

Gov. Ron DeSantis' environmental record not as stellar as it seems | Opinion

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A couple of things: by not stopping the new toll roads, DeSantis has allowed the single most environmentally destructive happening for Florida's immediate future, whose devastating effects will remain forever. Another blow for the environment is his non-support of home rule.

We could add that as we write this he has left the SRWMD Board of Directors twisting in the wind. Due to his failure to appoint new members in a timely manner, district business has suffered, monthly meetings canceled, the new budget unapproved. This is because the nine-member board now has four members and is unable to reach a quorum.

Can our governor be so busy he is unable to perform essential and critical tasks?

Read the complete article here in [Florida Today](#).

Comments by OSFR historian Jim Tatum.

-A river is like a life: once taken, it cannot be brought back-

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PhotoFlorida Gov. Ron DeSantis speaks at the Brevard County Emergency Operations Center in Rockledge on Thursday as Hurricane Dorian approaches the state. Various county and state officials also attended. (Photo: TIM SHORTT/FLORIDA TODAY)

Gov. Ron DeSantis generated a wave of bipartisan enthusiasm after promoting clean water as a centerpiece of his governorship early this year.

He replaced South Florida Water Management District Governing Board members, signed an executive order that called for a 40% increase in Everglades restoration spending, placed environmental enforcement under the Department of Environmental Protection, where it belongs, appointed a blue green algae task force, a chief science officer, set aside \$50 million for springs restoration, and un-banned the use of the word climate change.

Sounds like a lot. These are good things that he has done. Unfortunately, eight months into his governorship, these measures and others really don't amount to much.

2018 marked a tipping point in this state's awareness of its

water crisis as shocking pictures and videos flooded social media. Toxic blue-green “guacamole” algae poured to both coasts from Lake Okeechobee by the billions of gallons. These discharges devastated our estuaries and fed a historic red tide, which caused massive fish kills to wash up on our state’s beaches.

Our rivers and estuaries have all become sickened and discolored because of runoff from streets, lawns, mining, sewage spills, and farm fields layered with toxic biosolids.

Florida Bay is dying. Springs have turned from clear blue to murky green as nutrients from agriculture and development infiltrate the Florida aquifer. From Apalachicola Bay, to the coral reefs and Everglades of South Florida, the St. John’s River, and all the lakes and tributaries in between, Florida’s indispensable aquatic resources are in a state of unmitigated disaster.

Even with all of these problems, our Legislature voted to spend less than 1% of our state’s budget on fixing the state’s waters this year. Funding did go up slightly from when former Gov. Rick Scott plundered environmental dollars on behalf of special interests, but we aren’t even close to being back to where we were when he started. Of all of the bills that passed the Legislature in 2019, none of them significantly increased environmental protections anywhere, while many of them either removed protections, or increased funding to harmful projects. DeSantis stood silent and signed these bills and that budget.

Despite cleaning house on the South Florida Water Management District board, his environmental transition team included proponents from a wide range of destructive and unscrupulous interests, including John Miklos, a consultant who represented several clients who have been penalized for violating wetland

development rules. His Everglades initiatives fall dismally short of completing the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan, which laid out the necessary fixes over 20 years ago. Florida Forever funding is still only at 10% of what it was before Scott was elected. Phosphate mining company Mosaic continues to stack radioactive gypsum waste and pollute the Peace River. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission is still devastating wildlife by spraying toxic glyphosate into our waterways. Preemption of local environmental protections continues unabated.

Despite overwhelming public disapproval, oil drilling interests are moving forward with oil drilling permits in South Florida. The DEP denied the permit initially, but a lower court overturned that, and the agency has since abandoned the case even though a victory against oil drilling in a higher court would create an invaluable precedent. Our governor has the ability to end the issuance of new permits with the stroke of a pen. He will not.

The reality is that he is a weak governor who only won the Republican primary because of a twitter endorsement from Donald Trump, which is as sad as it is disturbing. Trump's own efforts to dismantle environmental protections border on being obsessive...

Matt Fleming is an activist and lives in Satellite Beach. He ran as a Democrat for the Brevard County Commission in 2018.