

# Gwen Graham's Letter to Gov. Scott -How To Fix Our Water-

July 15, 2016

U.S. REPRESENTATIVE  
**GWEN GRAHAM**  
FLORIDA'S 2<sup>ND</sup> DISTRICT



The following letter is to Gov. Scott from congresswoman Gwen Graham. Our governor would do very well to heed her advice. What are the chances? She has hit about all of the points here. We have taken the fourth paragraph and re-inserted it at the beginning, as we find it to be especially worthy of consideration and full of wisdom.

*Second, ask your political appointees on the South Florida Water Management District to resign and replace them with scientists, engineers and conservationists. Your first year in office, you forced the state's five water management districts to cut their budgets by \$700 million. You then filled their boards with political appointees who had no experience in water management, environmental planning or conservation. In the private industry, a construction company wouldn't place a biologist in charge of building an apartment building. Our government shouldn't place a developer in charge of protecting our water.*

*Comments by OSFR historian Jim Tatum.*

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



GWEN GRAHAM  
2ND DISTRICT, FLORIDA

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July 13, 2016

The Honorable Rick Scott  
Governor of Florida

Plaza 05, The Capitol  
400 South Monroe Street  
Tallahassee, FL 32399-0001

Governor Rick Scott:

I appreciate you writing to Florida's Congressional Delegation concerning the algae crisis threatening our state's environment and economy. However, I was disappointed to see, instead of

proposing or supporting comprehensive solutions to this disaster, your letter primarily focuses blame on President Barack Obama and advocates only a partial solution, maintaining and repairing Lake Okeechobee's Herbert Hoover Dike. I agree, the dike should be strengthened, but there is wide consensus that we need to do more than simply enlarge Lake Okeechobee to end this cycle of slimy summers.

I've spoken with the Indian Riverkeeper, Treasure Coast business owners, and scientists – and not one of them has blamed the president for this crisis. In fact, many of them are frustrated with our state government and hungry for you to exhibit leadership on this issue. Your administration has ignored sea-level rise, weakened water-quality standards and dismantled environmental protections. If you continue on your current course, your legacy will not be cutting taxes or creating jobs – it will be as the first governor in modern times, Republican or Democrat, who actively worked to harm Florida's environment. I implore you to reverse course and consider acting on the following four additional action items to address the algae crisis and save the Florida we love:

First, call the legislature into a special session focused on short- and long-term solutions to improve our water quality and prevent future algae blooms. The images of thick guacamole-like algae covering waterways and beaches is heartbreaking to every Floridian. These images have also outraged Floridians across the state. A key reason so many of us love living here is because of our state's natural treasures. Many Floridians also depend on our state's natural treasures and the tourists they attract, for their very livelihood. Every member of the state's legislature has beautiful beaches, rivers, lakes or springs in their district. They understand how important our environment is to our economy and our very way of life. Call the legislature into special session, and use the bipartisan outrage over today's

crisis to work with the legislature, controlled by your own party, to pass real solutions to protect us from future environmental and economic disasters.

Second, ask your political appointees on the South Florida Water Management District to resign and replace them with scientists, engineers and conservationists. Your first year in office, you forced the state's five water management districts to cut their budgets by \$700 million. You then filled their boards with political appointees who had no experience in water management, environmental planning or conservation. In the private industry, a construction company wouldn't place a biologist in charge of building an apartment building. Our government shouldn't place a developer in charge of protecting our water.

Third, work with the legislature and local governments to create a plan to clean up and replace failing septic tanks. While scientists do not believe septic tanks are the main source of nitrogen causing algae blooms, I agree with the Florida Chamber of Commerce that the state must address the tens of thousands of failing septic tanks. A statewide program would have the added benefit of improving water quality across Florida and clearing up the dark water in our springs. Though you were silent during previous legislative sessions as septic tank bills died, I'm glad you are now considering proposing an unspecified amount toward this issue in your next budget – but why wait? If you were to call a special session, the legislature could focus on this issue while the waters are still green.

Fourth, use Amendment One funds to buy land south of the lake and restore the river of grass to the Everglades. In 2014, Florida voters overwhelmingly approved Amendment One: the Water and Land Conservation Amendment to appropriate funds toward protecting and restoring our state's natural resources. Unfortunately, when you approved the legislature's budget, you

allowed \$242 million raised by the amendment to be diverted from the Land Acquisition Trust Fund to general revenue. Now environmental groups are suing the legislature and Chief Financial Officer Jeff Atwater to have the funds restored for the purpose voters intended. Ask the legislature to drop the lawsuit and begin working with them on a comprehensive plan to purchase land south of Lake Okeechobee.

Even with strengthening the Herbert Hoover Dike, it will never be large enough to hold enough water. If a hurricane or tropical storm were to hit central Florida, the Army Corps of Engineers would be forced to release millions of gallons of water into the Indian and Caloosahatchee rivers – or if a storm were to hit the full lake, we could face an even greater natural disaster. We must restore Florida's water flow to the way God and nature intended, by sending the water south. Even if you believe previously negotiated land deals were not the best option, show leadership and renew negotiations with private industry on a new, and possibly even better deal for our state.

As our waterways clog with algae, children suffer from negative health effects, and tourists cancel their trips to Florida, we need leadership. Passing the buck to the president and federal government isn't an answer – the state must take responsibility to tackle the problems we face. I offer these suggestions in good faith and am committed to working with you and any other leader to end this crisis. I hope you will show the same good faith and begin working to protect our environment.

Sincerely,

[Gwen Graham] signature

Member of Congress