

Open Letter to Governor Ron DeSantis and the Florida DEP Commission

August 28th, 2024

**45 DEMOCRATIC CANDIDATES CALL FOR PERMANENT HALT  
OF ALL GOP PLANS TO COMMERCIALIZE FLORIDA'S STATE PARKS**

As Democratic candidates for the Florida State Legislature, we are compelled to speak out against Governor Ron DeSantis's latest attempt to undermine the natural heritage of our state. Simply "going back to the drawing board" or **putting the plans on "pause" is not a genuine commitment**; DeSantis cannot leave voters in limbo during such a critical election. This is yet another Republican tactic to mislead and manipulate voters. The recent proposal by the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) to develop Florida's state parks is a blatant assault on the very principles of conservation and public trust that these lands are meant to uphold. Our state parks are not just plots of land; they are sanctuaries for wildlife, refuges for endangered species, and places where Floridians of all walks of life can connect with nature.

Governor Ron DeSantis's hand-picked DEP proposed a deeply concerning plan to allow the construction of hotels, golf courses, and pickleball courts within our state parks. 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 would *irreversibly* harm these ecosystems, replacing Florida's natural beauty with concrete structures and chemically-laden golf courses.

The so-called "Great Outdoors Initiative" was completely misleading. It was actually an attempt by the GOP to put corporate interests ahead of the public good. **For over 30 years, Republicans have been systematically dismantling environmental protections** in Florida, pushing for private development at the expense of our natural resources. This recent proposal to convert our public lands into profit centers for a select few serves as an example of Project 2025's stated agenda to privatize public agencies and replace their functions with for-profit corporate development schemes.

We will not be deceived by the handful of GOP lawmakers who *claim* to "oppose" the development plan. Their sudden concern does not erase years of support for Governor DeSantis's broader anti-environmental policies. **These same Republican 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 **eliminating 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—*they can't even talk about climate change*.

We refuse to let Florida’s natural treasures be auctioned off to the highest bidder. We demand Governor DeSantis and his DEP Commissioners **permanently** scrap *all* plans to commercialize our state parks—immediately. As Democratic candidates, **we insist on a legally binding commitment to protect these lands for future generations**, not to simply pause the plans. Until that happens, **this is still a live controversy**, and we’ll keep fighting to keep our parks wild and free.

Sincerely,

Franscine Mathis  
Candidate for FL House District 1

Adam Morley  
Candidate for FL House District 19

Haley Morrisette  
Candidate for FL House District 2

Tony Connolly  
Candidate for FL House District 20

Keith Gillum  
Candidate for FL House District 3

Judith Vowels  
Candidate for FL House District 23

Stephanie Lyn Leonard  
Candidate for FL House District 5

Fody Merritt  
Candidate for FL House District 25

Jerry Wyche  
Candidate for FL House District 6

Jackie Arndt  
Candidate for FL House District 26

Kenny Beasley  
Candidate for FL House District 7

Andy Ferrari  
Candidate for FL House District 27

Bobby Brady  
Candidate for FL House District 10

John Hill  
Candidate for FL House District 48

Gary McManus  
Candidate for FL House District 15

Ashley Elizabeth Herrmann  
Candidate for FL House District 49

Bryson Morgan  
Candidate for FL House District 17

Karl Cieslak  
Candidate for FL House District 54

Keith Matthews  
Candidate for FL House District 18

William “Willie” Pura  
Candidate for FL House District 56

Kelly Johnson  
Candidate for FL House District 57

Bryan Beckman  
Candidate for FL House District 58

Dawn Douglas  
Candidate for FL House District 59

Nick Clemente  
Candidate for FL House District 66

Lisa Carpus  
Candidate for FL House District 68

Bobby Kachelries  
Candidate for FL House District 69

Luther Wilkins  
Candidate for FL House District 70

Adriaan DeVilliers  
Candidate for FL House District 71

Lesla Miller  
Candidate for FL House District 72

Charles "Chuck" Work  
Candidate for FL House District 81

Arthur Oslund  
Candidate for FL House District 82

Lisa Stortstrom  
Candidate for FL House District 85

Alberto Hernandez  
Candidate for FL House District 86

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Candidate for FL House District 111

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Candidate for FL House District 112

Jacqueline "Jackie" Gross-Kellogg  
Candidate for FL House District 113

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Candidate for FL House District 114

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Candidate for FL House District 116

Joel Vodola  
Candidate for FL House District 118

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Candidate for FL Senate District 1

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