

 Florida Conservation Voters

2022 LEGISLATIVE REPORT



DEAR CONSERVATION VOTER,

There is always a buzz in the air at the Capitol during election years. But this year, it was deafening. The Governor, Cabinet, and (due to redistricting) the entire state legislature will be up for election this November. To say the looming specter of Election Day played a role in the politics of the legislative session would be a gross understatement. On top of an already-tension-infused environment at the Capitol, the omicron variant of the coronavirus wreaked havoc on lawmakers and staff early in session. I am so grateful to FCV's Advocacy Team for their perseverance in representing the values of our members and supporters so well at the Capitol, no matter how challenging and, at times, toxic the circumstances may have been.

Like all legislative sessions, there are good and bad things to report. The one constant is that Conservation Voters, once again, spoke up and made their voices heard this year. I am particularly proud of our first Chispa Florida Latino Climate Advocacy Day, which brought more than 130 participants together from around Florida in January. Together, we spoke to lawmakers about the urgency of the climate crisis and how we need immediate action to create a healthy and sustainable future for everyone. It was a great event, and I'm looking forward to working with our team to make it happen again next year. Read more on page 11.

On issues relating to manatees, rooftop solar, climate migration and immigration, constitutional amendments, and more, the people of Florida took action and were noticed. At FCV, we believe that a healthy environment requires a healthy democracy. Ample public participation is the backbone of this work, and I look forward to your review of our 2022 legislative report, which demonstrates how the Conservation Voter Movement made an impact this year. I am incredibly proud of our work to defeat the bad seagrass mitigation bank bill. It was a great example of what we can do when we work together. Read more on page 9.

Thank you, and thanks to everyone who spoke up this year. *Together we are making a difference!*



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

Alik Moncrief, Executive Director



THE BUDGET

Boom or Bust: Election Year Politics Impact Environmental Funding

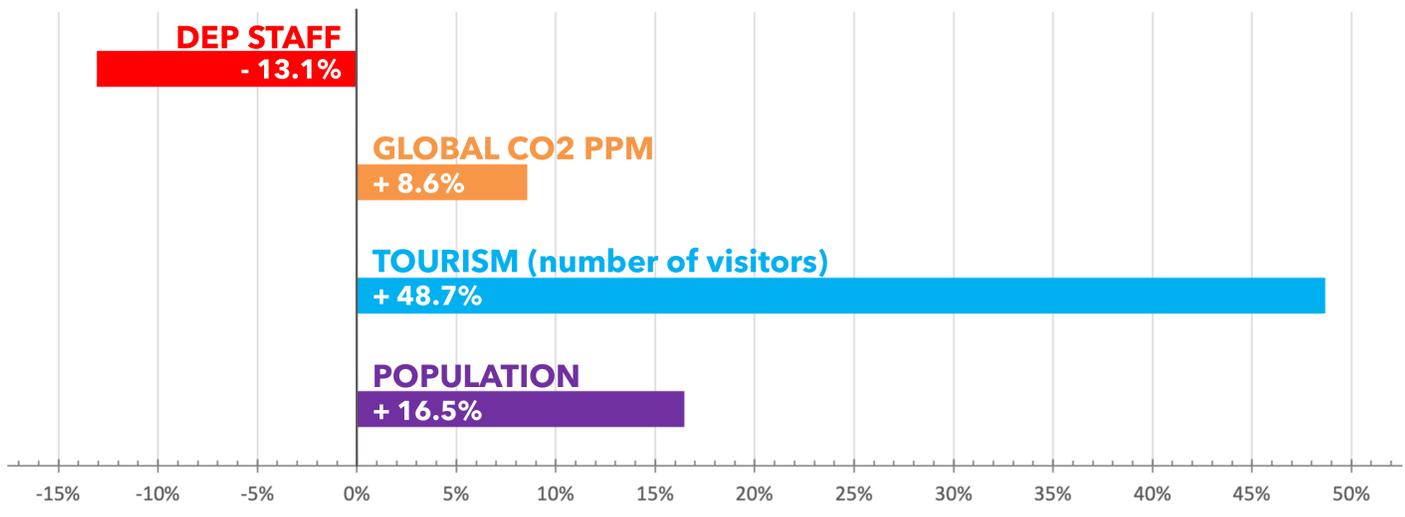
With the massive infusion of federal American Rescue Plan (ARP) funds into Florida's state budget last year, we saw a dramatic increase in funding for new state initiatives like the Resilient Florida and wastewater infrastructure grant programs. In 2021 total environmental spending increased by nearly 70%, and in 2022 it increased by 20%, thanks to the federally-funded ARP.

While the Governor and Republican legislative leaders tout the increases in environmental funding and the addition of staff to the Department of Environmental Protection, there are a few essential things to keep in mind. First, we have President Joe Biden and the U.S. Congress to thank for this influx of environmental funding. Were it not for ARP funding in 2021, the state's financial contribution to environmental programs and agencies actually would have decreased by nearly 2%. Second, the legislature increased environmental spending in election years (5 out of 6) over the last decade while reducing such spending in most non-election years (4 out of 5). And finally, while our state population has grown by 16.5% over the past decade (18.8 million in 2010 to 21.9 million today) and the number of visitors has increased by 48.7% (more than 120 million visitors in 2021), the total number of Department of Environmental Protection staff is still 13.1% below 2010 levels.

While funding and agency staff increases are much needed and welcomed as our state's environmental health worsens, they must not distract the public's eye from the Governor and legislative leadership's failure to advance strong environmental policy protections. Funding, coupled with commensurate policy changes, is the only way to prevent our problems from getting worse. For example, the legislature invested \$27 million toward manatee recovery (including emergency feeding), yet failed to enact policy changes that would prevent the dramatic loss of their primary food source (seagrass) in our coastal waters. The legislature also invested millions of dollars in grants to protect our state from sea level rise, yet failed to do anything that would reduce our reliance on dirty fossil fuels and even went so far as to make it harder for families to install rooftop solar panels.

Throwing taxpayer money at our environmental problems without changing policies that cause them to begin with is a recipe for disaster.

Florida Fails to Keep Pace with Growing Environmental Challenges
Department of Environmental Protection staff compared to challenges, 2010 vs. 2022



We encourage you to explore our Environmental Budget Tracker online at fcvoters.org/budget-tracker for more information.

DEMOCRACY

Equal representation under the law is a cornerstone of our democracy. We cannot protect our environment and create a healthy and sustainable future without a fair and accessible democracy and government transparency, which is why FCV will always fight to protect the rights and institutions that uphold these ideals.

KEY ISSUE: REDISTRICTING PROCESS STUMBLES TO FINISH LINE

Using U.S. Census data collected every decade, Florida's constitution requires state lawmakers to redraw State House, State Senate, and U.S. Congressional district boundaries to ensure equal populations among districts. Florida's remarkable growth over the past century continued over the past decade and all of our major population areas grew substantially. The Orlando area (and the I-4 corridor at-large) grew most rapidly, which helped bring Florida's total population to an astounding 21,538,187 residents.

As lawmakers convened in Tallahassee for pre-session committee meetings, FCV testified in front of each of the new redistricting committees, asking leaders to make the process transparent and to find meaningful ways the public could get involved.

With one small exception (enabling Google Translate on parts of the redistricting website and providing some documents in Spanish), the legislature failed to meet most of the reasonable requirements that FCV and partners called for.

At the beginning of session, Floridians were once again plagued by another deadly variant of coronavirus, making a trip to Tallahassee to participate in redistricting hearings a risky endeavor. Considering how ubiquitous digital meeting technology has become, legislative leaders could have adapted meetings to allow virtual public testimony. Instead, they rejected that request and, as a result, voices from outside Tallahassee were virtually silenced. Making matters worse, the Speaker of the House scheduled many of the redistricting committee hearings to take place at the exact same time in different locations, rendering it impossible for any person to participate in all of the hearings.

Lawmakers offered various proposals before settling on State Senate and State House maps in February. Throughout the process, lawmakers made it extremely clear they wanted to avoid litigation related to the Fair Districts amendments, a protection added to our state constitution by voters in 2010. The fact that lawmakers continually referenced and attempted to follow the provisions in the Fair Districts Amendments is a massive win for the people of Florida. Last time around, legislators passed gerrymandered maps drawn by outside consultants, which resulted in the Florida Supreme Court eventually producing new maps instead of the legislature.

The redistricting process for the U.S. Congressional maps, however, was decidedly different. Because of the federal House of Representatives' current 435 seat maximum, some states will lose or gain representation in Washington, D.C. depending on the population. Florida gained one new seat after the 2020 Census, bringing our state congressional delegation to 28 members. Even just one new district means dramatic changes to our current map.

According to Florida's Constitution, the Governor has only one official role in redistricting: authority to veto the U.S. Congressional map approved by the state legislature. With State House and State Senate maps, the Governor has no role whatsoever. Out of nowhere, months into the redistricting process, Governor DeSantis offered his own Congressional map using the online portal set up by the legislature. Not only did the Governor's office improperly fill out the required forms associated with the map, but the map was roundly derided as illegal and racist by redistricting scholars across the country. The Governor's proposal threw the entire process into chaos, with the House scheduling and then canceling numerous meetings. By the time the Governor proposed a map, the Florida Senate was nearly done with its version of the map, and the House's work was already well underway.

In a shocking turn of events, the House eventually proposed two Congressional maps: one to appease the Governor and, in preparation for when that map is thrown out by the courts for being illegal, a second map as a fall-back. The Governor doubled-down on his improper influence of the process when, while the House

was debating the maps on the floor, he tweeted that he would veto the current maps if they made it to his desk. **Rep. Evan Jenne** (D-Hollywood) read the Governor's tweet on the floor, which led to a handful of Republicans then voting no in opposition to their own party and their own chamber's maps.

Despite producing a version of the U.S. Congressional map that Fair Districts advocates largely applauded, the Florida Senate eventually accepted the House dual-map plan. And then, as expected, the Governor vetoed the Congressional maps, necessitating a special session in late April. FCV will, once again, be there every step of the way.

You can view all of the new maps at [FloridaRedistricting.gov](https://www.FloridaRedistricting.gov) and see if your district numbers have changed. FCV would like to thank the leadership of Cecile Scoon, the President of the Florida League of Women Voters, for her unyielding leadership and perseverance during the long redistricting process.

OTHER LEGISLATION THAT WILL AFFECT FLORIDA'S DEMOCRACY

The framers of our state constitution guaranteed the citizens' initiative process to Floridians as a check on the state legislature. Not surprisingly, legislators don't like it when the people tell them what to do. Florida Conservation Voters got our start as the sponsor committee to the 2014 Water and Land Conservation Amendment, which gave us a deep appreciation for the sanctity of the electorate's right to advance important public policies when the legislature fails to do so. We will always oppose attempts to weaken or take away the citizens' initiative process.

This year, **Sen. Jason Brodeur** (R-Lake Mary) and **Rep. Mike Beltran** (R-Valrico) sponsored a joint resolution (SJR 1412/HJR 1127) to bring a ballot question to voters that would dramatically limit the scope of initiatives in Florida. FCV opposed this bill at every committee stop, and Conservation Voters sent hundreds of emails to legislators urging them to vote no. We were glad to see this bill die before it reached final passage. Sadly, bad ideas never seem to disappear. FCV's Advocacy Team will be on guard next year if this bill, or something similar, turns up at the Capitol. Thank you to everyone who used FCV's action portal to speak out in defense of our right to a citizens' initiative in Florida.

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

The global climate crisis is getting worse and we feel it acutely in Florida. As many communities can attest, climate change harms air and water quality and causes a greater number of hazardous heat days and wildfires. Rising sea levels drive more frequent and more damaging flooding, and can contaminate our drinking water supplies.

An often overlooked but significant consequence of the climate crisis is human migration. Millions of people leave their homes and countries of origin every year because of extreme climate and weather stressors, such as hurricanes, excessive rainfall, or droughts. Climate change does not recognize any borders, and its impacts usually cause the most harm to communities with the least access to resources and power.

In 2017, for example, Hurricane Maria pummeled the island of Puerto Rico. After the storm, more than 50,000 climate migrants came to the continental United States in search of safer homes. It has been four years since the violent storm, and still, the island has not yet recovered to a level that is safe for many families to return home.

In the final days of the 2022 Florida Legislative Session, the Florida legislature passed SB 1808/HB 1355, sponsored by **Sens. Aaron Bean** (R-Jacksonville) and **Ray Rodrigues** (R-Fort Myers) and **Rep. John Snyder** (R-Palm City). The massive bill targets vulnerable children to fuel a false immigrant threat narrative, criminalizing immigration for political gain and forcing local authorities to report a detained person's immigration status to federal law enforcement agencies. Regardless of their U.S. citizen status, all people deserve to search out safe and stable homes for themselves and their families. Florida needs legislation that treats immigrants with the dignity and compassion that all people deserve and allows families to feel safe and stay together.

FCV was proud to stand with our allies in the immigrant justice movement and follow their lead in opposition, and we are urging Governor DeSantis to veto this hateful bill.

CLIMATE AND CLEAN ENERGY

Last year, the Florida Legislature established a grant program to address the impacts of sea level rise and increased flooding happening across our state. In 2021 and 2022, the legislature appropriated \$500 million and \$200 million in Federal American Rescue Plan funding, respectively, to support this new program. Despite ample funding for resilience, the legislature failed to advance any legislation to help us better understand and reduce the root cause of this growing problem—burning dirty fossil fuels. Climate change is the greatest threat to the future of Florida and is primarily caused by human-produced greenhouse gas emissions. Without any focus on the root cause of climate change, the legislature has left the state more vulnerable and less prepared to meet the needs of our people.

This glaring policy gap was apparent in **Sen. Jason Brodeur's** (R- Lake Mary) and **Rep. Demi Busatta Cabrera's** (R-Miami) Statewide Flooding and Sea Level Rise Resilience bill (SB 1940/HB 7053). Despite FCV's testimony in committee, both sponsors refused to add language to this bill that would consider the root cause of sea level rise. We are incredibly grateful to **Rep. Ben Diamond** (D-St. Petersburg) for offering amendments on multiple occasions to address this problem. Unfortunately, Rep. Busatta Cabrera declined to accept any of them.

KEY ISSUE: LEGISLATURE SIDES WITH UTILITY COMPANIES ON ROOFTOP SOLAR

Not only did legislative leadership choose to ignore Florida's greenhouse gas emissions problem, they actually made it more difficult for Florida residents to reduce their own reliance on dirty fossil fuels. SB 1024/HB 741 by **Sen. Jennifer Bradley** (R-Orange Park) and **Rep. Lawrence McClure** (R-Plant City) would undermine Florida's "net metering" laws, which allows rooftop solar homeowners and businesses to exchange the excess energy they produce for credits on their monthly electric bill at a fair, one-to-one rate.

Rooftop solar panels can be pricey for the average Florida family. For most, installing solar requires a substantial up-front investment that takes a decade or more to pay off. Fair compensation in exchange for the excess energy they produce helps rooftop solar owners reduce their electricity bills, and allows for a reasonable return on their initial investment. SB 1024/HB 741 significantly reduces this exchange rate, imposes arbitrary deadlines, and adds new fees, charges, and minimum monthly bills.

Making rooftop solar less affordable will result in fewer families and businesses investing in rooftop solar. This will force Florida's small but growing rooftop solar industry to reduce staff or close down altogether, creating a harmful ripple effect across the state. Solar jobs pay well and cannot be outsourced; installation and maintenance will always require local workers. Rooftop solar is a boots-on-the-roof, homegrown, competitive industry producing fantastic results for consumers. SB 1024/HB 741 threatens to undo all of the remarkable growth of an industry vital to Florida's future.

Save Our Solar rally at the Capitol



FCV would like to thank Florida's hard-working Capitol press corps and other reporters around the state that help everyone better understand the problems, policy, and politics of our environment. If you have not already, please consider subscribing to your local newspaper and supporting your local public radio affiliate. The "first draft of history" will not write itself.

Thanks to investigative reporting and public records requests from the *Miami Herald/Tampa Bay Times*, we know that the state's largest electric utility, Florida Power & Light (FPL), wrote the bill and gave it to Sen. Bradley to file last October. FPL and Sen. Bradley then blamed rooftop solar owners for increasing electricity costs, even though the average rooftop solar owner still pays \$88 a month to their electric utility. The truth is that the Florida Public Service Commission, which regulates electricity prices, has never produced data, research, or a study that says rooftop solar customers cost utilities more (or less) to serve than non-solar customers. There are no data to back up any of the claims in this terrible bill.

FCV thanks Reps. Anna Eskamani (D-Orlando), **Yvonne Hinson** (D-Gainesville), **Marie Woodson** (D-Pembroke Pines), **Sens. Gary Farmer** (D-Lighthouse Point), and **Jeff Brandes** (R-St. Petersburg) for sponsoring amendments to help alleviate some of the concerns in this legislation. Unfortunately, the bill sponsors in both chambers deemed all amendments “unfriendly” and instructed their colleagues to vote them down, which they did. Numerous other members asked questions or spoke out in opposition during debate on this bill, and for that, we are incredibly grateful. We were proud to see bipartisan opposition to this legislation in both the House and Senate.

FCV would also like to thank our members, supporters, and allied organizations for their remarkable coordination during this challenging session. Together, we pushed this bill to its limit and garnered some significant concessions from the bill sponsors along the way. While the vote count did not go our way, we remain committed to advocating for accessible rooftop solar in Florida and are now calling on Governor DeSantis to veto this anti-solar legislation.

Florida Conservation Voters
Sponsored · Paid for by Florida Conservation Voters, Inc.

Big utility companies are trying to unfairly raise fees on solar power so they can keep their monopoly on electricity and charge high energy bills. You can stop them. Tell your lawmakers to Vote NO on SB 1024/HB 741.

DON'T LET BIG UTILITIES MAKE ROOFTOP SOLAR UNAFFORDABLE

TELL YOUR LAWMAKERS TO VOTE NO ON SB 1024/HB 741

#SAVESOLARFL

SECURE.EVERYACTION.COM
Tell Lawmakers to Vote NO on SB 1024/HB 741

69 likes · 22 shares

FCV ran this ad and others across the state of Florida during legislative session

OTHER LEGISLATION THAT WILL AFFECT FLORIDA'S CLIMATE AND CLEAN ENERGY

We were proud to support numerous bills that would have assisted communities in transitioning to a clean energy future. These bills also would have channeled attention to Florida's long-neglected need to clean up polluted sites in Black, Latino, and low-wealth communities, and set a foundation for the equitable distribution of benefits created by future energy infrastructure. Unfortunately, legislative leaders did not allow any of them to pass. A huge, heartfelt thank you to:

Sen. Lorraine Ausley (D-Tallahassee) and **Rep. Ramon Alexander** (D-Tallahassee) for sponsoring the “Brownfields to Brightfields” bill (SB 1562/HB 745). This bill would require a study of otherwise unusable land (like contaminated sites and closed landfills) for commercial solar use.

Sen. Audrey Gibson (D-Jacksonville) and **Rep. Yvonne Hinson** (D-Gainesville) for sponsoring the “Energy Equity Task Force” bill (SB 1678/HB 1285). This bill sought to create a diverse task force, including an environmental justice expert, to support communities with the siting of future commercial solar developments.

Sen. Lori Berman (D-Boynton Beach) and **Rep. Anna Eskamani** (D-Orlando) for sponsoring the 100% clean, renewable energy bill (SB 366/HB 81). This bill would set renewable energy goals for Florida and help protect workers in a just transition. Both lawmakers have sponsored a version of this legislation for multiple years; their tireless climate leadership is vital and appreciated.

PUBLIC LANDS

Conservation funding received a significant boost for the second year in a row, thanks to President Joe Biden and the U.S. Congress. Of the nearly \$3.5 billion Federal Coronavirus Recovery State Fiscal Recovery Funds package, the legislature chose to direct \$300 million directly to the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services to support the Rural and Family Lands Protection Program (RFL). The funding is to purchase land and conservation easements, focusing on protecting the Florida Wildlife Corridor, a statewide network of land and water that supports wildlife populations. In a politically-motivated move, the legislature will delay the release of these funds until 2023, well after the current Commissioner of Agriculture and Consumer Services is out of office.

KEY ISSUE: CONSERVATION FUNDING COMES WITH CONTROVERSIAL CHANGES

Unfortunately, this large funding amount comes with significant, controversial changes to the RFL program that were not fully vetted through the regular legislative process. SB 2508, the **“Environmental Resources”** bill, was shepherded by **Sen. Ben Albritton** (R-Bartow), the Chair of the Senate Agriculture, Environment and General Government Appropriations Committee.

SB 2508 is known as a “conforming bill,” designed to provide technical clarity to the overall budget. Conforming bills shouldn’t contain substantial policy changes, as they are hard to amend and do not provide the same opportunities for public input as traditional bills. However, SB 2508 *did* contain substantial policy changes, and the approval of RFL and Everglades restoration funding was directly tied to the bill’s passage, putting lawmakers and the Governor in a bind.

In particular, the bill changes the intent of RFL from only conservation easements (a conservation mechanism supported by many lawmakers because it keeps land on the tax rolls and reduces management responsibilities for the state) to fee simple acquisition. This may create competition with the well-established and popular Florida Forever conservation program which typically has a more stringent, scientific, and transparent ranking process.

The bill may also dilute our taxpayer investments in conservation by allowing landowners to “double dip” by creating mitigation banks for wetlands or imperiled species on the same lands protected by a state-purchased conservation easement. It removes the preference for ranch and timber - working landscapes that provide documented benefits to native Florida wildlife. This means that agricultural lands with lower ecological quality, like fruit and vegetable row crops, may receive equal consideration for purchase, even if they provide little value to wildlife and may be a source of pollution to nearby waterways.

FCV spoke out against these and other harmful provisions in SB 2508 during the Senate Appropriations Committee, the only opportunity for public comment. FCV appreciates the lawmakers who asked thoughtful questions or opposed the bill, including **Sen. Jeff Brandes** (R-St. Petersburg) who correctly explained that conforming bills are not an appropriate vehicle for significant policy changes; **Sens. Gary Farmer** (D-Lighthouse Point) and **Jason Pizzo** (D-Miami), and **Reps. Ben Diamond** (D-St. Petersburg), **Anna Eskamani** (D-Orlando), and **Joy Goff-Marcil** (D-Maitland).

OTHER LEGISLATION THAT WILL AFFECT FLORIDA'S PUBLIC LANDS

Florida Forever will receive \$100 million from the Land Acquisition Trust Fund, similar to the funding it received the past two years. However, with an overall state budget of \$112 billion, this is less than 0.1% of the total budget. The extremely popular Florida Communities Trust program, which provides matching grants for cities and non-profit organizations to create parks close to where people live, will receive no funding. Overall, the state funding level is wholly inadequate to address the needs for clean water, productive agriculture, and parks for people. In the coming years, the legislature must approve full and consistent funding of \$300 million or more for the entire suite of conservation programs, including Florida Forever, Florida Communities Trust, and the Rural and Family Lands Protection Program.

Despite attempts each year, the Legislature has never passed a bill to secure permanent, annual funding to our conservation programs. Thank you to **Sen. Linda Stewart** (D-Orlando) and **Rep. Rick Roth** (R-West Palm Beach) for filing “**Land Acquisition Trust Fund,**” SB 1816 /HB 1377. These bills would have funded the full suite of conservation programs at \$100 million annually and restored the ability to use bonding for conservation purchases. Historically, the legislature used bonding to provide stable funding of \$300 million annually for Florida Forever before the 2008 recession when funding ceased. Stewart’s bill would have also restricted funds from the Land Acquisition Trust Fund (LATF) for inappropriate uses, such as executive salaries or IT equipment. While both bills passed unanimously through at least one committee, legislative leaders failed to move it through the entire process.

As always, this year was marked by attempts to use the LATF for infrastructure projects that run afoul of the voters’ intent when they approved the Water and Land Conservation Amendment (Amendment 1) by 75% in 2014.

While the bill did not pass, SB 1400/HB 603 sponsored by **Sen. Danny Burgess** (R- Zephyrhills) and **Rep. Melony Bell** (R- Fort Meade) sought to allocate \$20 million annually from the LATF for water supply projects in the Heartland Headwaters (central Florida) area. The proposed projects, which are included in an annual workplan, include gray infrastructure, like wastewater systems, pipes, and pumps. While nature-based solutions like protecting natural wetlands are allowable expenditures, LATF funding was not established to support the drinking water and wastewater expansion plans of local governments.

FCV recommended limiting the projects considered for state LATF funding to only environmental restoration or conservation. The bill sponsors rejected that recommendation and the bill did not pass. However, the legislature ultimately appropriated \$20 million for these projects from General Revenue, which, unlike the LATF, is an appropriate source of funds for these projects.



WATER

The solutions to Florida's ongoing water woes are not secret. For years, scientists and advocates have urged lawmakers to pass aggressive policy measures to reduce water pollution at the source and increase water conservation. Unfortunately, rather than address our water crises head-on, legislators filed and passed bills this year to allow more fertilizer use, make it easier to destroy seagrass, and fast-track the destruction of wetlands.

KEY ISSUE: COMMUNITY OUTCRY KILLS BILL THAT COULD KILL MORE MANATEES

This year, **Sen. Ana Maria Rodriguez** (R-Miami), **Rep. Toby Overdorf** (R-Palm City), and **Rep. Tyler Sirois** (R-Merritt Island) filed a horrible seagrass mitigation bank bill innocuously entitled "**Water Resources Management.**" But this legislation (SB 198/HB 349) would have created a pathway for developers to destroy more of our already declining seagrass in exchange for paying private mitigation bankers to transplant seagrass in areas already within public ownership. In one of the few true wins of this legislative session, this harmful bill died after only one committee stop in each chamber. Thank you to all Conservation Voters who used our online action portal to warn lawmakers about the dangers of this bill: you defeated this terrible legislation.

Seagrass, an underwater plant, relies on clean and clear water to grow. It is a primary food source for manatees and an essential habitat for many fish and shellfish. Statewide, tens of thousands of acres of seagrass have been lost in recent years due to dirty, polluted water and harmful algal blooms, like red tide and blue-green algae. Devastatingly, 2021 was a record year for manatee deaths, with 1,101 recorded. Many of these deaths resulted from starvation, as water pollution has decimated seagrass meadows in coastal areas.

FCV testified against this deadly bill in both chambers, citing research about the abysmal success rate of seagrass transplanting and how more focus is needed on comprehensive water quality improvements that will allow seagrass to regrow naturally.

Significant pressure from FCV and conservation partners, coastal residents, and newspaper editorial boards made this a toxic issue, and the bill ultimately died.





OTHER LEGISLATION THAT WILL AFFECT FLORIDA'S WATERS

In many parts of the state, pollution from agriculture is the leading contributor to unhealthy waterbodies. Agriculture already enjoys what is known as a “presumption of compliance,” meaning that farms are assumed to meet water quality standards if they are following voluntary Best Management Practices (BMPs). Yet, rather than rein in this known problem, lawmakers passed a bill entitled “Nutrient Application Rates” (SB 1000/HB 1291) to allow additional fertilizer use on citrus fields. While the bill moved through the legislature, FCV recommended additional water quality monitoring to quantitatively study the implications of increased fertilizer use. However, the bill sponsors, **Sen. Ben Albritton** (R-Bartow) and **Rep. Lawrence McClure** (R-Plant City), rejected that requirement. The sponsors rationalized this bill as necessary to counteract the detrimental effects of citrus greening (a disease that causes citrus to fall off the tree before it is ripe). However, the bill also tasked the Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) with studying this approach on other crops, opening up the potential for more widespread fertilizer use without additional pollution control measures.

Despite the water quality crises that continue to impact coastal and freshwater areas around the state, the Legislature failed to pass the legislation necessary to protect our water. FCV appreciates the continued leadership of those who filed proactive bills.

Sen. Linda Stewart (D-Orlando) and **Rep. Joy Goff-Marcil** (D-Maitland) filed “**Implementation of the Blue-Green Algae Task Force**” (SB 862/HB 561). This good bill would have implemented some of the recommendations of the Blue-Green Algae Task Force, including an inspection program for septic systems. It would have also prioritized pollution reduction and water conservation projects that yield maximum results. FCV has supported this commonsense bill for the past two years because implementing these recommendations is essential to addressing water pollution from various sources that can cause harmful algal blooms. Unfortunately, legislative leaders blocked this bill from passing, declining to hold a single hearing in the House.

Following the disastrous spill of more than 200 million gallons of polluted industrial wastewater from the Piney Point phosphogypsum site, **Sen. Jeff Brandes** (R-St. Petersburg) and **Rep. Ben Diamond** (D-St. Petersburg) filed “**Phosphogypsum Stacks**” (SB 1744 /HB 1339). This bill would have tasked the Florida Department of Environmental Protection with developing an annual report and public database of the more than two dozen phosphogypsum stacks around the state to understand the potential of imminent hazards and risks to human and ecological health. Leadership failed to advance this critical bill to a single committee hearing in either chamber.



10,464

TEXTS SENT BY
FCV STAFF AND
VOLUNTEERS

26,638

LEGISLATOR
CONNECTIONS

130

PARTICIPANTS IN
LATINO CLIMATE
ADVOCACY DAY

550

MILES WALKED
BY FCV'S
ADVOCATES AT
THE CAPITOL

230

ADVOCACY
VOLUNTEERS

CONSERVATION VOTERS IN ACTION

When Conservation Voters speak up, good things happen. Connecting the public with the people elected to represent them is a crucial tenet of FCV's Cycle of Accountability. FCV was proud to hold numerous civic engagement events during the 2022 legislative session (virtual and in-person) to help our members and neighbors communicate directly with their state lawmakers.

Unfortunately for Florida, many lawmakers still do not believe climate change is real, nor do they understand the climate crisis's broad impact on our communities. Thanks to the hard work of FCV's Chispa Florida team, more than 130 community members came together in January for our inaugural Latino Climate Advocacy Day. Our staff helped numerous lawmakers connect the dots between immigration, migration, clean energy, climate justice, and quality of life here in Florida. While the coronavirus limited this year's event to virtual-only, we are already planning a more robust (and in-person) event for 2023.

Lawmakers heard from us this year, whether it was an email, phone call, tweet, or letter. In addition to face-to-face meetings, thousands of Floridians used FCV's online advocacy tools to connect with their lawmakers on all of our main issue areas. From rooftop solar policy and constitutional amendments to immigration reform and seagrass protection, our members made their voices heard. We are incredibly proud of our digital organizing staff, who made online advocacy easy and helped bring some brand new voices into the Conservation Voter Movement.

A healthy and vibrant environment depends on continually expanding our community of engaged and motivated people ready to make their voices heard and inspire others to do the same.

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