



# PROTECTING FLORIDA'S AIR, WATER, AND OPEN SPACES: A Track Record of Success





## DEAR FRIENDS,

In 2007, Environment Florida Research & Policy Center was founded as the new home of Florida Public Interest Research Group Education Fund's environmental work. All told, we have a nearly 40 year history of protecting the environment, and we want to share with you some of our biggest achievements over the past decade.

The victories chronicled in this booklet reflect a diversity of issues, strategies and policy areas in which we have made a difference. Whether the objective has been cleaner water, clearer air or healthier people, Environment Florida Research & Policy Center and our allies have consistently won important victories despite overwhelming odds. Within these diverse stories there is a common thread: research, education, organizing and, with the help of our sister 501c(4) citizen organization Environment Florida, advocacy.

Yet, for all the successes of the past, the challenges facing Florida's environment and our society remain daunting. The degradation of our wild open spaces, the continued threats to public health from water pollution, and the dominance of special interests over pressing issues show we need renewed and emboldened activism in the years ahead.

As we enter our next chapter, we are resolved to replicate and expand upon our past successes in the hopes of bringing about a cleaner, greener and healthier future for us all.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'JRubiello', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Jennifer Rubiello  
*State Director*



# WORKING FOR 40 YEARS TO PROTECT FLORIDA'S ENVIRONMENT

We've built on nearly 40 years of experience educating Floridians and conducting research about our environment. Our staff combine independent research, practical ideas and effective educational campaigns to win tangible results that improve the quality of our environment and our lives.

We work every day to move the needle of public opinion towards policies that will help us achieve a cleaner, greener, and healthier Florida. We envision a future where healthy wetlands, lakes and rivers are safe for swimming and fishing; where panthers, manatees and other wildlife are protected; and where clean sources of energy like solar and wind that don't pollute or make us sick power our communities.

We know Floridians support the environment, but too often, special interests pollute our air and water and pave over natural areas without consequence. That's why, every year our staff, interns and volunteers educate thousands of

people in communities from Tallahassee to Miami about pressing environmental issues such as fracking. Our online team engages tens of thousands of committed environmentalists on the top issues that matter to them while creating content that expands the ranks of the environmental movement.

We promote common sense policy solutions and goals that the clear majority of Floridians agree on, like increasing our use of solar energy and protecting our drinking water. Our organizers recruit and mobilize coalition partners from all walks of life, from academics and community leaders to parents and elected officials. Meanwhile, we release hard-hitting reports to generate and keep a steady stream of media coverage on the issues, reaching both national outlets such as *The Washington Post* and *U.S. News & World Report* as well as local outlets that are trusted news sources for communities across Florida.



# ALL IN FOR 100% RENEWABLE

*Fossil fuels have changed our climate faster than scientists feared, but renewable energy has grown faster than experts predicted. We know we can and must power our lives without polluting our environment, which is why Environment Florida Research & Policy Center has been showing the way and building the movement needed for our cities, campuses and corporations to switch to 100 percent renewable energy.*

## THE SKY'S THE LIMIT

With bountiful sun and ample public support for clean energy, Florida is ripe for clean energy progress. For example, more than 73 percent of Floridians supported a ballot initiative in the summer of 2016 that makes it easier for businesses to go solar. And according to a recent Environment Florida Research & Policy Center report, “Solar on Superstores,” the rooftops of Florida’s big box stores and shopping centers could host enough solar photovoltaic capacity to power 249,000 homes.

Florida also has a lot to lose if climate change goes unchecked. Coastal communities from Pensacola to St. Petersburg to the Keys are exposed to hurricanes, storm surge and flooding. Sea level rise threatens close to 300,000 homes and 1,000 waste sites that are less than three feet above high tide. Saltwater intrusion threatens the Everglades and our drinking water supply. Switching to 100 percent renewable energy is urgently needed to protect Florida’s future.



Staff train Bradenton and Sarasota community leaders on how to effectively communicate about climate change in partnership with the Union of Concerned Scientists and Eckerd College faculty. Photo credit: Staff.

## BLOCKING THE SUN

Unfortunately, utilities and their allies have actively worked to thwart policies that encourage renewable energy such as net metering, and have done little to encourage policies to tap into the state’s solar potential.

Florida’s lack of strong solar policies is no surprise. Environment Florida Research & Policy Center’s report, “Blocking the Sun,” found that Florida’s four largest utilities spent millions of dollars supporting a front group, Consumers for Smart Solar, which was the primary backer of the deceptive Amendment 1 ballot initiative. The amendment would have further restricted rooftop solar growth in the state, but voters fortunately voted it down.

Due in part to this organized opposition to efforts to boost solar, Florida is far behind where we could be. The Solar Energy Industries Association reports that Florida is third in the country for rooftop solar energy potential—but 13th in the amount of solar energy it actually generates.



Field organizer Sarah Bucci releases “Building a Solar Future” in West Palm Beach in 2010 outlining how a comprehensive suite of public policy strategies can remove many of the common barriers to solar energy development and help to make a clean energy future a reality. Photo credit: Staff.

# THE PATH TO 100 PERCENT RENEWABLE ENERGY

We can have healthier communities and a better future for our children, but to get there, we need to transform the way we produce and consume energy. That's why Environment Florida Research & Policy Center is calling on colleges and universities, businesses, and local and state agencies to commit to 100 percent renewable energy. It's a big goal, one that would make Florida a world leader in the race toward a cleaner, healthier future—and it's a goal that's 100 percent possible, as we documented in our report, "Renewables On The Rise."

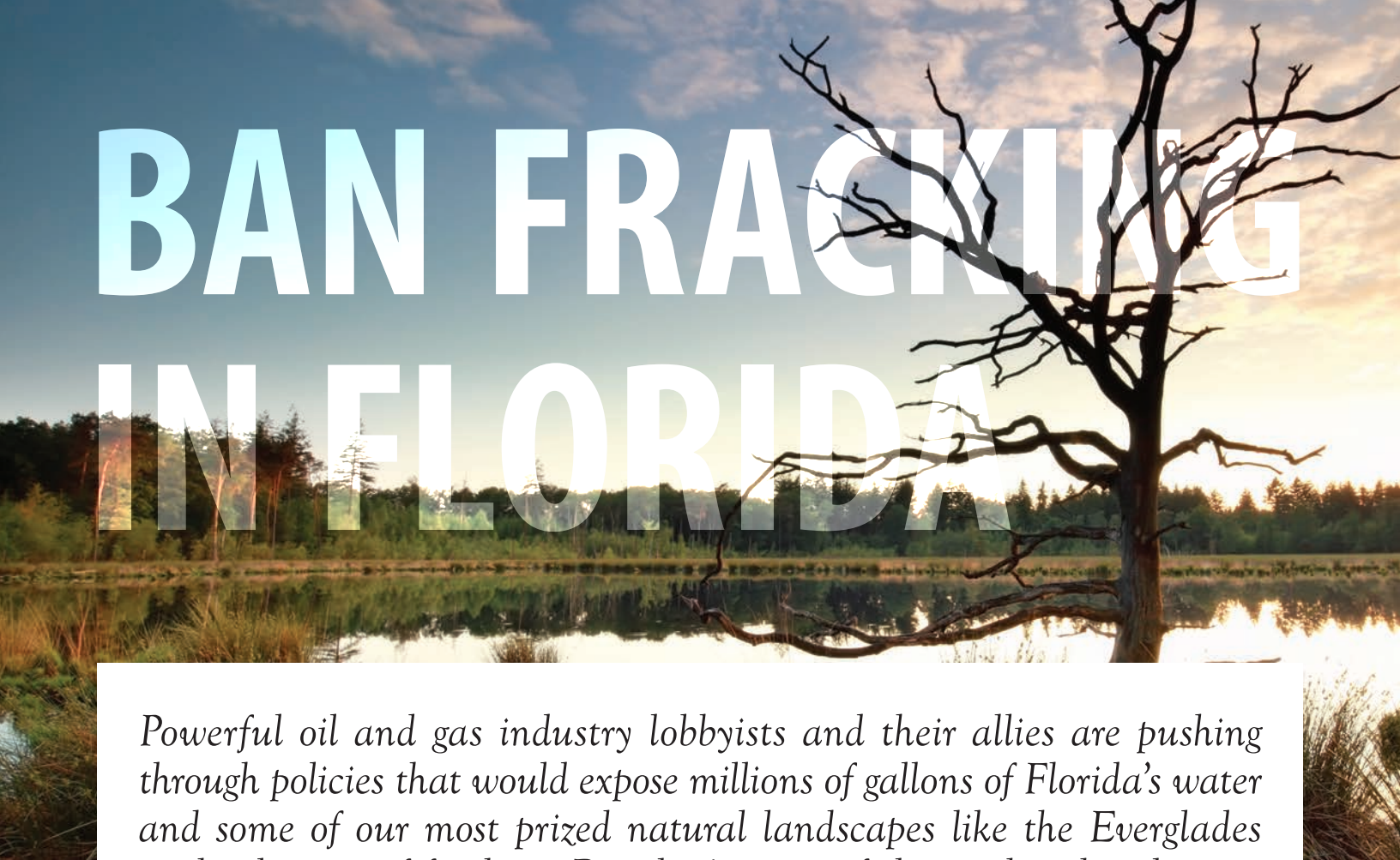
What's more, colleges and universities have a unique opportunity to lead the way in this transition, as we outline in "Renewable Energy 100," a handbook showing colleges and universities how to achieve 100 percent clean energy and become role models for a larger-scale transition. Solar power adoption in the United States has tripled in the last three years, and prices are dropping lower than many experts had predicted in the past. This means now is the right time to engage the public on getting out our big, bold and, most importantly, attainable goal of powering Florida with 100 percent renewable energy.



In March 2016, Environment Florida Research & Policy Center partnered with Eckerd College students and faculty to research and release an interactive, online map that made clear that our dependence on dirty energy sources leads to real climate threats in Florida. Students documented stories from local residents affected by extreme weather, and then planned and executed the press conference announcing the extreme weather map. Coverage of the map appeared in half a dozen news outlets including ABC Action News and the Tampa Bay Times.

Photo credit: (top-left) chuyu2014 via Envato Elements. (bottom-left) Staff.





# BAN FRACKING IN FLORIDA

*Powerful oil and gas industry lobbyists and their allies are pushing through policies that would expose millions of gallons of Florida's water and some of our most prized natural landscapes like the Everglades to the dangers of fracking. But they've got a fight on their hands—tens of thousands of Floridians are joining our call to stop fracking from threatening our water, our environment and our health.*

## UNAUTHORIZED FRACKING SPARKS A STATEWIDE MOVEMENT TO BAN FRACKING IN FLORIDA

Fracking is a highly polluting and destructive industrial process that shoots toxic chemicals underground to get at oil and gas locked beneath the earth's surface. As fracking expands rapidly across the country, it's leaving a trail of destruction in its path—from polluting drinking water sources and scarring public lands to triggering earthquakes.

Fracking prospectors have targeted some of the most biodiverse regions in Florida, including parts of the

Panhandle and Big Cypress National Preserve. In 2013, Texas-based Dan A. Hughes Company violated their permit and fracked a well on the outskirts of the Everglades without authorization. Our sister organization, Environment Florida, alongside the Stonecrab Alliance and other allies, organized rallies opposing this dangerous drilling practice. This public outcry eventually led the company to leave the state, and the defeat of the Naples well sparked a statewide movement to ban fracking.

## EDUCATION AND ORGANIZING BUILDS PUBLIC OPPOSITION TO FRACKING

Over the past 5 years, Environment Florida Research & Policy Center's continued education and organizing has helped build public opposition to fracking throughout the state. In December 2013, we released "Fracking by the Numbers" in Naples, the first report of its kind to quantify the damage already done by fracking across the country.

Since then, we've engaged dozens of elected officials from Tampa Bay to Tallahassee to counter oil and gas industry misinformation and educate them on the real dangers of fracking. We have worked with the media to raise the visibility of fracking's toxic threats and expose industry lies in over 75 news, online and print stories, helping to sway the needle of public opinion. We've shared our research and tools from our reports, factsheets and toolkits on fracking, including "Fighting Fracking: A Toolkit for Activists: Tips, Tactics and Resources for Your Local Campaign," during dozens of in-person forums, panels and community events throughout Florida.

As a steering committee member of the Floridians Against Fracking coalition, our sister organization Environment Florida has helped win local resolutions and ordinances in cities and counties statewide, including measures in Pinellas and Hillsborough County. Yet fracking companies continue to lobby to nullify existing local measures that prohibit fracking, and to this day, Florida law remains silent on this dangerous drilling process.

The good news is that we've come a long way in the fight against fracking. A decade ago, many of the facts around fracking were disputed. According to Physicians for Social Responsibility's "Compendium of Scientific, Medical, and Media Findings Demonstrating Risks and Harms of Fracking," in 2008, only six peer-reviewed papers on fracking's health and environmental impacts had been published; now there are more than 900.

These local efforts to oppose fracking didn't come about on their own; they came about because of a statewide campaign aimed at educating Floridians, the media and decision-makers about fracking's threats through face-to-face conversations, public forums and coalition building. Moving forward, we'll continue to build on our local successes and statewide infrastructure to organize people in the areas that will be most affected by fracking so we can shut the door on this dangerous practice.



Environment Florida Research & Policy Center staff, coalition partners and affected community members gather in Naples in 2013 for the release of "Fracking By the Numbers." Photo credit: Staff.



St. Petersburg city councilmembers, physicians and scientists release our report, "Fracking By the Numbers," on the steps of city hall. Photo credit: Staff.

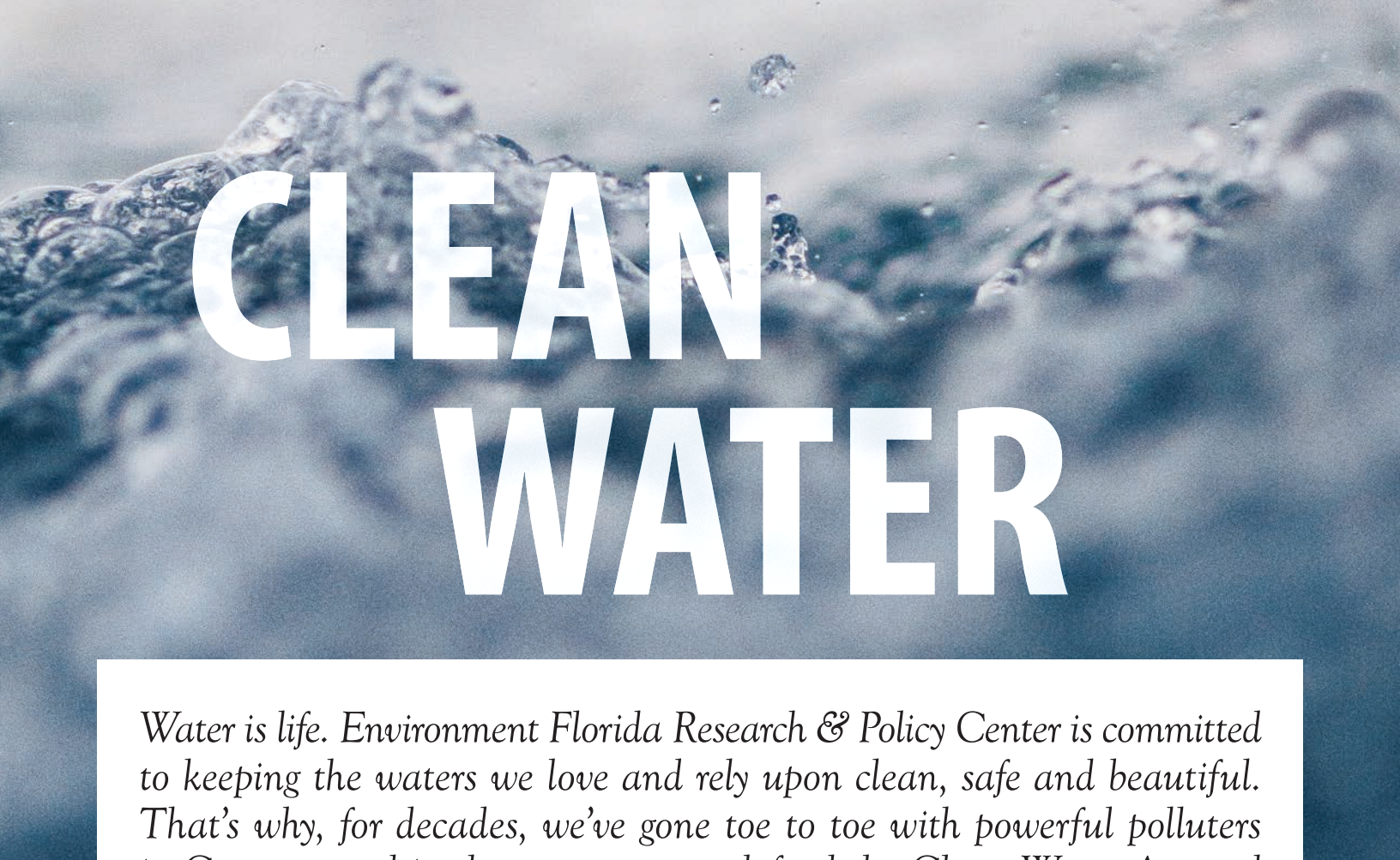


Environment Florida volunteers, coalition partners, doctors and community members educate state legislators on the dangers of fracking. Photo credit: Staff.



Staff and coalition partners educate Floridians in Pasco about the threat's fracking poses to Florida's water. Photo credit: Staff.





# CLEAN WATER

*Water is life. Environment Florida Research & Policy Center is committed to keeping the waters we love and rely upon clean, safe and beautiful. That's why, for decades, we've gone toe to toe with powerful polluters in Congress and in the courtroom to defend the Clean Water Act and protect our waters.*

## **HARD-HITTING RESEARCH TO PROTECT OUR WATER**

Tampa Bay, the Everglades, the Suwannee and the other countless streams and rivers that crisscross our state are where Floridians go to boat, fish and swim. These same waterways also provide us with clean drinking water. In spite of this, our waterways are threatened by pollution from both the oil industry and large agribusiness. Over the last four decades, Environment Florida Research & Policy Center's research on threats facing Florida's waters has played a critical role in educating Floridians about the importance of the Clean Water Act and the dangers facing Florida's lakes, rivers and streams.

To protect our waterways, we need to crack down on pollution from factory farms, sewage and other sources. And we know it won't be easy thanks to opposition from developers, giant agribusiness and other polluters. We're working to harness the huge grassroots support for clean water and turn it into the political power we need to have a lasting direct impact on our lakes, rivers and streams.



# A FEW OF THE WAYS ENVIRONMENT FLORIDA RESEARCH & POLICY CENTER STANDS UP FOR CLEAN WATER:

**1** Our “Summer Fun Index” counts the ways we enjoy clean water around the country. More than 37 million people visit the Sunshine State’s waterways each year. In fact, Florida is home to more registered boats than any of the 28 other states the index assesses. Florida also ranks in the top five for the number of registered fishers and summer camps with water activities.

**2** Our “Wasting Our Waterways” report documents the toxic pollution that enters our waterways and threatens our health and drinking water supplies. We found that 206 million pounds of toxic chemicals were dumped into America’s waterways in 2012 alone.

**3** Our “Polluting Politics” report links discharges of toxic chemicals as reported in the EPA’s Toxics Release Inventory for 2012 with federally reported campaign contributions and lobbying expenditures. The report shows how Florida’s biggest polluters are spending millions of dollars to pollute politics.

Leading up to Hurricane Irma, we released research mapping Superfund sites vulnerable to flooding. After the storm, we sent out scientists to test water near flooded Superfund sites and compiled reports of statewide wastewater spills to educate Floridians about the impact of the hurricane on Florida’s waters.



Leading up to Halloween, farmers, boaters, and community partners release our “Scary Water Facts” along the Hillsborough River showing the many pollutants that still plague Florida’s rivers, lakes and streams. Photo credit: Staff.



Our staff release “Polluting Politics” alongside consumer advocates, local elected officials, and community leaders. Photo credit: Kelsey Grentzer.



In 2015, elected officials, scientists and community leaders joined us and more than 100 residents at the St. Petersburg Museum of History for a town hall to highlight clean water success stories and explain what city, state and federal officials can do to protect Tampa Bay and waterways across the state. Photo credit: FOX13



Over 100 Environment Florida Research & Policy Center staff and volunteers gathered with St. Petersburg city council members, media and more than a dozen community and business leaders from across the state at Three Daughters Brewing Co. to shine a light on how important clean water is for businesses, especially breweries, and to people across Florida. Photo Credit: Staff



# PROTECTING OUR WATERWAYS

Environment Florida Research & Policy Center is committed to holding polluters accountable through the courts. Federal environmental laws such as the Clean Water Act and Clean Air Act give citizens the right to bring lawsuits against polluters for violating the law when government agencies fail to act. Citizen lawsuits can be an effective way to affect change through the courts.

For example, in March 2017, our sister organization, Environment Florida, and the Suwannee-St. Johns Sierra Club chapter worked with the National Environmental Law Center to file a lawsuit in the United States District Court

in Jacksonville against Pilgrim's Pride, which is the second-largest chicken producer in the world.

The Middle Suwannee River is famous for its 62 freshwater springs and home to several state parks and some of the best backcountry paddling in the state. Over 43,000 visitors flock to the region to paddle down and camp along the Suwannee River—near the Pilgrim's Pride processing plant's discharge point. Yet since 2012, Pilgrim's Pride has released wastewater into the Suwannee River which resulted in the introduction of pollutants at up to three times the allowable levels at their poultry processing plant in Live Oak, Florida.

In November 2017, a settlement was reached that requires Pilgrim's Pride to make major changes to their wastewater practices and pay what is believed to be the largest Clean Water Act penalty in a citizen enforcement suit in Florida history. The suit made national headlines.

This landmark settlement is a major victory for clean water in Florida and demonstrates that citizen suits are essential in the enforcement of our environmental laws.

Photos: (Page 10) JP Valery via Unplash. (Page 11, clockwise from top-left) (1) The Middle Suwannee River is home to several state parks and some of the best backcountry paddling in the state. (2) The pollution discharge point for the Pilgrim's Pride processing plant in Live Oak, Florida. Photo credit: John Moran, Florida Nature Photography. (3) Environment Florida staff, interns and canvassers canoe down the Hillsborough River to stand up for Florida's streams and wetlands. Photo credit: Staff. (4) Environment Florida, Sierra Club staff and members announce the settlement with Pilgrim's Pride. Photo credit: Jose Matos.









# SAVE FLORIDA'S COASTS

*Our shores and wildlife are too precious to risk with an oil spill—but that's exactly what's at stake if we open our oceans to oil and gas drilling. For almost 40 years, Environment Florida Research & Policy Center has led our state's efforts to keep oil rigs as far from our treasured coastline as possible.*

## DRILLING: DIRTY AND DANGEROUS

So much of Florida—our environment, our culture, our economy—is defined by our beautiful and distinctive coastline. That's why for decades Floridians have been opposed to offshore oil and gas drilling. The risks, we said, were too high, the rewards far too small.

And then, within days of the 40th anniversary of Earth Day, the risks became a reality. On April 20, 2010, BP's Deepwater Horizon oil rig exploded, claiming 11 lives and upending thousands more in one of the worst environmental disasters in American history.

Environment Florida Research & Policy Center responded by uniting members and making our voices heard. We organized cities in South Florida, including the City of Key West, the Florida Keys Chamber of Commerce and the Florida Keys National Marine

Sanctuary Advisory Council, to oppose new offshore drilling. When President Obama signed an executive order, opening the doors to drilling off our shores, we responded with 25,000 petition signatures urging him to reconsider.

## JOINING HANDS TO PROTECT OUR COASTS

Environment Florida Research & Policy Center also took an active role in organizing Hands Across the Sand, the largest demonstration against offshore drilling the world has ever seen. What began in Florida as a statewide offshore drilling protest on a cold day in February in 2010 grew enormously by June 26, when tens of thousands of people around the world traveled to their local beaches and joined hands to protest dirty, hazardous drilling.



Incredibly, the oil industry continued to aggressively push for executive action that threatened our world-famous coast. So in March 2015, our national team organized more than 250 businesses in Florida, North Carolina, Georgia, New Jersey and New York to join a bipartisan group of lawmakers against the drilling plan. Environment Florida Research & Policy Center released an analysis that demonstrated that offshore drilling puts birds at risk, disrupts the food chain, endangers wildlife and threatens our coasts with pollution.

The Obama administration listened, and we celebrated when it dropped plans to drill off of the Gulf and

Atlantic coasts and instead declared a moratorium on offshore drilling in our nation's waters.

Unfortunately, the Trump administration hasn't followed the same path. In early 2017, President Trump signed an executive order calling for the expansion of offshore drilling, and in January 2018, he re-opened the Arctic, Atlantic, Pacific and the Gulf of Mexico to the dirty and dangerous practice.

Once again, Environment Florida Research & Policy Center responded immediately to President Trump's executive order in 2017, and used the public outrage to mobilize hundreds of people, including

chamber representatives and over a dozen Republican and Democratic local and state representatives, for a successful bipartisan Hands Across the Sand event opposing the Trump administration's drilling plan.

Moving forward, we will continue to organize and elevate this bipartisan opposition to drilling off of our shores alongside a diverse coalition of elected officials, businesses and community allies to build the public support necessary to protect huge swaths of Florida's coasts from the type of offshore drilling authorized by the President. We won't stop until drilling can no longer threaten Florida's waters.

Photos: (Page 12) Floridians gather on Treasure Island beach to join hands across the sand. (Page 13 Clockwise-from-top) (1) St. Petersburg Mayor Rick Kriseman speaks at Hands Across the Sand. Photo credit: Sharon Kalahar. (2) Environment Florida Research & Policy Center, business owners, local elected officials and coalition partners rally to oppose offshore drilling during Hands Across the Sand at the Bilmar Hotel on Treasure Island. (3) State Director Jennifer Rubiello talks to media about the threats of offshore drilling to Florida's shores. Photo credit: Emma Stevens. (4) Interns and volunteers join hands in Miami in response to the BP Deepwater Horizon oil spill. Photo credit: Staff.





# TRAINING THE NEXT GENERATIONS OF ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISTS

*Today's young people will be the leaders of tomorrow. Each semester, our professional staff train and mentor a team of dedicated young people to educate and engage citizens throughout Florida on the most pressing environmental challenges of our time.*

## ENVIRONMENT FLORIDA INTERNS RALLY TO KEEP OUR PUBLIC LANDS IN PUBLIC HANDS

From the Everglades in South Florida to Dry Tortugas National Park in the middle of the Gulf of Mexico to Timucuan Ecological and Historic Preserve in Jacksonville, our parks, forests and public lands are a beloved part of our natural heritage. They're the places we visit with friends and family to paddle, bike, fish and open our eyes to the wonders of the great outdoors. We preserved these special places for future generations—and that's why we're putting young people at the forefront of our efforts to keep our public lands protected.

2016 marked the centennial of the National Park Service and a great opportunity to remind the public and our elected officials about how deeply Floridians care about our public lands and parks. So Environment Florida Research & Policy Center interns got to work rallying support. Over the course of a summer, Jenna Stevens, a University of Florida junior, Jessica Finkel, a University of Florida freshman, and Grace Clark, a junior at State University of New York, build a groundswell of support for our public lands including:

1 Collecting over 1,000 petitions at farmers markets, marathons and state and national parks from Floridians calling on our U.S. Senators to protect our public lands.

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2 Generating almost 100 calls from Floridians into Senate offices calling for strong protections.

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3 Writing and submitting five letters to the editor that were printed in papers throughout the state.

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4 Recruiting more than a dozen local elected officials to sign on in support of protecting our public lands.

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5 Showing the breadth of popularity for our parks and special places with almost 200 photo petitions from families and tourists in favor of keeping our public lands in public hands.

This rallying of public support around the 100th birthday of America's national parks not only helped educate and bolster Congressional champions, but it also provided an opportunity for new environmental leaders to learn critical organizing and leadership skills. And while the threats to our public lands are more dangerous than ever before, we're committed to keeping Florida's public lands in public hands, ensuring they are well-funded and maintained, and protecting them from pollution or other threats.



Families and tourists from across Florida take photopetitions to show support for keeping our public lands in public hands. Photo credit: Staff.



Environment Florida Research & Policy Center is a 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to protecting Florida's air, water and open space. Established in 2007 as the new home of the Florida Public Interest Research Group Education Fund's environmental work, we investigate problems, craft solutions, educate the public and decision-makers and help Floridians make their voices heard in local, state and national debates over the quality of our environment and our lives.

We would like to thank the Foundation for a Healthy St. Petersburg for their generous support of the publication of this booklet. Their support has made it possible for us to showcase our work to build public support for critical policies that boldly move Florida toward a cleaner, greener and healthier future.



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