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Autumn 2018

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VOTE LIKE THE EARTH DEPENDS UPON IT

When have we witnessed an assault upon the earth as we have witnessed these past two years? The modus operandi of this president and this Congress when it comes to the environment is appallingly clear: compromise it, exploit it, sacrifice it if doing so can make a corporate buck.

Can we downsize national monuments and open them up to mining and drilling? Do it.

Can we lower emissions standards when even car manufacturers say climate change means the fuel-efficiency of our vehicles matters? Do it.

Can we open up huge sections of offshore waters to drilling even at great risk to our shorelines as well as contributing to rising sea levels? Do it.

Can we severely compromise the Clean Air and Water Acts and thereby the protection of the most basic of needs, air and water?

Can we target the Endangered Species Act?

Can we make a travesty of the EPA?

Can we kill wolf and bear cubs in their dens?

Can we turn our backs on the Paris Climate Accord?

Can we do all this and more while flying in the face of science, social justice, and sheer common sense?

As far as our federal government is concerned, yes.

Locally, we are living in the midst of environmental tragedy and its economic consequences. Green water, green beaches, red tide, fish kills, 100's of dead sea turtles, 100's of dead manatees, dead dolphins, unchartered charter boats, empty restaurants, world-wide attention to an ecosystem in dire distress: all the result of unsound environmental policies and politics.

Statewide, the Sabal Trail Pipeline was approved, the legislature failed to ban fracking, trial deep injection wells are in the works, deep cuts hurt the DEP, and Amendment 1 dollars were spent in ways the voting public did not want the money spent, among other things.

Has there ever been a more important time than now to check such flagrant disregard for the planet and people?

No.

This year VOTE like the earth depends upon it, because it does.



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Greetings Fellow Sierrans! Since the last time I wrote, the assault on the environment has been in overdrive.

At the beginning of the year we had two proposed mining facilities apply for rezoning classification with Lee County. The King Ranch mine, (over 4,000 acres), and the Troyer Brothers mine, (781 acres), are both located in the DR/GR (Density Reduction/Groundwater Resource) located off Corkscrew Rd. Both mines will be used to supply lime rock aggregate requests for new communities to be built off of Corkscrew Rd. and in Collier County. Both of these mines will have huge impacts to the environment. Wildlife like the endangered Florida Panther, surrounding preserves, water and air quality and residential living conditions in the surrounding areas will be terribly impacted. Dramatic increases in dump truck traffic to and from these mines will become a public safety nightmare. I spoke at both Lee County Hearing Examiner meetings to express Sierra Club's concerns. These mines are NOT a need, but rather a monetary opportunity for the property owners. There are currently more than enough mines in the DR/GR to meet the supply and demand of developers in Lee and surrounding counties. The public comment period for these mines ended on June 29th, 2018. We're awaiting a recommendation from the Lee County Hearing Examiner to the County Commissioners.

From the Chair Ruth Scott

On April 22nd, 2018, Sierra Club Calusa Group celebrated Earth Day at the Calusa Nature Center with a focus on plastic pollution. In Lee County, two communities have enacted plastic straw bans: Ft. Myers Beach and Sanibel Island. It's imperative we address one of the planet's largest forms of pollution individually and community-wide. Only 14% of plastic packaging is recycled globally. Annually, eight million tons of plastics enter our oceans. Help stop plastic pollution by using #stopsucking and #unplastictheplanet when posting on social media.

September 15th, 2018 was International Coastal Cleanup Day. Myself, Vice Chair/Treasurer John Scott and Solemi Hernandez did the first microplastic/microfibers testing in Lee County at Little Hickory Beach. The testing program, in conjunction with NOAA & Charlotte Harbor National Estuary Program, is quite new. We'll post results to our website and social media pages as they become available. I urge you to recycle plastic items #1-7 and re-purpose, re-use and reduce your consumption of one-time use forms of plastic.

Proposed revisions to the Endangered Species Act will greatly impact threatened and endangered species in Florida and across the nation. (See page 11) Nineteen endangered species will be impacted by the East Collier Habitat Conservation Plan (ECHCP), which is beginning to move along. Sierra Club Calusa Group will post information on the upcoming public comment period as it becomes available.

Discharges from Lake Okeechobee filled with blue-green algae and historic red tide off the coast have plagued all of South Florida's inland and coastal waters, resulting in unprecedented ecological and economic disasters. The impact to wildlife, economy, and human health has been terrible. (Read Red Tide, Green Algae: A Disaster on page 4)

Sierra Club Calusa Group participated in roundtable discussions with Bill Nelson to discuss these impacts and also hosted Andrew Gillum on Aug. 24th at the Cape Coral Yacht Club for a tour and discussion of our water quality problems. Both are Sierra Club endorsed candidates.

It was a lot of work but Calusa Group is excited to announce that our SIX local candidates for State/Federal Office have been officially endorsed by Sierra Club Florida. We need your vote, help, and support to elect all Sierra Club endorsed candidates.

Sierra Club Endorsements

United States Senate **Bill Nelson**

<https://www.nelsonforsenate.com/>

United States House of Representatives

Fl. District 19: **David Holden***

<https://www.holden2018.com/>

Governor **Andrew Gillum**

<https://andrewgillum.com/>

Attorney General **Sean Shaw**

<https://seanshaw.com/how-we-win/>

Commissioner of Agriculture **Nikki Fried**

<https://nikkifried.com/>

Florida State Senate

District 28: **Annisa Karim***

<https://www.karimforsenate.com/>

Florida House of Representatives

District 78, Lee County: **Parisima Taeb***

<https://www.parisimataeb.com/>

District 79, Lee County: **Mark Lipton***

<https://www.liptonfloridahouse79.com/>

District 80, Hendry and Collier Counties:

Jennifer Boddicker*

<https://www.voteboddicker.com/>

District 106, Collier County: **Sara Doyle McFadden***

<https://votemcfadden.com/>

Don't know your state senate district? See:

<https://www.flsenate.gov/Senators/Find>

Don't know your state house district? See:

<https://www.myfloridahouse.gov/Sections/Representatives/myrepresentative.aspx>

*Special thanks to Ruth and John Scott and Bonnie Clancy for their efforts in securing endorsements for the candidates listed above with an asterisk next to their names.

Amendments

VOTE NO on Amendment 1

Property Tax assessment exemption

VOTE YES on Amendment 4

Voters Rights Restoration

VOTE NO on Amendment 5

Supermajority required for tax increase

VOTE YES on Amendment 9

Near Shore Drilling BAN

VOTE YES on Amendment 13

Stop Greyhound Racing



Sierra Club Calusa Group meets 6pm every 2nd Wednesday of the month in meeting room CD at the Fort Myers Regional Library, 1651 Lee St., Fort Myers, FL 33901. All members are encouraged to attend!

Red Tide, Green Algae: A Disaster With No End in Sight

It was a historically wet May. Shortly thereafter, blue-green algae covered 90% of Lake Okeechobee. Red tide exploded off the coastlines of Southwest Florida. This story has a familiar theme. When Lake Okeechobee water levels creep above 15.5 feet, under the mandate of public safety, the Army Corps of Engineers release algae-saturated, nutrient-rich, polluted discharges east and west into the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee Rivers, respectively. Those ecosystems were still recovering from 2016, which was also horrific but had an ending. The ecological disasters laying waste to coastal and inland waters in 2018 have no end in sight.

Red tide, whose duration is normally measured in days or weeks, has lasted almost a year and may continue into 2019. Naturally occurring (like climate change), red tide has been exploded by man-made nutrient loading and rising water temperatures. While some are slow to make the connection, it's undeniable that nutrient loading feeds red tide. Really. It's not a conspiracy theory. High levels of nutrients and pollution contained in the discharges blasting out into the Gulf of Mexico are a steady stream of fuel for red tide.

The sheer volume of marine life lost in 2018 is staggering. At least 554 manatees, over 400 sea turtles and more than 70 dolphins have died this year. More than 2,400 tons of dead marine life have been picked up. Gut-wrenching.

Officially, more than 15 people have been taken to Southwest Florida emergency rooms as a result of problems caused by red tide. In addition to respiratory issues, exposure to red tide can also cause nausea, vomiting and, in rare cases, acute liver failure.

The toxicity of blue-green algae (cyanobacteria) can also be deadly, as evidenced by independent test results conducted by the Calusa Waterkeeper. Results showed toxicity almost 800 times greater than what can make humans sick. Unimaginable toxicity. More potent than most industrial chemicals.

Found in cyanobacteria, neurotoxin BMAA is cumulative (like mercury or lead) and scientifically linked to neuro-degenerative diseases like ALS, Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease, but long term health effects may not be seen for 20 years. Watch the documentary "Toxic Puzzle" for more details.

Hundreds of dead end canals in Cape Coral and North Fort Myers are clogged with mats of blue-green algae. The stench has confined people to their homes. Some have left. Disturbed blue-green algae becomes airborne and the only protection is a respirator mask. Local officials don't think testing for airborne cyanobacteria is a priority. I vehemently disagree. Water can be avoided but breathing can't. Aggressive signage and testing are mandatory to protect an unsuspecting public from airborne AND waterborne threats. The response from local and state health departments continues to be woefully inadequate.

The economic impact has been devastating as well. Sanibel and Fort Myers Beach have lost nearly \$41 million combined during the months of July and August. Bailey's General store on Sanibel has experienced a 40 % drop in revenue, amounting to a half million dollars in lost business. Charter boat captains are literally "dead in the water," most of them losing 80% or more of their business.

The east coast is also being pummeled by blue-green algae blooms once again in the St. Lucie River. Seven cyanobacteria-related pet illnesses have been reported, one of which resulted in the death of Finn, a healthy 9-year-old standard poodle.

Calusa Group hosted Andrew Gillum on a "Look, Listen and Learn tour" at the Cape Coral Yacht Club on

Red Tide, Green Algae (cont.)

August 24th and participated in roundtables with Senator Bill Nelson, Agriculture Commissioner candidate Nikki Fried and CFO candidate Jeremy Ring, which were productive, educational discussions about environmental problems and solutions.

These disasters are a culmination of terrible policies over the past 20 years. Rick Scott and the Florida legislature have overseen, by far, the worst of those policies in the past 8 years. Over 200 million tons of fertilizer runs off into Lake Okeechobee annually and over 500 million tons of sewage enters Florida waterways each day. Unfettered growth and development continue to exacerbate these problems as well. We must stop pollution at its source and hold polluters accountable. In 1996, voters passed the “Polluters Pay” amendment which has remained an unfunded mandate to this day.

It’s crucial we elect environmental champions in November to break the cycle of destruction and usher in a new era of policies and enforcement that will protect Florida’s environment. If we keep going down the same path we’ve been on, the algae blooms of death will only continue to get worse.

John Scott, Vice Chair/Treasurer



Sierra Club Calusa Group

Toxic Puzzle

Cyanobacteria were among the first living organisms on earth. They evolved photosynthesis, emitting oxygen in the process, and so made possible life as we know it today. Cyanobacteria is blue-green algae.

Can cyanobacteria be causing ALS, Alzheimer’s and Parkinson’s diseases? This is the focus of *Toxic Puzzle*, narrated by Harrison Ford. A medical detective story, it follows Dr. Paul Cox on his worldwide quest to find a cure for these neurodegenerative diseases.

His findings should concern anyone who eats food from, swims in, or even breathes air impacted by blue-green algae, for it produces BMAA, an amino acid which “can trigger Alzheimer’s-like brain tangles and amyloid deposits,” and the science suggests “bigger blooms [mean] more ALS.”

“Our research demonstrates a close link between environmental health and human health,” Dr. Cox reports. “This is not theory. It’s fact.” Experts suggest that this environmental link is the reason BMAA is less likely to be pursued; governments don’t want to go there. But “water quality is a key issue,” Dr. Cox says. “Cyanobacteria thrive on nitrogen and phosphorous from agricultural and sewage inputs,” circumstances all too familiar to SWFL residents. Some people may be more BMAA-vulnerable than others, but research needs to bear this out. Until then, exposure remains a risk for everyone.

Nor is it just about us. BMAA toxin may also be harming the neurological health of dolphins, manatees and other wildlife.

Dr. Cox is cautiously optimistic that L-serine, a non-essential amino acid, can counter the effects of BMAA in vulnerable people. But more trials are needed before it earns FDA approval.

With climate change compounding the situation, cyanobacterial blooms are growing in frequency and duration more than ever. We in SWFL know this all too well. Watch the film on Amazon or YouTube.

DeSantis' Environmental Plan

Sierra Club Florida Director Frank Jackalone says, “Ron DeSantis’ environmental plan for Florida is filled with empty promises, few facts, and fewer details, and he omits any reference to climate change, clean energy, or the State’s desperate need to manage growth again. DeSantis’ plan attempts to greenwash his abysmal record voting against the environment 98% of the time in his three terms as a Member of Congress.”

Regarding **Southern Storage and Everglades Restoration**, DeSantis is embracing the watered-down, expensive, and problematic version of the EAA Reservoir that Governor Scott and the Water Management District designed. At 23 feet high, the Reservoir would be deeper than Lake Okeechobee and a potential engineering nightmare. Also, the reservoir won’t provide clean water to the Everglades unless the state commits to spend hundreds of millions of dollars on something needed but is not in Rick Scott’s plan: the purchase of tens of thousands of acres of sugar land to create additional wetlands to clean the dirty water stored in the reservoir before it is released to the Everglades.

Regarding **Oil Drilling Off Florida’s Coast**, DeSantis says that he will use his “unique” relationship with President Trump to ensure that oil drilling never occurs off Florida’s coast. We are troubled that DeSantis is being vague here. Where does “off Florida’s coast” begin? 5 miles out from the beach? 10 miles out? 100 miles out?

Regarding **Red Tide**, DeSantis says he’ll put together a blue ribbon panel and to study the causes of red tide. We know the causes. Action is needed now.

Florida Water and Land Conservation Amendment (Amendment 1) – DeSantis says that he would use Amendment 1 dollars not just for purchasing and managing new conservation lands, but also for various existing projects including “water quality, beach restoration, and conservation of state parks.” It sounds like he’s siding with the Legislature in its appeal of the Florida Circuit Court ruling that said the voters’ intent was to use Amendment 1 funds exclusively for new land

Injection Wells Approved

Emergency Estuary Protection Wells, otherwise known as deep-injection wells, are billed by some as a quick solution to reduce the amount of harmful lake water discharged into the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee estuaries, and two test wells were recently approved by the South Florida Water Management District governing board. Each well could pump 15 million gallons of water per day.

Deep injection wells involve digging down about 3,000 feet into what is often called the boulder zone—an area of rock, silt and brackish water that does not ordinarily mix with the drinking water in our aquifers. But this layer could be prone to vertical cracks that might allow untreated surface water to migrate back up into and polluting drinking water sources.

Such wells, as Shannon Estenoz, chief operating officer of the Everglades Foundation and former vice-chairman of the water district’s governing board says, are “1940s thinking. Restoration is about capturing the water, cleaning it and redirecting it to where it should go.” Environmentalists want a holistic approach to repairing the troubled Everglades ecosystem, and restoration is the key element in that approach.

Paralleling those concerns and goals, last May, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which controls discharges from Lake Okeechobee, removed the consideration of deep injection wells from the Lake Okeechobee Watershed Restoration Project, saying further analysis was needed.

Ultimately, the plan could include up to 60 wells and cost more than \$5 million each. District water managers are not elected. They are appointed by the governor and approved by the Florida Senate.

conservation purchases and management of those lands. If DeSantis sides with the legislature in its attempt to overturn the court decision, it would be bad news for future land conservation efforts in Florida.

Climate Change and Clean Energy: unaddressed!

See more here: <http://peoplesvoiceradio.com/sierra-club-florida-news-dissecting-ron-desantis-environmental-plan-and-abysmal-voting-record/>

Sierra Club Wins on Amendment 1

This past summer, a Tallahassee judge ruled in favor of Sierra Club and other Florida environmental groups in a 2015 lawsuit filed to force state officials to spend money approved by voters in a 2014 constitutional amendment election as intended.

The measure, known as Amendment 1, was approved by 75 percent the voters—a mandate if there ever was one—and directs that one-third of the collections from the tax on real estate documentary stamps be sent to the Land Acquisition Trust Fund.

The amendment was proposed and adopted because the Legislature and governor failed to allocate sufficient revenue to satisfy a portion of the Florida Constitution that states: “It shall be the policy of the state to conserve and protect its natural resources and scenic beauty. Adequate provision shall be made by law ... for the conservation and protection of natural resources.” But that hasn’t been happening since 2009 when the state drastically reduced or eliminated funding of the premier program for acquisition — Florida Forever.

Amendment 1 made it clear that 33 percent of net revenues from these real estate documentary stamps would be used to “acquire, restore, improve, and manage conservation lands including wetlands and forests; fish and wildlife habitat; lands protecting water resources and drinking water sources, including the Everglades, and the water quality of rivers, lakes, and streams; beaches and shores; outdoor recreational lands; working farms and ranches; and historic or geologic sites.”

Environmentalists sued because legislators diverted hundreds of millions of dollars of that money to things like operational and management costs, and to offset cuts to other programs and agencies.

Alisa Coe of Earthjustice, one of the attorneys representing the Sierra Club and other environmental organizations, said that “This decision is a big victory for the millions of Florida voters who demanded that the legislature reinstate land buying programs for parks, wild lands and the Everglades. Four million Floridians approved a constitutional amendment to devote almost a billion dollars a year to purchasing conservation lands. The legislature and agencies thumbed their noses at the voters by spending the money on other things. This ruling will help protect some of Florida’s most beautiful and environmentally important areas for generations to come.” Amendment 1 “was the most popular item on

the entire statewide ballot that year. [This] ruling means that the state must honor the voters’ will to preserve our precious natural resources through conservation.”

Frank Jackalone, Sierra Club Florida Chapter Director, said the ruling “is a landmark decision making it clear that amendments to Florida’s constitution are orders by the people; they aren’t suggestions which the Legislature can decide to ignore. After four years of blatant misappropriation of taxpayers’ money, the Legislature has been forced by the Florida Courts to obey the voters mandate that it use a dedicated source of state funds to preserve and protect Florida’s natural lands.”

Legislators plan to appeal. Matt Caldwell, currently running for Commissioner of Agriculture, said the ruling defies the actual language in the amendment. “I think this is evidence of why we shouldn’t legislate through the Constitution. These are political questions that need to be solved through the political process. The courts aren’t equipped to handle these issues.”

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Juliana v. United States: Landmark Climate Lawsuit

Children Demand Climate Action

It has come to this: children are suing their own government to ensure they inherit a healthy planet. (the case two days after Donald Trump was elected.)

It's being called the Trial of the Century, a moniker it deserves. Defendants include President Trump, the EPA, and the U.S. Departments of Energy and the Interior among many others. *Juliana v. U.S.* begins on October 29th and the world will be watching.

The lawsuit was filed in Oregon in 2015 on behalf of 21 children. Their lawyers will argue that the government failed to fulfill its responsibilities under the public trust doctrine. That doctrine has its roots in Roman law and asserts that certain natural and cultural resources are preserved for public use, and that the government is entrusted with protecting and maintaining these resources for the public good. A healthy climate, the plaintiffs claim, is such a resource.

The prosecution will assert that a healthy climate is an "unenumerated" right implicit in the Constitution. They will contend that the government compromised that right and violated the public trust in that it a) knew the danger that fossil fuels represent to the earth in terms of global warming as far back as 1955; b) had the power to stop it; and c) knowingly failed to protect the earth from catastrophic CO₂ levels. Lawyers will make the case that the US government actually promoted the rise of CO₂ by subsidizing the fossil fuel industry to the tune of \$503 billions dollars (the U.S. is the world's top subsidizer of the industry), as well as issuing tens of thousands of oil-drilling permits on federal lands. In short, the government created the danger that threatens the planet these children will inherit.

Should they prevail, the children are asking the court to order the executive branch of government to develop a plan that will put us on as path to 350ppm by 2100 and a maximum of 1 degree warming.

Of course, the government has done its best to prevent this case from ever going to court and initially fossil fuel companies joined the government in arguing for dismissal of the case. (They removed themselves from

In November, 2016, in a historic 54-page decision upholding a lower court ruling, U.S. District Court Judge Ann Aiken denied motions to dismiss the case, writing, "I have no doubt that the right to a climate system capable of sustaining human life is fundamental to a free and ordered society. Just as marriage is the foundation of the family, a stable climate system is quite literally the foundation of society, without which there would be neither civilization nor progress." Perhaps anticipating those who maintain courts should not be deciding environmental policy, Judge Aiken continues, "The identification and protection of fundamental rights is an enduring part of the judicial duty to interpret the Constitution," and quotes Justice Kennedy who, in regard to same-sex marriage, wrote:

The nature of injustice is that we may not always see it in our own times. The generations that wrote and ratified the Bill of Rights...did not presume to know the extent of freedoms in all its dimensions, and so they entrusted to future generations a charter protecting the right of all persons to enjoy liberty as we learn its meaning. When new insight reveals discord between the Constitution's central protections and a received legal stricture, a claim to liberty must be addressed."

The courts, including the U.S. Supreme Court, has denied subsequent and "extraordinary" attempts by the Trump administration to have the case dismissed. Finally, on October 29th, science, common sense, and social justice will be pitted against governmental and corporate malfeasance of the highest order.

There are similar lawsuits underway at the state level. This past April, in *Reynolds v. Florida*, 8 Floridian children, aged 10 to 20, became plaintiffs seeking to force the government of a state especially vulnerable to climate-driven sea level rise and currently experiencing algae blooms and red tides aggravated by global warming, to develop a science-based "Climate Recovery

Juliana v. U.S. (continued)

Plan.” They are being represented by Our Children’s Trust, the same Oregon based organization arguing the Juliana case. Topping the list of defendants is Governor Rick Scott.

More specifically, the children accuse the governor—which placed a gag order upon state employees regarding climate change—of rolling back or failing to implement carbon-cutting legislation and ignoring the threat of rising sea levels, which in turn threatens the state’s tourist-based economy.

A hearing was held on October 4th in Tallahassee. Suggesting how difficult lies the road ahead, in August, a judge in Washington dismissed a similar lawsuit maintaining that the issues in the case are political ones and must be addressed by Congress and the president.

But there is good reason to be hopeful as well. In April, in a case much like the Juliana case, Columbia’s highest court overturned a lower court’s ruling. The Supreme Court ruled in favor of the youth plaintiffs, who argued that deforestation in the Amazon and increasing temperature threatened their constitutionally-guaranteed rights to a healthy environment, life, health, food and water.

Cases in Belgium, India, and Pakistan have all been allowed to proceed. Norwegian youth are appealing the Oslo District Court’s January denial of their constitutional climate change case to the nation’s highest court. And lawyers in Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom are working with Our Children’s Trust in preparation of their own suits.

When Dutch citizens sued the government over climate change in 2015, the government argued that the issue of climate change was too big for it to handle alone. But Dutch judges didn’t buy it and ruled in favor of the plaintiffs. “The state,” they said, “should not hide behind the argument that the solution to the global climate problem does not depend solely on Dutch efforts...Any reduction of emissions contributes to the prevention of dangerous climate change and as a developed country the Netherlands should take the lead in this.” The Dutch government was ordered to reduce emissions by 25% within five years.

Those who will inherit the planet are in no mind to tolerate further inaction on the part of their elders, and their message is loud and clear: “We will see you in court!”

(See www.ourchildrenstrust.org for more information).



Sadness, Anger, Disappointment and Resolve

Local 15-Year Old Plaintiff Talks About Climate Lawsuit

What sort of young adult has the gumption to take on her state government over its inaction regarding climate change?

The sort whose mother is Energy Chair for the Sierra Club Calusa Group and whose father is a member of the Seminole Tribe of Florida. The sort who has spent almost all her young life residing in the middle of the Everglades, which she calls one of the “most diverse and rarest ecosystems” in the world, an ecosystem that is “so full of wonders and beauties, it still takes my breath away.”

Valholly Frank, a 15-year old tenth grade student who certainly knows her own mind, is one of the 8 minor-aged plaintiffs bringing suit against a Florida state government that they don’t believe is protecting one of their inalienable rights: the right to a healthy, biologically diverse, climate-stable planet.

Long passionate about climate change, she thought she’d play a supportive role when she heard about the lawsuit. But when her mother said there was the possibility that she could assume a direct part in it, she jumped at the opportunity. In a phone interview, I asked her why.

“To protect what is rightfully everyone’s,” she said. “People let money-making, greedy people in power use that power to make living for normal people and average citizens intolerable and unhappy in general.” The lawsuit “is not about winning a monetary award. It’s about raising awareness, it’s about why we need to change, how we can change, and that there will be change,” she affirmed. Very specifically, it’s about the state producing “a credible carbon-reduction plan,” a goal that parallels the goals of the federal lawsuit starting a few weeks later in Oregon.

Regarding climate inaction, she described her feelings as “a mix of sadness and anger, creating an overwhelming disappointment.” At school, teachers do not want to discuss the issue even when asked by students, because it is “too controversial.”

“It should not be controversial at all,” she stated, “because it is real.”

She believes that those people who do not admit the reality of climate change do so not out of ignorance, but out of denial. For some people, “business reasons” underlie their denial. For others, it is to avoid “the guilt that they are part of the problem that is affecting so many people in the world.”



But she is “inspired by [her] fellow plaintiffs, just regular kids, who have such a solid resolve to fight against the state government. No matter how old or young one is,” she added, “one can still make change.”

Some people, I noted, might challenge her, asking, “What do you and your family do to combat global warming. Do you walk the walk, or just want others to fix the climate problem?”

“We have solar panels on our house which provides most, if not all, of our electricity needs. We also have solar hot water heaters. Both our cars are hybrids. And we do the smaller stuff, too. We recycle, we use LED lightbulbs, we grow some of our own food in our garden, and we buy organic a good deal.”

At a September 8th climate rally, speaking publicly, Valholly declared, “I am in love with this earth, and I am grateful for it.” During our phone interview, I asked her if she would add anything to that statement. After a moment’s reflection she said, “**No man, no corporation, no company, no government can take away my right to the beauty this world has shown me.**”

The Endangered Endangered Species Act

"War is peace. Freedom is slavery. Ignorance is strength." And in an Orwellian 2018, new proposals to change the Endangered Species Act will be "very protective and enhance the conservation of species."

So stated Interior Department Deputy Secretary David Bernhardt, who before working in the Interior Department, worked as an oil industry lobbyist whose clients included the Petroleum Association of America.

The Endangered Species Act (ESA) was signed into law 45 years ago by Republican president Richard Nixon with overwhelming bipartisan support and has been one of America's most successful laws. Sometimes called the gold standard for environmental protection, it has saved from extinction all but 10 of its approximately 2,000 listed species. The humpback whale, gray wolf, bald eagle, and the American alligator and American manatee are here today because of the ESA.

Attacks on the Endangered Species Act are nothing new says Michael Gerrard, an environmental law professor at Columbia's Sabin Center for Climate Change Law. "The ESA has been under relentless attack for years from the construction and real estate industries, fossil fuel extraction companies, and others." But with a Republican-controlled Congress and an anti-environment president in office, "this is their best opportunity in decades to try to weaken it."

It always comes down to the same thing: the clash between environmental protection and economic interests. Florida, with its mix of explosive population growth and development, and its conservation-minded residents, has long been a battleground. Florida is home to 93 endangered species and 44 threatened species.

Under the current law, the federal government cannot take economic impacts into consideration when deciding whether or not to list a species as threatened or endangered. "That was included for a reason," says Lisa Dale of the Earth Institute, "because the ESA's intent is to protect the species, not to put a price on the species." The proposed changes would allow economic impacts to be considered in deciding whether a species gets listed. How much is the Florida panther worth?



"What the U.S. government is doing now," Dales says "is uniquely destructive."

Of course, more than anything else, protecting a species means protecting its habitat and this is where economic costs clash with conservation efforts. To save the spotted owl, one needs to save the forest it inhabits. To save the sage grouse one needs to save lands on which industry wants to drill. The proposed changes to the ESA would likely make it easier to build roads, pipelines, mines, and other developments in areas that could be essential for a species' survival.

New proposals would also give more power to states to oversee application of the act. Some argue that well-intentioned state scientists know their home species better than federal scientists. But scientists aren't the problem. Industry influence and politics are the problems. Gerard states unequivocally, "Turning over implementation of the [ESA] to the states amounts to turning it over to the oil, gas, and coal industries." The fact that the proposal strikes a requirement that government agencies consult scientists and wildlife officials before approving permits for potentially disruptive activities like gas and oil drilling, supports this statement.

The ESA is under attack by an anti-environment president and Congress. You can change that in the election booth.