

The Pelican Sierra Club Florida

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SIERRA CLUB

FLORIDA CHAPTER



Photo/Marcia Biggs



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A BRAVE NEW WORLD

As we move forward into the Florida Legislative Session for 2021, Sierra Club Florida announces the following priorities for the coming year.

BY DEBORAH FOOTE
Florida Chapter Deputy Director
and **DAVE CULLEN**, Chapter Lobbyist

Clean Energy

Adaptation is not enough. Florida must be pro-active and act decisively to reduce heat trapping emissions. If we fail, our children will pay the price when climate change and sea level rise outpace our ability to retreat. Steps must be taken now to transition to 100% renewable energy statewide by 2050 with an interim goal of powering all state-funded operations with renewable energy by 2035 and cut greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.

Start by updating the Florida GHG emissions baseline so we know where to prioritize our efforts, and phase in electric vehicle (EV) fleets, including for mass transit. Prevent new fossil fuel development by banning all forms of well stimulation as it would only add to the emissions problem caused by extraction, leaks, and burning.

Low-income families, who are hardest hit by rising energy costs, must not be left behind, and demand-side and supply-side energy efficiency must be incentivized and invested in. Conserved energy doesn't have to be generated which means more comfortable homes and fewer emissions for less money.

(Continued on page 5)

A NOTE FROM THE CHAIR

ALYSSA CADWALADER



As we ring in 2021, we find many challenges ahead of us. We find ourselves in the midst of a surging pandemic, while battling to preserve our democracy. In the meantime, our environmental and social justice battles closer to home in Florida are raging as much as ever.

Now is the time we need everyone to join the fight! While we may not be able to organize in person, we need everyone's help to attend virtual meetings, talk to your state legislators, write letters to the editor, share environmental stories on social media, and more. I encourage you to get involved with your local groups who are as active as ever and read this newsletter to find out how to get involved in issues you care about. We are more powerful together!

This will be my last Note from the Chair, as I have reached my term limit on the Florida Chapter Executive Committee. It is my pleasure to introduce you to Steve Wonderly, the incoming Chair of the Florida Chapter. Steve is a long-time member and Chair of the Volusia-Flagler Group, and has served as the Vice Chair of the Florida Chapter for the past year.



Wonderly

Steve has a great track record of leadership, conservation, political, and legislative advocacy, and will drive the Florida Chapter into the future along with the rest of the Executive Committee and chapter leadership. It has been an honor to serve as your chair for the past two years, and I look forward to a continued commitment to the Florida Chapter.

COVID-19 UPDATE

Sierra Club remains committed to the safety of our members, volunteers, staff and the public during these unprecedented times. Most meetings and events will continue to be held virtually in the foreseeable future.

The pandemic has also led to the closure of our state offices, with staff working from home under mandate from National Sierra Club. These offices are expected to remain closed until further notice. Certain administrative functions can be taken care of through our national Member Care team by calling (415) 977-5653 or logging onto our new Member Center platform, My Account, at myaccount.sierraclub.org. Once you've successfully signed in, you will be able to change your address, update your preferences, sign petitions, and more.

Thank you for your continued patience.

Meet the New ExCom Members

The Florida Executive Committee welcomes three new members:

Debbie Matthews of the Miami Group is back after taking a hiatus of several years. She served on Florida ExCom in 2011, becoming Chair in 2013. She served as Miami Group Chair and Vice Chair and is a founding member of the Group Advisory Council (GAC) and is currently on the Group Empowerment Team (GET).



James Scott comes to us after serving two years as Chair of the Suncoast Group. He remains on the Suncoast ExCom as an expert in sustainability, climate adaptation, urban growth and clean energy. He is a solid champion of diversity, inclusion and environmental justice issues.



Leighanne Boone of the Big Bend Group has a background in environmental law and energy policy. Leighanne is proud to have been a leading member of the coalition that achieved a 100% renewable energy goal for the City of Tallahassee.



Continuing to serve will be Sheila Erdley of Turtle Coast. The Chapter wishes to thank outgoing ExCom members Alyssa Cadwalader, Stephen Mahoney and Daniel Marian for their past service!

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Marcia Biggs, Editor

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Sierra Club Florida Director

Frank Jackalone

Sierra Club Florida Executive Committee

Steve Wonderly, Volusia Flagler Group, Chair

Debbie Matthews, Miami Group

James Scott, Suncoast Group

Craig Diamond, Big Bend Group

Grant Gelhardt, Big Bend Group

Sheila Erdley, Turtle Coast Group

Leighanne Boone, Big Bend Group

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Single-Use Plastic Bags Campaign Continues

BY JANET STANKO

Despite the disruptions of the presidential election and the COVID-19 pandemic, we have been moving forward on our digital single-use plastics campaign - Stop Using Plastic Bags, Publix

Our ultimate goal is to get Publix to stop using single-use plastic bags at their checkouts. This could save up to 500 million bags per year, a portion of which would not go into our communities, municipal solid waste recycling systems, waterways and marine environments. We chose Publix because they are the biggest supermarket chain in Florida and hopefully will set an example that similar retailers will follow.

Eliminating single-use grocery bags stops this trash at its source.

Our campaign got off to a great start in January 2020. Our committee and local Sierra groups throughout Florida were gearing up for an event-filled spring in



order to get our petitions signed from in-person contact and educating people about problems related to single-use plastics. But due to the virus we are stalled in in-person events indefinitely. Hopefully things will ramp up in the fall.

We are seeking 50,000 signatures on our online petition to make a compelling statement. We are using social media, e-mails, local group newsletters, and recently virtual event webinars about single-use plastics and related topics to get our word out.

SIGN THE PETITION

Sign the Stop Using Plastic Bags, Publix petition at:

www.addup.sierraclub.org/campaigns/stop-using-plastic-bags-publix

To volunteer, contact Janet Stanko at jstanko3@gmail.com

We are forming coalitions among our partners in plastics initiatives to coordinate our impact and leverage off our information platforms. These campaigns educate the public about topics such as Styrofoam, straws, and ocean friendly restaurants, carry-out containers and foodware. Together we present a multi-faceted front to retailers and plastics interests that we want to move to a less plastic intensive lifestyle.

How can you help? It's easy. Sign our petition and share it on your social media. Attend our webinars and join our single-use plastics working group to help with the campaign in your area.

Kids Learn About Overcoming Obstacles in ICO Film Festival

Invite children and teens to watch this special programming, and inspire them to turn on to nature, inclusiveness and the meaning of free spirit.

Even if COVID-19 is forcing us to stay home, we can be inspired by a virtual outdoors film festival hosted by the Sierra Club's Inspiring Connections Outdoors (ICO) program. The 2-night film festival, from 7 to 9 pm February 20-21, can be watched free online on YouTube Premieres.

The film festival serves not only to inspire and challenge today's youth, it's also a fundraiser for seven ICO groups across the nation, including two in Florida: Palm Beach County and Tampa Bay. Donations are greatly appreciated.

The first program on Feb. 20 features 14 short films from 5 Point On the Road Adventure Films which take viewers around the globe kayaking and mountain biking, river surfing, rock and mountain climbing, hiking and more, all with stories of personal limitations and challenges.

On Feb. 21, "Community Campfire Night" showcases Sierra Club's ICO volunteers and young people, reflecting and inspiring with personal adventures.

Sierra Club's ICO program teams adult volunteers with community youth who have limited access to the outdoors.



5 Point on the Road

"United States of Joe's" goes rock climbing in rural Utah.

Collaborating with schools, clubs and community service organizations, ICO serves to introduce kids and teens to nature, conservation and wildlife.

To sign up to watch the special and receive the YouTube Premieres link, go to www.ICOFilmFest.com. To learn more about volunteering for the ICO program in Florida, contact Rocky Milburn at tbico@live.com

Sierra Club Election Work Worth the Effort

BY DAVID HARBEITNER
Chapter Political Chair

It is always a relief when the elections season is completed and, given the shenanigans we have witnessed post-election day this cycle, I know we are all glad the 2020 electoral cycle is now complete. We did want to share a brief synopsis of our work and results from the elections.



The Chapter hired Deborah Foote as our Government Affairs and Political Director in early 2019. Additionally, almost every Group around the state had an active Political Committee working on elections. As a result of these actions, we entered the 2020 electoral cycle in much better position

to be actively engaged in the elections.

We made an endorsement in over 150 elections ranging from Congressional seats, to the Florida Legislature and local county and municipal offices. This also included engagement in state wide amendments and local county ballot initiatives. While I would like to report 100% of our endorsed candidates/positions were victorious, we were not quite that successful. However, we did have good success. Here is a quick summary:

100% of our positions on Amendments/Ballot Initiatives were successful including significant conservation victories in Collier, Manatee, Orange and Volusia counties.

92% of the incumbents we endorsed won re-election.

50% of our endorsements for open seats were successful.

19% of our endorsements of challengers were victorious.

Viewed via the level of the contest, our greatest successes were in local elections (better than 67% victories) followed by Congressional (58%) and then state level (43%).

Measuring our success just via election results misses the bigger picture. The Sierra Club does not engage in politics simply to win elections. Our goal is to protect the environment and that occurs via our advocacy work. Advocacy success is built not only on winning elections, but also by building relationships with the elected officials. Here are a few ways we helped build our political strength through this cycle:

We placed 28 interns into the campaigns of endorsed candidates crossing both the state and local levels. Additionally, the Club placed 2 Victory Corps staff members into Congressional campaigns.



13 of our Groups, ranging from the Panhandle down to the Keys had a Political Committee in place and a number of new leaders and participants actively participated in the endorsement and subsequent support activities.

Scores of our members actively supported our endorsed campaigns, many helping in the Presidential campaign, but we were also active in campaigns at the state and local levels.

So what does this all mean?

As you can read on the facing page, the Club has seven key priorities at the state level. We will be reaching out to many members of the legislature, both those we endorsed as well as those we did not, to advocate for our positions.

Many Groups will be doing similar things with their local county commissions and/or city councils. This is a great time for you as a member to engage as this is when the rubber hits the road and our environmental priorities are what we work on to support better policies for our future.

To learn more about how you can assist in these efforts, please reach out to Deborah Foote (Deborah.foote@sierraclub.org) or David Harbeitner (davidh@suncoastsierra.org).

Receive Legislative Updates / Session Chats / Online Bill Tracker

During the 2021 session, we will be following priority bills and presenting insight into news you can use with regular Facebook Live “Sierra Session Chat” videos. Be sure to follow us at www.facebook.com/sierraclubfl.

To receive legislative alerts during session via e-mail sign up for our **Florida Report** listserv by submitting your e-mail to our lobbyist Dave Cullen at cullenasea@gmail.com. We are planning to provide real-time updates on bills pertaining to our priorities as they go through committees with a Bill Tracker on our web site once session opens on March 2. To find it, go to florida.sierraclub.org and look for the link on the home page.

2021 Priorities

(Continued from page 1)

Land Conservation

The ability of land to provide clean air and water and to serve as buffer from storms and flooding is compromised or destroyed when it's developed. We need sufficient conservation of land to ensure future generations' ability to rely on sustainable ecosystem services, outdoor recreation lands, wildlife/landscape/ecotourism resources and agriculture.

Smart Growth

An important part of land conservation is using the land we develop wisely and efficiently. Sprawl is neither. Florida's decade-long rejection of planning in favor of reliance on purely market-driven land use decisions benefits speculators at the cost of wasted resources, diminished quality of life, and increased costs for residents in impacted communities.

Instead, increase the quality of life in developed areas by investing in redevelopment and infill, and walkable and transit-oriented communities that allow residents to choose to live near recreation, employment, and shopping without being tied to an automobile.

Choose carefully where new development takes place. Ensure valuable natural resources and wildlife habitat are protected. Determine in advance the availability of water and the capacity for treating wastewater, the potential impacts of sea level rise, and the long-term impact of new transportation corridors.

Repeal M-CORES due to the insupportable cost of the 330 miles of toll roads and the sprawl it will induce. It is the antithesis of smart planning that includes protection of natural resources.

Water Quality and Quantity

Florida is heading for a population of 24.4 million by 2030 and the *laissez faire* approach to pollution and capacity doesn't work anymore. Most importantly, let's stop pollution at the source.

Increased costs will be paid for one way or the other. The question is who should pay those costs? Should taxpayers pay to clean up someone else's mess or have to live with it? Or should it be borne by the entity that pollutes? It's cheaper to invest in doing it right to begin with than paying to fix it when it's broken. It can cost up to \$2,000 to remove a pound of fertilizer from surface waters. Preventing it from getting into the water to begin with costs much less. Prevention is the better economic choice.

Florida's water supply shortfall can be partially addressed by preventing pollution. More clean water means more for use and for natural ecosystems. Preserving pollution-filtering wetlands; appropriately regulating fertilizer, septic tanks, stormwater, and sewage systems; and banning land application of all classes of biosolids are all part of the solution.

Proper water use fees for permitted users will encourage conservation and provide funding for water projects. Permits to pump water should be based on a "water budget" and permit holders' use should be monitored. Permits allow the use of water, but it's owned by the people of the State which holds it in trust for us.

Water is essential for the natural systems Florida depends on. We urge the legislature to acquire 100,000 acres of the Everglades Agricultural Area for water treatment to help restore the River of Grass; protect our groundwater which supplies 93% of the population with drinking water; and stop the over-pumping of our aquifer to restore historical flow to our Outstanding Florida Springs and preserve their recreational and economic value.

And before we start pumping treated wastewater into our source of drinking water, make certain that all contamination that could threaten public health is removed.

Democracy

Our democracy is under assault. The ability of citizens to vote, the process of direct democracy (citizen driven ballot initiatives), and fair redistricting have all

suffered. We must protect and defend the most fundamental elements of our democracy for all Floridians.

Our government should serve all the people, not just the wealthy or partisan special interests. Defend public participation in government decision-making; repeal unfair procedural obstacles such as the threat of costs and fees; and defeat attempts to undermine process in the courts, the Division of Administrative Hearings, and the ballot box.

State Interference in Local Decisions

If you believe in government "of, by, and for the people," let local governments lead on local issues. Local governments recognizing a problem can enact an ordinance to address it, and adjust it as needed. But when the State preempts them and offers weak regulation or none at all, affected communities have nowhere to turn.

Business and the economy are important, but so are the rights of people who live in Florida communities. Let local governments enact and enforce stricter standards than the State to deal with the plague of plastic, fertilizer sales during rainy season application bans, tree protection, and the application of herbicides and pesticides.

Budget

If it isn't paid for, it won't happen. Provide for conservation land acquisition with full funding from the Land Acquisition Trust Fund in a way that redresses the current inequitable distribution of funds between North and South Florida.

Invest in state owned EVs and EV infrastructure. Protect our natural resources by ensuring adequate funding for enforcement activities. Support at-risk Floridians during the COVID-19 pandemic by increasing funding to community agencies that administer Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) funding and for utility bill payment relief. Finally, free up millions in funding by repealing the ill-advised M-CORES program.

Around the State



Repeal M-CORES

After major studies concluding the building of three planned toll roads is fiscally irresponsible and needless, Florida Sierra continues to pressure top decision makers to stop the M-CORES project from seeing the light of day. We are urging every city and county government in Florida to pass a resolution telling the state to repeal the bill authorizing that these toll roads be built through the rural heartland of Florida, where they will destroy land, pollute waterways and threaten endangered species. Do you have a local elected official who may be interested in championing such a resolution? Go to www.noroadstoruin.org/take-action to join the #RepealTheRoads effort!

Wetlands Permitting

Sierra Club has joined environmental organizations including Florida Wildlife Federation, Center for Biological Diversity, Defenders of Wildlife, Miami Riverkeeper and St. Johns Riverkeeper, and the Conservancy of Southwest Florida, in filing a lawsuit in federal court challenging the recent transfer of power over wetlands dredge and fill permitting from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to the Florida Department of Environmental Protection.

This authority will allow the state to formally take over the longstanding federal program that protects marshes, cypress forests, ponds and other wetlands under the Clean Water Act.

Earthjustice is representing the groups who claim that delegating the power to grant these permits to the State of Florida is a dream come true for the developers, miners, and road builders who spend lavishly to elect, influence, and control Florida politicians.

Join our Equity, Inclusion and Justice Team

Everyone deserves clean water and breathable air—but for many communities in Florida access to those basic necessities is compromised by systemic racism and discrimination. Florida Chapter's Equity, Inclusion, and Justice Committee (EIJ) is working with a renewed sense of urgency to educate and address these issues. Some Florida Groups may be unsure what this means on the local and volunteer levels. Please reach out to justice@florida.sierraclub.org to request resources and information. Let's do this together!

Radioactive Roads?

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is being sued by Sierra Club and several other organizations for approving the use of radioactive waste to build roads in Florida.

For about three decades, it's been the position at the EPA that a product called phosphogypsum — a radioactive waste that's left over from creating chemicals used for fertilizer — poses an unreasonable risk to public health if it were put into roads. The substance produces radon gas, a hazardous air pollutant. It also includes lead, arsenic, and other metals that have been found to have health consequences for people and the environment.

But in October, the EPA switched its position and approved phosphogypsum for use in road creation. Usually this waste gets put aside in gypsum stacks.

A petition to the EPA to reconsider this decision was submitted in December.

Water War Continues

After years of battling between Florida and Georgia, the U.S. Supreme Court will again take up a dispute about water in a river system that links the two states. The Supreme Court scheduled oral arguments Feb. 22 in the case about divvying up water in the Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint river system, which stretches from northern Georgia to Apalachicola Bay in Franklin County.

Florida filed the lawsuit in 2013, though the two states have fought for decades about water in the river system. Florida contends that Georgia is using too much water from the system, damaging the Apalachicola River and the long-iconic oyster industry in Apalachicola Bay. In December 2019 an appellate court judge ruled that Florida had not adequately shown that Georgia's water use caused problems in the Apalachicola River and Apalachicola Bay.

In Memory

Sierra Club Florida lost a legendary leader with the passing of **Mary Sheppard**, longtime Manatee-Sarasota environmental activist. Protection of the Florida environment was her lifelong passion. She won three Sierra Club awards including the Florida Chapter Medal in 1999.

Around the State

Adventure Coast Group is Official

Sierra members in Hernando, Citrus and north Pasco counties are now part of the new Adventure Coast Group! The group ExCom recently adopted three areas of focus for the coming year.

The first goal is to support the use of electric vehicles (EV's) in Hernando, Citrus, and northern Pasco Counties by promoting the installation of 20 new EV charging stations in each county for a total of 60 EV chargers. We will focus on



businesses, schools/colleges, state parks, government offices and hospitals to encourage and facilitate efforts to install EV chargers at their locations. Our plan will include research, community outreach, and direct action to bring more EV chargers to our neighborhoods. The second goal is to collaborate with the disadvantaged in our communities. Sierra Club

acknowledges the intersectionality of environmental and social justice. Our work to protect the planet should include those most affected by environmental injustice. Marginalized communities often experience an increased risk of exposure to pollution. We chose to focus on the homeless and/or hungry among us and will reach out to partner with local organizations on the frontline of helping these communities to offer our support and collaboration.

Finally, we will pursue the Clean Energy Schools Campaign in Hernando to facilitate the adoption of clean energy goals by the public school district. In Citrus, we'll create a new solar coop in cooperation with Solar United Neighbors and others to bring more solar power to more homes.

Members in these counties are encouraged to get involved, we need your help! Email sierraclubadventure-coastcc@gmail.com or call 352 277-3330 for more information. Our new web site is:

sierraclub.org/florida/adventure-coast

Calling all Panhandle Members - Join us!

Florida Sierra is forming a Northwest Florida Committee to bring together members in the West Panhandle who would like to engage in environmental issues, political endorsements, outings (when possible), conservation issues and more. If you would like to join a conference call to discuss opportunities, please email John.Swingle@florida.sierraclub.org



Free the Ocklawaha River

Please join Sierra Club Florida in urging Gov. Ron DeSantis to restore the Great Florida Riverway. It is time to save the Ocklawaha, Silver, and St. Johns Rivers, as well as historic Silver Springs.

Why Does It Matter?

The Great Florida Riverway is one of Florida's environmental and economic treasures — and it needs your help.

This vast, 217-mile river system reaches from the Green Swamp in Central Florida all the way to the Atlantic Ocean via the Ocklawaha and St. Johns Rivers. The Great Florida Riverway is home to 50 freshwater springs: 25 at historic Silver Springs, 20 on the Ocklawaha River, and five in the Harris Chain of Lakes. Like the Everglades to the south, restoring the Great Florida Riverway is vital to improving the ecosystem and economic health of North and Central Florida.

The Ocklawaha, the heart of the Great Florida Riverway, was dammed in 1968. Constructed for a canal that was never completed, the dam flooded over 7,500 acres of forested wetlands, 20 springs, and 16 miles of the Ocklawaha River. The continued decline of water quality, spring flow, wetland forests, fish, wildlife, and recreation has led American Rivers to designate the Ocklawaha River as one of America's Most Endangered Rivers® of 2020.

Restoring the Great Florida Riverway by breaching this dam will re-establish access to essential habitat for manatees, bring back migratory fish, connect three river ecosystems, historic Silver Springs, and restore a lost riverway for anglers and paddlers.

Save a Tree, Get Your Pelican Online

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Email new address to
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and include your membership ID
number located on the mailing label.

A Fond Farewell to Chapter Director Frank Jackalone

After some 23 years of leading Florida Chapter through the ups and downs of countless political administrations, fielding media calls and speaking at rallies on everything from fracking and oil spills



to clean energy and black bears, Chapter Director Frank Jackalone has announced his retirement effective February 5.

During a virtual meeting of state leadership on

Dec. 11, heartfelt tributes to Jackalone were voiced by many who had worked with him during the past two decades. Jackalone's dedication to Florida, his leadership and willingness to represent the Club to any and all have been hall-



Jackalone speaking at the 2016 Hands Across the Sand event on St. Pete Beach.

marks of his position as Chapter Director.

He was remembered for his many

contributions providing thoughtful direction, being a team builder and supporter, and a driving force in fundraising for the Chapter. Jackalone has always been an advocate for social justice. He insisted that the voiceless be heard by hiring staff for campaigns such as the Stop Sugar Field Burning campaign in the Glades. He was essential to the organization of Puerto Rico's Sierra Club group, arranging for Florida and national staff to work closely to make the group a reality. He was also a Sierra leader in the recovery and support of Puerto Rico and Florida after hurricanes Irma and Maria.

The Chapter Executive Committee presented Jackalone with a crystal award statue commemorating his dedication and service. On behalf of the entire Chapter, we wish to give him our sincerest thanks and congratulations on his retirement. Job well done, Frank!