

Sierra Club Defends Our Parks From Our DEP

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PICNIC IN THE PARK ONLY IN FLORIDA



Tom T. Hall
Knows what
Makes Our
Legislature

Spin

James Call of the *Tallahassee Democrat* has written about the bills holding the fate of our state parks, which are currently passing through our Legislature. The Sierra Club is valiantly defending our parks from degradation by our own DEP.

Tom T.. this is not about "...faster horses," or "younger women," but it is about "mo' money."

State lands bill heads to House floor

[James Call](#), Democrat Capitol Reporter 5:11 p.m. EST February 18, 2016

Revisions address many concerns environmentalists had but park advocates say a loophole needs to be closed.

A proposal revamping how Florida manages state lands, including parks, is ready for a House vote. But Gov. Rick Scott's bottom line approach to government and his Department of Environmental Protection secretary's focus on making the park system self-sufficient is casting a long shadow on HB 1075.

Most environmental groups are withholding judgement and hoping to work with Rep. Matt Caldwell, R-Lehigh, to further change the proposal, which cleared the State Affairs Committee Thursday on a unanimous vote.

The Florida Audubon, Conservancy of Southwest Florida and the Nature Conservancy say Caldwell has made wholesale changes to the proposal that created a prairie fire of protests last year when it was first introduced.

They all thanked Caldwell for incorporating some of their suggestions in his bill but say more work is needed.

“This has been one of the most positive experiences. . . . We felt like our concerns were heard (and) responded to,” said Jane Bowman of the Nature Conservancy. “We definitely want you to pass (the bill), which is not supporting the bill.”

Caldwell said he wants to streamline how state lands are managed and provide flexibility to the governor and Cabinet, who serve as the Board of Trustees for state properties.

“I’m looking at the whole picture and saying you are going to have a different management plan depending on what your goals are for a particular property,” Caldwell told the *Democrat* last month. “I want the Cabinet not to be hamstrung by some expectations that no one can no longer explain or defend.”

Florida owns about 13 million acres of land; about 3.4 million acres are conservation lands and include state parks and preserves. Another 9 million acres are submerged lands and the rest are properties with state buildings and universities and colleges.

The land is managed by a variety of state agencies under a hodgepodge of laws, but the prime directive is that land management is consistent with the purpose the land was acquired.

To appease opponents, Caldwell removed a provision allowing “low impact” revenue producing activities. But park advocates say they see a loophole. One that could permit revenue-producing schemes like logging at state parks and preserves.



David Cullen
Speaks for the
Environment

The Sierra Club Thursday was the only group to voice opposition. Dave Cullen, the group's lobbyist, said the proposal changes the management plan's prime directive to being compatible with recreation and or conservation instead of the reason for which the land was acquired.

With a reference to an idea floated last year by the Department of Environmental Protection to allow hunting, cattle grazing and timbering at state parks, Cullen said the bill's language would enable DEP to permit silviculture – the harvesting of timber.

"Silviculture is included in the term conservation," said Cullen. "If we're talking about the state parks and they want to do the timbering to make the money to make the park quote, unquote, self-sufficient. Then they can tuck that into the heading of conservation and do what they want."

Cullen compared the provision to the "tail wagging the dog."

Also, Stephanie Kunkel of the Conservancy of Southwest Florida said the language Caldwell used to provide DEP flexibility in land management is problematic.

"It is possible that a private individual could take over management of state parks," said Kunkel, discussing a provision involving land swaps. "We want it expressively prohibited that a private individual cannot have access to manage a state park or preserve."

"The one issue that remains, which I feel passionately about and I will work the best I can with advocates, involves the exchange of lands," said Caldwell. "I believe fully the future of

landscape conservation in the state is going to require conservation easements and having the flexibility to use the resource . . . perhaps more efficiently.”

HB 1075 is ready for a floor vote. The Senate companion, SB 1290, has cleared one committee and has two more committee assignments