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## **45 Democratic Candidates Demand Permanent Halt to GOP's Plan to Commercialize Florida's State Parks**

**TALLAHASSEE, FL** – Forty-five Democratic candidates for the Florida State Legislature are calling on Governor Ron DeSantis and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) to permanently abandon all plans to commercialize Florida's state parks. The candidates have issued a strong statement opposing the governor's recent proposal to develop these parks, calling it an affront to the principles of conservation and public trust.

"Simply 'going back to the drawing board' or putting the plans on 'pause' is not a genuine commitment," the candidates stated. "Governor DeSantis cannot leave voters in limbo during such a critical election. This is yet another Republican tactic to mislead and manipulate voters."

The DEP's proposal, which included plans to build hotels, golf courses, and pickleball courts within state parks, has drawn widespread criticism. These parks are home to some of Florida's most iconic and vulnerable species, including the Florida panther, sea turtles, gopher tortoises, and the Florida scrub jay. The introduction of commercial development, the candidates argue, would cause irreversible harm to these ecosystems, replacing natural beauty with concrete and chemically-treated landscapes.

The candidates have criticized the so-called "Great Outdoors Initiative" as misleading, accusing the GOP of prioritizing corporate interests over the public good. For more than 30 years, Republicans have systematically dismantled environmental protections in Florida, pushing for private development at the expense of the state's natural resources. This latest proposal, they say, is part of a broader agenda, known as Project 2025, to privatize public agencies and replace their functions with for-profit corporate schemes.

"We will not be deceived by the handful of GOP lawmakers who now claim to 'oppose' this development plan," the letter continues. "Their sudden concern does not erase years of support for Governor DeSantis's broader anti-environmental policies. These same lawmakers have consistently voted to weaken environmental regulations and defund conservation efforts, contributing to the very crisis we now face. They have even gone so far as to eliminate the words 'climate change' from state law, leaving our state parks unable to address the devastating effects of a warming climate—stronger hurricanes, more tornadoes, and rising sea levels."

The Democratic candidates are calling for a legally binding commitment from Governor DeSantis and his DEP Commissioners to protect these lands for future generations. They insist that the plans be permanently scrapped, not just paused.

“We refuse to let Florida’s natural treasures be auctioned off to the highest bidder,” they concluded. “Until a permanent commitment is made, this remains a live controversy, and we’ll keep fighting to keep our parks wild and free.”

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[Attachment: Press Release and Open Letter]