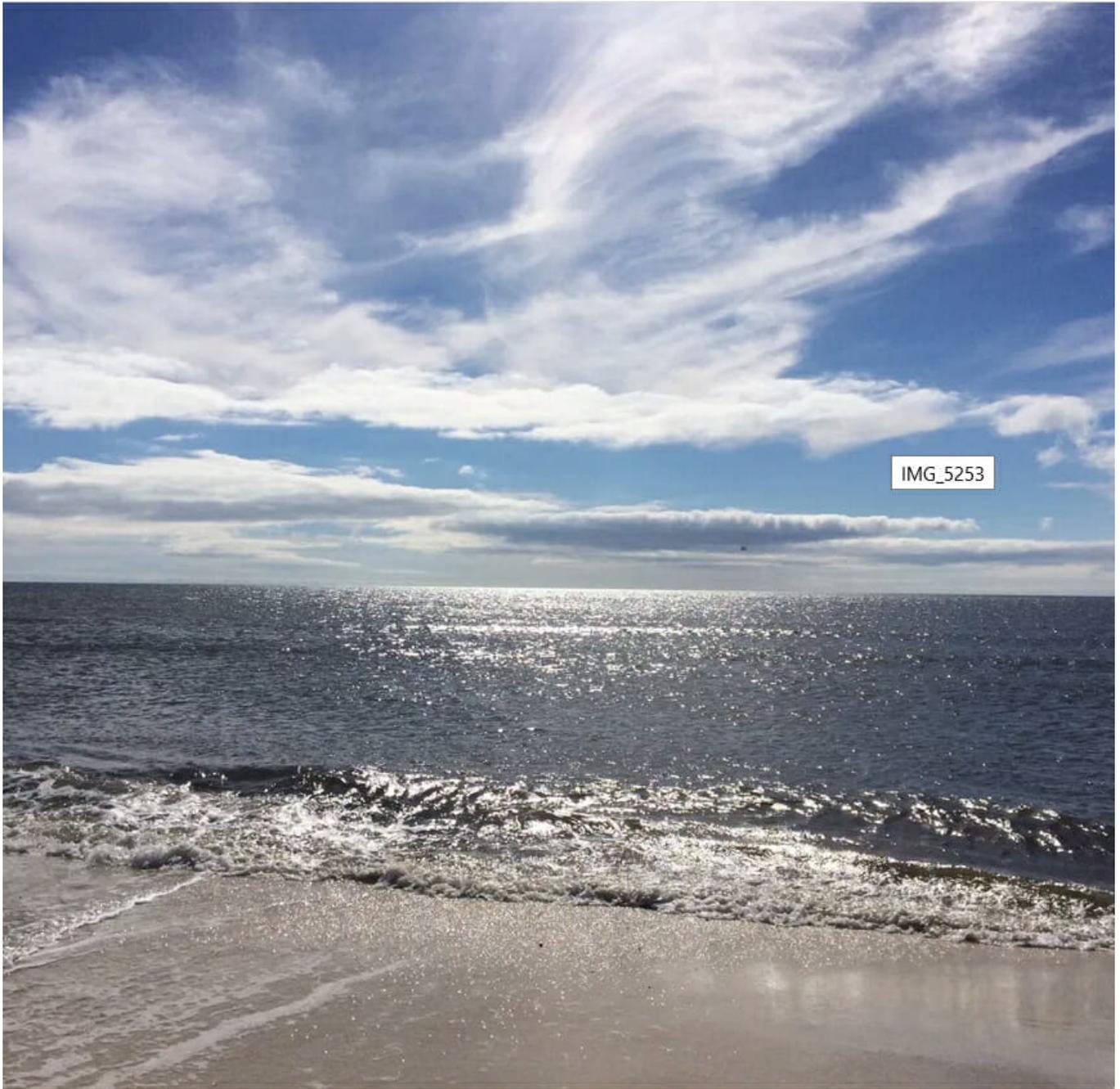


Voters' will? Legal case over FL conservation land-buying measure has its day in court Tuesday

July 16, 2019



Julie Hauserman photo

Quite a few Florida legislators have blatantly thumbed their noses at the constituents who put them in their jobs, playing God and indulging in self-serving whims and various forms of self gratification. We are talking, in this one case, about the old Amendment 1 which expressed the will of the people to conserve land to benefit the environment.

We would hope the State of Florida gets its comeuppance

tomorrow, and if not, that decision will speak volumes.

Read the original article by Julie Hauserman [here in the Florida Phoenix](#).

Comments by OSFR historian Jim Tatum.

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

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[Julie Hauserman](#)

July 15, 2019

Five years ago, a whopping 75 percent of Florida voters approved a state Constitutional amendment to dedicate a share of state tax dollars to conservation land buying. The enormously popular measure got more votes than any candidate (or any other issue) on the ballot.

It wasn't a new tax – it just earmarked 33 percent of the money already collected through the documentary tax on real estate transactions “to acquire, restore, improve, and manage conservation lands” for future generations.

But right off the bat, the Florida Legislature started raiding the land conservation land-buying money for other things – like buying vehicles and paying insurance premiums and salaries – operating costs that normally come from the state’s big pot of tax dollars, the General Revenue fund.

Environmental groups went to court to get lawmakers to adhere to what voters directed in the Water and Land Conservation amendment to Florida’s Constitution. Last summer, Circuit Judge Charles Dodson, in a ruling from the bench, agreed with the groups that legislators had defied voters’ will.

The state appealed, and on Tuesday, the legal case will be heard in the First District Court of Appeal in Tallahassee. A number of groups sued the state, including the Florida Wildlife Federation, the Florida Defenders of the Environment, Sierra Club, St. Johns Riverkeeper and the Environmental Confederation of Southwest Florida. They are being represented by the nonprofit national legal firm Earthjustice and other independent lawyers.

For years, the state’s Florida Forever conservation program led the nation. From 1990 to 2008, the Florida Legislature earmarked \$300 million a year for conservation land-buying. Then, the commitment dwindled. One year, the state allocated no dollars at all to Florida Forever. In the most recent state budget, legislators appropriated only \$33 million for Florida Forever.