



Florida Conservation Coalition

TAKING ACTION FOR FLORIDA

STEERING COMMITTEE:

Chairman

Bob Graham

Vice Chairman

Lee Constantine

Organizations

CONSERVANCY OF SOUTHWEST FLORIDA

DEFENDERS OF WILDLIFE

FLORIDA WILDLIFE FEDERATION

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS

NORTH FLORIDA LAND TRUST

1000 FRIENDS OF FLORIDA

SIERRA CLUB FLORIDA

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August 1st, 2019

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Blue-Green Algae Task Force
Department of Environmental Protection
Office of Environmental Accountability and Transparency
3900 Commonwealth Boulevard
Tallahassee, Florida 32399

Dear Members of the Blue-Green Algae Task Force,

On behalf of the 80 member organizations of the Florida Conservation Coalition (FCC), we appreciate the important mission assigned to the Blue-Green Algae Task Force. Members of the FCC share your goal to reduce harmful nutrients in Florida’s waters statewide and appreciate your service and commitment to the task at hand.

We are convinced that an essential duty for the Task Force is to recommend ways to “fine-tune” existing programs. We were encouraged by the statement from Secretary Valenstein at your first meeting that he expected task force members to question rules and regulations and consider everything from process improvements to statutory changes. It’s essential that this full range of policy options remain open to achieve the task force’s mission. We respectfully offer the following recommendations for your endorsement.

Protect Land to Protect Water

One way to protect our rivers, lakes, and bays from nutrient pollution and toxic algae blooms is to perpetually protect the lands around them by purchase of land or protective rights thereto. Land acquisition programs

should include strategic acquisitions to buffer against growth; protect wetlands, waterways and floodplains; preserve critical recharge areas; and safeguard our supply of affordable fresh water.

The Task Force should consider recommending:

- That the Legislature dedicate sufficient funds from the Land Acquisition Trust Fund to meet the needs of Florida's land acquisition programs such as the Acquisition and Restoration Council's Florida Forever Priority List, and the Rural and Family Lands Protection Program. Funding existing programs through the sale of Florida Forever bonds makes good use of scientifically-driven selection criteria to ensure sufficient funds are available to invest where they can make the biggest difference in protecting Florida's water resources. These acquisitions could be in fee or via conservation easements.
- That Water Management Districts restore ad valorem tax rates to the levels allowed by Article VII, Section 9 (b) of the Florida Constitution to enable them to meet their responsibilities, including the acquisition, management and restoration of lands important for protecting local and regional water quality and supply.

Prevent Pollution at its Source

Florida needs a comprehensive strategy to prevent nutrients and other pollutants at their sources from entering our groundwater and surface waters.

The Task Force should consider recommending:

- Requiring all Basin Management Action Plans contain sufficient projects and strategies to achieve total maximum daily load goals, including data monitoring adequate to assess both project-level and basin/sub-basin nutrient reduction success. These projects and strategies should account for future population growth and development that will intensify land use and increase nutrient loading.
- Prohibiting new septic tanks on properties of less than five acres or require the installation of septic tanks with enhanced nitrogen advanced wastewater treatment for new developments.
- Upgrading or replacing aged and failing wastewater infrastructure.
- Eliminating the spreading of septage and land disposal of sewage sludge (aka biosolids).
- Updating the statewide stormwater standards for development to incorporate new technologies for more effective pollutant removal.
- Replacing the use of herbicides in water bodies with mechanical harvest methods where feasible and prohibiting the deposition of vegetative material into Florida's waters.

In rural areas, agriculture is the primary source of nitrogen polluting many of Florida's springs, rivers, and lakes. We must find a way to balance the economic viability of agriculture with the health of our water resources.

The Task Force should consider recommending:

- Requiring existing concentrated animal feeding operations eliminate discharges to surface and groundwater and prohibiting future concentrated animal feeding operations in vulnerable areas, including high aquifer recharge areas.
- Requiring implementation and verification of agricultural Best Management Practices (BMPs), as well as the adoption and implementation of advanced BMPs that achieve water quality goals in impaired watersheds.

Fund Water Quality Programs

The State of Florida has detailed programs to restore our impaired water bodies, but little funding has gone towards wastewater infrastructure, agricultural operations, and programs north of Lake Okeechobee. The immediate costs of addressing failing septic tanks, nutrient-laden stormwater, and updating wastewater treatment plants may seem daunting but cannot compare to the massive long-term economic losses associated with degraded water resources. The Task Force should consider recommending:

- Taking advantage of Florida's excellent credit rating and issue bonds to help meet current and future water infrastructure needs. Historically, bonding has been a key element in funding Florida's environmental priorities.
- Enacting cost-sharing programs to work with local governments on funding wastewater infrastructure.
- Providing significant funding for grants and cost sharing programs to help agricultural operations convert to more sustainable operations.
- Placing a reasonable price on the quantity of water used in order to incentivize water conservation and fund water restoration programs.

Encourage Local Innovation to Protect Waters

Local leaders in Florida are most directly acquainted with the water quality problems in their communities and are uniquely positioned to work with stakeholders to develop effective solutions. The Task Force should consider recommending:

- Ending the preemption of local regulation of do-it-yourself urban fertilizer sales (F.S. §570.07 (41)(a)) in order to provide local governments the easiest and lowest cost method in which to enforce their urban fertilizer ordinances, and eschewing any and all preemption of local control of sources of water pollution.
- Encouraging local governments to include water quality protections in their comprehensive plans to allow for engagement with the citizens closest to their waterways.
- Restoring the state land planning office to a separate, stand-alone department, and requiring state coordinated review for a greater proportion of comprehensive plan amendments, especially those impacting water quality.
- Repealing the provision in HB 7103 that penalizes the losing side in lawsuits challenging the consistency of development orders with comprehensive plans by requiring the losers to pay attorney fees and costs to the winners. This provision will dramatically reduce enforcement of comprehensive plans and undermine local measures to protect water quality.

As a coalition of over 80 conservation-minded groups and over 2,000 individuals, the Florida Conservation Coalition comprises Florida's preeminent environmental organizations including experts on our state's waters, lands and wildlife. For more information, consider FCC's position statements, "A Water Policy for Florida" and "The Critical Need to Conserve Florida's Natural Lands" detailing the importance of protecting our state's land and water resources. Thank you for your consideration and for your commitment to reducing harmful nutrients in Florida's degraded water bodies statewide.

Sincerely,



Bob Graham
Chairman
Florida Conservation Coalition



Lee Constantine
Vice Chairman
Florida Conservation Coalition

Cc: Secretary Noah Valenstein