-Sarasota), Evan Jenne (D-Hollywood), and Bobby DuBose (D-Ft. Lauderdale), for sponsoring amendments that would have helped to protect our environment and made the highways plan better. Unfortunately, the majority party did not allow any of them to pass. A special thank you is in order for Rep. Delores Hogan Johnson (D-Ft. Pierce) and Rep. Anna Eskamani (D-Orlando) for their impassioned speeches on the floor of the House in defense of our beautiful environment and, specifically, our amazing gopher tortoises.

GOOD BILLS BLOCKED BY LEADERSHIP

Land Acquisition Trust Fund (SB 944/HB 1341) - Sen. Linda Stewart/Sen. Darryl Rouson/Rep. Lorraine Ausley



Denotes FCV Endorsed Candidate

*Due to space constraints, we decided to focus this report only on a small number of bills and legislators.

**For information on any bill mentioned in this report, please visit www.flsenate.gov and enter the bill number in the query box on the top of the page.



Rep. Ausley



Sen. Stewart



Sen. Rouson

Democracy isn't a spectator sport; it requires participation for it to work. And when more people vote, the environment wins. As such, increasing voter turnout, encouraging citizen participation in the political process, and ensuring Floridians have fair election laws that work for everyone are key components of our work and the Conservation Voter Movement. However, legislators regularly sponsor bills that would limit, restrict, or hinder many of the democratic principles we hold most dear. It's our job to defend them.

KEY ISSUE: ANTI-VOTER INITIATIVE BILLS

If the 2014 Water and Land Conservation Amendment taught us anything, it's that the Legislature may not like when Florida's voters exercise their constitutional rights and pass a citizens initiative. The 2019 Florida Legislature leaves no doubt.

Legislators sponsored a multitude of bills this year that would make it much more difficult or practically impossible for citizens to bring a question to the ballot and have it approved. From raising the amendment approval threshold to 66% to making it a criminal act to compensate petition signature gatherers, there was no shortage of attempts to weaken or restrict our constitutional rights.

The Florida Constitution couldn't be more clear: the right to propose ballot questions for voter approval is reserved to the people. As one of the few non-profit organizations in Florida with direct experience managing a statewide initiative campaign, FCV assumed a leading role in opposing these bills. We are proud to report that thousands of FCV members, supporters, and allies joined our campaign to protect our democracy.

For a moment, it looked like our campaign to defeat this bad package of anti-voter initiative bills was going to be successful. But, with less than 24 hours before the end of session, Rep. Jamie Grant (R-Tampa) amended a seemingly-unrelated bill to incorporate the worst elements of the worst anti-voter initiative bill.

Despite a valiant effort from many House and Senate Democrats to lessen the impact of this proposal, the bad amendment and bill passed both chambers and will now head to the Governor's desk.

Citizens must stand united when the Legislature threatens our Constitutional rights. We were proud to work with so many of our allied organizations across the state in this fight, including the AFL-CIO, SEIU, ACLU, Southern Poverty Law Center, New Florida Majority, Organize Florida, America Votes, and more.

GOOD BILLS BLOCKED BY LEADERSHIP

Campaign Finance (SB 396/HB 55) - Sen. Gary Farmer (D-Ft. Lauderdale)/Rep. Evan Jenne (D-Hollywood)

Elections (HB 1365) - Rep. Geraldine Thompson (D-Orlando)

Voter Registration (SB 1760) - Sen. Annette Taddeo (D-Miami)



Sen. Farmer



Rep. Jenne



Rep. Thompson



Sen. Taddeo

If clean water is the essence of life, dirty water is its destruction. In Florida, this couldn't be more true. Over 90% of Floridians rely on underground sources for their drinking water. And our economy is intrinsically tied to the health of our coastal waters. Year after year, algae and bacteria blooms, altered salinity levels of our estuaries, and the overpumping of our aquifers threaten our quality of life and Florida's future.

KEY ISSUE: ALL WATER TALK, NO WATER ACTION

Last summer's red tide and blue-green algae explosion was a blunt wake-up call to voters, tourists, business owners, and our elected officials. Ron DeSantis made tackling Florida's water quality problems an essential element of his campaign for Governor. However, it seems his promises to take on polluters were not honored by Florida's legislative leadership, who failed to pass any meaningful water protections this year.

Members in both the House and Senate sponsored bills to reduce fertilizer runoff, manage stormwater, regulate septic tanks, and eliminate the environmental impact of biosolids on our water. For all of the hand-wringing over the state of our waters, not one of these good water bills made it to final passage.

Plastic pollution plagues oceans around the globe. Sadly, much of this plastic is a result of single-use items, like plastic straws, utensils, and bags. Because of Florida's unique relationship with our coastline (and the fact that we are surrounded on three sides by water), it makes sense that some coastal communities are taking action to ban some of the most-common plastic pollution items found in our oceans and on our beaches. Unfortunately, as more communities reign in plastic pollution, the Florida Legislature passed a moratorium prohibiting any local government from banning these items in their town.

Finally, lead particles in our drinking water are also a severe threat, especially when that drinking water is coming out of a public school water fountain. Senator Janet Cruz (D-Tampa) sponsored a good bill this year to monitor all sources of drinking water in schools for lead contamination, but that too failed to reach a final vote in either chamber. We hope to see many of these good bills return next session.

GOOD BILLS BLOCKED BY LEADERSHIP

Stormwater Management Systems (SB 1344/HB 1343) - Rep. Margaret Good (D-Sarasota)/Sen. Janet Cruz (D-Tampa)

Drinking Water in Public Schools (SB 66/HB 545) - Sen. Janet Cruz (D-Tampa)/Rep. Evan Jenne (D-Hollywood)

Onsite Sewage Treatment and Disposal Systems (SB 214/HB 85) - Sen. Joe Gruters (R-Sarasota)/Rep. Will Robinson (R-Bradenton)/Rep. Mike Caruso (R-Boca Raton)

Water Quality Improvements (SB 216/HB 141) Sen. Joe Gruters (R-Sarasota)/Rep. Randy Fine (R-Palm Bay)

Biosolids Management (SB 1278/ HB 405) - Sen. Debbie Mayfield (R-Melbourne) Rep. Erin Grall (R-Vero Beach)



Rep. Good



Sen. Cruz



Rep. Robinson



Sen. Mayfield



Rep. Grall