



Florida Conservation Voters

# 2020 LEGISLATIVE REPORT



Dear Conservation Voter,

Just over five years ago, I gathered with conservation partners at an Election Night watch party, eagerly awaiting the results of the vote on Amendment 1—the Water and Land Conservation Amendment. Thanks to people like you, we won that election and changed Florida’s Constitution to dedicate \$20 billion to conserving water and land through 2035. But that victory didn’t mean the fight was over. **In many ways, our job was just beginning.** Engaging people in our democracy to protect our environment and healthy communities for everyone is forever work.

The following report is proof that Conservation Voters like you are changing the world for the better. We could not be more proud of our central role in connecting thousands of Floridians with their elected officials this Legislative Session. We advocated for our conservation lands and water protections, climate action and renewable energy, direct democracy... and made a difference. **Together, we are building community power to protect our living planet and our quality of life, and in these uncertain times, that endeavor could not be more urgent.**

I hope that you and your loved ones are safe from the public health crisis that is disrupting so many lives around the world. In reviewing the report of the 2020 Florida Legislative Session that follows, I hope that you will be proud of what we have been able to accomplish together. No doubt, you will also see that we still have a lot of work to do. The climate crisis will not stop until our lawmakers make it a priority, and it is up to us to make that happen.

We have a big year ahead of us and no time to lose. Thank you for all that you do for Florida!



A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Alik Moncrief". The signature is stylized and written in cursive.

Alik Moncrief, Executive Director

## THE BUDGET

**The legislative budget reveals the truth about our lawmakers’ values and priorities.** In election years, politicians ramp up the spin machine to convey a pro-environment image, even when the outcomes of their actions are a far cry from real protections for our environment and do little to keep communities safe from climate change. It can become exceedingly difficult for voters to discern fact from fiction, but the proof is in the numbers. That is why, this year, FCV invested in a visual budget tracking tool to help legislators, media, policy staff, and Conservation Voters understand exactly where budget leaders are spending our tax dollars. By shining a light on Florida’s environmental budget, we can see where legislative leaders stand and hold them accountable for protecting our environment and healthy communities for everyone. We included a few budget highlights below and encourage you to explore the tool online at <https://fcv.rocks/budgettracker> for even more information.

The good news from this session is that the budget provides **\$100 million in funding for Florida Forever**. Additionally, as our tracking tool shows, funding from the Land Acquisition Trust Fund for Everglades programs has steadily increased since the passage of the 2014 Water & Land Conservation Amendment, with the budget reflecting approximately **\$375 million both this year and last year for the Everglades**.

Overall, the total environmental budget increased by more than \$485 million over last year, mostly due to increased federal funding. The \$67.5 million in U.S. EPA Volkswagen settlement funds, along with \$212 million in federal funding for drinking water facilities and wastewater treatment infrastructure, contributed more than half of this year’s environmental budget increase. Unfortunately, the budget does not reflect any significant increase in funding for springs restoration, wetlands protection, or other programs designed to protect our waters before they are polluted. Most disappointing, however, is that state lawmakers allocated virtually no state resources for innovative clean energy programs and emissions reductions—despite the magnitude and urgency of the climate crisis for Florida. While more resources have been allocated this year to the Resilient Coastline Initiative than ever, the scant \$10 million to help local governments plan for adaptation strategies falls terribly short of what Florida needs to protect our communities from the worst of impacts of climate change.

In the end, even though the Legislature’s Demographic Estimating Conference has projected a 1.64 percent increase in Florida’s population this year, the environmental budget fails to keep pace. As a percent of the total state budget, this year’s **environmental and associated infrastructure funding grew by less than half a percentage point**, despite all we know about the growing conservation needs of our state and the urgency of addressing the climate crisis.

# CLIMATE AND CLEAN ENERGY

Climate change is the single biggest threat facing Florida's environment and our communities. After years of advocacy by FCV and the environmental community-at-large, it seems Florida's legislative leaders are finally beginning to verbally acknowledge how vital this issue is to all Floridians. **But actions speak louder than words.** Although legislators from both parties filed more than 30 climate and clean energy-related bills this session, legislative leaders allowed **only one** of those bills to pass, while leadership blocked many more from getting a single hearing in committee.

## KEY ISSUE: CARBON EMISSIONS REDUCTIONS

**Climate change is a social justice and community emergency that warrants an urgent and comprehensive response.** Yet, when Governor Ron DeSantis or his allies in the Legislature talk about this crisis, they only focus on one part of this incredibly complicated problem: resiliency.

Resiliency is the term many legislators use to describe how state and local governments will respond to climate change impacts, like sea level rise. While resiliency planning is a key element of any response plan, it does not address the vital role Florida can play in preventing things from getting worse. Any politician who suggests Florida is doing enough to address climate change without reducing our carbon emissions is misleading voters.

Despite all we know about the urgency of reducing carbon emissions, Governor Ron DeSantis failed to prioritize this issue, and **legislative leaders did not consider a single carbon-reduction bill during the 2020 Legislative Session.** When opportunities to address carbon-reduction goals arose, leadership aggressively shut down the discussion. Scientists predict that humanity has about ten years left to make a difference in global emissions, which makes the Florida Legislature's inaction—and worse, opposition to finding ways to reduce Florida's contribution to greenhouse gas emissions—even more shocking.

Thank you to **Sen. Jose Javier Rodriguez (D-Miami), Sen. Lori Berman (D-Boynton Beach), Rep. Anna Eskamani (D-Orlando), Rep. Javier Fernandez (D-Miami), Rep. Margaret Good (D-Sarasota), Rep. Vance Aloupis (R-Miami), Rep. Jennifer Webb (D-Gulfport), Rep. Dan Daley (D-Sunrise),** and others for filing bills and amplifying the need for a comprehensive response to climate change.

## OTHER LEGISLATION

Congratulations to **Sen. Rodriguez (D-Miami)** and **Rep. Vance Aloupis (R-Miami)** on the passage of their sea level impact projection (SLIP) bill (HB 579/SB 178), which will require state planners to account for sea level rise before investing taxpayer dollars in coastal construction projects. And although **Rep. Daley's** electric vehicle charging station master plan bill did not pass, the concept was later incorporated into a more extensive infrastructure bill. His leadership was invaluable.



# PUBLIC LANDS AND NATURAL AREAS

Since the passage of the Water and Land Conservation Amendment (Amendment 1) in 2014, legislators have cemented their misuse of the Land Acquisition Trust Fund (LATF) to fill budget holes and fund pet projects. Not only has the Legislature failed to restore full funding for land conservation since 2008, but we are also still fighting inappropriate uses of the LATF to protect the integrity of our existing conservation areas. **With our population growing by the day, water and land conservation is crucial to the health and quality of life of all Floridians.**

## KEY ISSUE: FLORIDA FOREVER

This session, FCV and FCV Education Fund launched our largest land conservation campaign to date. In the fall, we debuted our new Gems Report. This beautiful, 52-page book explains the history of the Florida Forever programs and the value of conserving our water and land legacy. In it, we celebrate conservation successes made possible through Florida Forever funding and highlight some remaining priority properties that are under threat of development.

**Thanks to our supporters, we were able to hand-deliver a Gems Report to every legislator along with the Governor and Cabinet.**

Even with public demand and a reliable, science-driven process for land acquisition and conservation decisions, there was uncertainty about funding for Florida Forever this year. In the early stages of the budget negotiations, the Senate proposed \$125 million, and the House offered a paltry \$20 million. While our staff worked the Capitol, FCV mobilized our supporters to send thousands of calls, emails, and tweets about the importance of funding Florida Forever. Thanks to our advocacy on multiple fronts and in conjunction with many allies, legislative leaders ultimately agreed to allocate \$100 million to Florida Forever programs. In her announcement during the budget conference, Budget Chair Rep. Holly Raschein (R-Key Largo) said, **"You can stop the emails!"** Proof that Conservation Voters are making a difference!

**While \$100 million is a far cry from historic levels, this amount keeps our land acquisition and conservation programs viable for another year. And we'll be back next year to demand increased and recurring funding.**

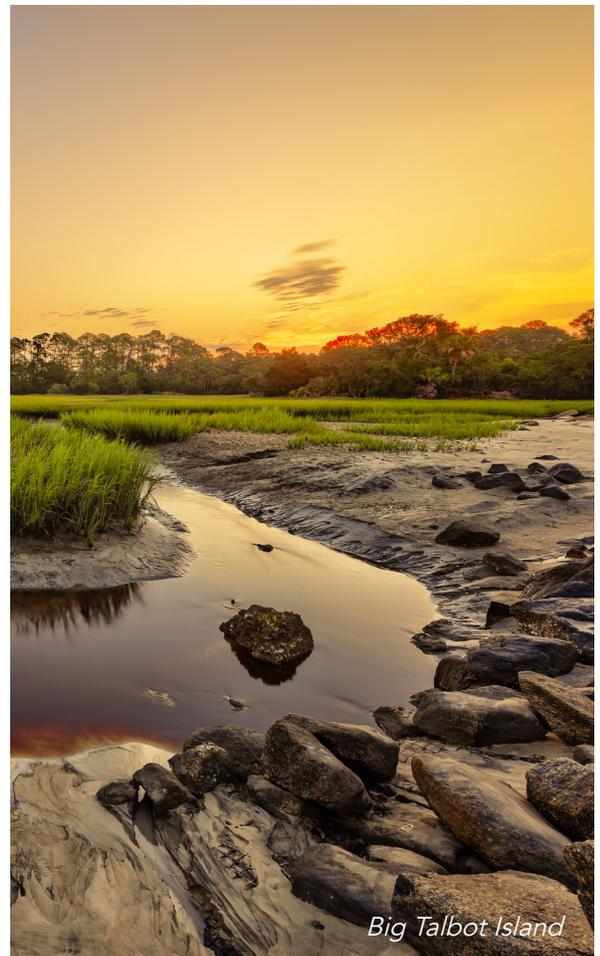
## OTHER LEGISLATION

For the second year, **Sen. Linda Stewart (D-Orlando)** filed a bill to fund Florida Forever at \$100 million annually. While the bill passed two committees unanimously, it died before it could reach the Senate floor. **Rep. Thad Altman (R-Indianapolis)** filed similar legislation to permanently fund Florida Forever, however, House leadership blocked his bill from being heard.

Congratulations to **Sen. Randolph Bracy (D-Orlando)** and **Rep. Lorraine Ausley (D-Tallahassee)** for the successful passage of SB 580/HB 349, Uniform Partition of Heirs Property Act, which will help protect Florida's rural and working lands, and property owners.

Late in session, Rep. Blaise Ingoglia (R-Spring Hill) and Sen. Tom Lee (R-Brandon) introduced a bad amendment to good legislation (HB 7099/SB 7018) intended to expand opportunities for electric vehicles. We expect the Governor to sign or allow this legislation to become law. The new language will weaken protections for conservation easements on agricultural lands by allowing landowners with a Rural and Family Lands Protection easement to unilaterally negotiate with public and private entities for the construction of roads, pipelines, or other "linear facilities." Removing the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services—the owner of these conservation easements—from the negotiation process removes representation for the people of Florida and could exacerbate our already rapid loss of conservation lands. Despite FCV's numerous efforts, both sponsors rejected changes that would protect Florida's conservation lands and taxpayer investments. The bill passed unamended in the last week of session.

**We are thankful to all legislators who spoke up against this section of the bill.**



*Big Talbot Island*

# CLEAN WATER

Two legislative sessions have now passed since summer 2018, when massive blue-green algae and red tide outbreaks plagued our coastal waters, killing countless marine species and devastating local economies. Despite Florida's growing population and worsening water crisis, the Florida Legislature failed to pass a single substantial water bill in 2019. **From the start of this year's legislative session, lawmakers signaled that they were determined to pass a water quality bill this year.** The big question was: would it be enough to save our most precious resource, our water?

## KEY ISSUE: WATERED DOWN POLICY

**Sen. Debbie Mayfield (R-Vero Beach)**, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, and the Governor's office were on a mission to pass clean water legislation this year, no matter what. Picking up where she left off last session, Sen. Mayfield filed SB 712, the self-proclaimed "**Clean Waterways Act.**" This massive bill went through extensive changes at every committee stop, and then again on the Senate floor.

What started as a promising idea was quickly "watered down" to the point of being grossly inadequate considering the monumental challenges confronting Florida's water. **Rather than stopping pollution at the source, the bill is full of bureaucratic housekeeping and weak, inadequate measures.** Rather than mandating strict nitrogen reduction standards for septic systems, it merely moves the regulation of septic tanks from the Department of Health (DOH) to the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP). Rather than enacting stricter pollution standards for agricultural operations, it doubles-down on voluntary best management practices. Rather than empowering local communities to adopt measures to protect their local waterways, it prohibits them from passing "rights of nature" laws. The bill fails to adequately address the disposal of biosolids (treated and dried human waste) in critical watersheds, nor does it account for climate change impacts on our water quality in any way.

**Despite its ambitious name, the bill will not sufficiently solve Florida's water problems.** Even the official Senate staff analysis admits that many of the rules proposed in this legislation cannot be implemented on their own and will require the approval of the Legislature, leaving much of this bill to the whims of future politicians.

While we realize that this may be the first step towards future water policy reforms, we don't have the time to wait. This bill was a missed opportunity to enact much-needed bold change to protect our waters.

## OTHER LEGISLATION

We appreciate all members who voted for or filed pro-water legislation. Thank you to **Rep. Randy Fine (R-Melbourne)** and **Sen. Joe Gruters (R-Sarasota)** for their legislation to increase financial penalties on local governments that violate water quality laws.

Thank you to **Sen. Janet Cruz (D-Tampa)** and **Rep. Evan Jenne (D-Hollywood)** for sponsoring legislation to ensure clean drinking water in schools built before 1986. And thank you to **Sen. Annette Taddeo (D-Miami)** and **Rep. Matt Willhite (D-Royal Palm Beach)** for sponsoring SB 1112/HB 861, which would create an excise tax on bottled water producers. Unfortunately, these bills did not pass, but we hope to see these concepts return next year.

*Red Tide on St. Pete Beach*



# OUR DEMOCRACY

Protecting our democracy is at the heart of the Conservation Voter Movement. When more Floridians engage in our democracy, our environment and public health wins. Every year, we monitor the Legislature for bills that will increase voter turnout, encourage citizen participation in the political process, and ensure fair election laws that work for everyone. **However, legislators regularly sponsor bills to do precisely the opposite, undermining many of the democratic principles we hold most dear. Together, it's our job to defend our democracy.**

## KEY ISSUE: ANTI-VOTER INITIATIVE BILLS

Attacks on citizen access to the ballot are nothing new. For twenty years, the Florida Legislature has used every trick in the book to chip away at our fundamental constitutional rights at the urging of corporate special interests. But before the ink could even dry on last year's attacks, the 2020 Legislature was back with even more egregious changes to our election laws.

**If last year's bills were an outright assault, this year's bills are the final nail in the coffin.**

Once again, FCV stood shoulder-to-shoulder with our allies at the AFL-CIO, SEIU, ACLU, Southern Poverty Law Center, New Florida Majority, Organize Florida, and others to defend our Constitution from attacks against citizen's right to direct democracy.

The Governor has expressed his support for signing this year's anti-citizen initiative bills, SB 1794 from Sen. Travis Hutson (R-Palm Coast) and HB 7037 from Rep. Jamie Grant (R-Tampa). If allowed to become law, this legislation will decrease the time available for petition signature-gathering, increase the number of petitions needed to prompt review by the Florida Supreme Court, invalidate a citizen's petition signature if collected improperly, and exponentially increase the cost of placing proposed amendments on the ballot. These new restrictions create insurmountable hurdles for grassroots organizations to appeal to voters on important issues. Yet at the same time, they create an unfair playing field where billionaires and large special interest groups can unduly influence our democracy.

Despite connecting thousands of Floridians with their elected officials about this issue, dozens of hours of direct advocacy with legislators, and numerous press conferences and media events, SB 1794/HB 7037 barreled through session. The bill passed on a party-line vote in both chambers, with Republicans voting for the bill and Democrats voting against it. FCV immediately called on the Governor to veto this bad legislation and will work to improve citizen access to the ballot in the future. We sincerely thank every legislator who opposed this bill; your defense of our Constitution will not be forgotten.

## OTHER LEGISLATION

HB 7093 from Rep. Bob Rommel (R-Naples) and SB 7062 from Sen. David Simmons (R-Longwood) would bring a ballot question to voters asking if they want to change the Constitution to increase the threshold requirements for petition signatures, which, in practical effect, increases the overall cost of a campaign.

**Thanks to thousands of phone calls, tweets, emails, in-person meetings, committee testimony, press conferences, and more in opposition to these bills, our coalition was able to defeat HB 7093/SB 7062.**



### Florida Conservation Voters

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