



People enjoy clean water at the beach near Cape Canaveral.

Water pollution feeds algal outbreaks in Tampa.

Florida's waterways are at risk

Rivers and beaches are critical to quality of life in the Tampa Bay region and across Florida, but actions by the Trump administration are threatening the state's waterways. Regulatory rollbacks, proposed budget cuts, and expanded offshore drilling all put clean water at risk.

The Trump administration's attack on clean water

The administration has moved forward with a series of regulatory rollbacks that put Florida's coasts and waterways at risk.¹ In addition, the administration has proposed draconian budget cuts that threaten Florida waters with continued sewage overflows and other pollution.

Expanded offshore drilling puts our beaches at risk

The Trump administration has proposed opening new areas off the Atlantic and Gulf coasts of Florida to oil and gas drilling. Even areas along Florida's Gulf Coast that are currently protected by a drilling moratorium could be opened in 2023.

Floridians know that drilling spills can devastate the state's beaches and wildlife. The Deepwater Horizon disaster in 2010 killed more than 150 dolphins and whales, up to 170,000 turtles, and vast numbers of other animals. That disaster also washed oil onto 177 miles of Florida shoreline, including Pensacola Beach. New research shows that it will take at least 30 years for tar beneath the surface of the sand to degrade. A spill from a rig closer to Florida's coast could cause even more widespread damage.



This Kemp's ridley turtle was oiled by the Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010.



Tar balls like these contaminated Pensacola Beach after the Deepwater Horizon spill.

The Dirty Water Rule will increase toxic algae and flooding

This spring, the EPA finalized its Dirty Water Rule, which leaves half of our nation's remaining wetlands and thousands of streams without federal protections. It is the worst rollback in the history of the Clean Water Act. The impacts of the Dirty Water Rule will be particularly acute in Florida, which has already lost millions of acres of wetlands.

Wetlands help reduce toxic algal outbreaks by filtering out phosphorus pollution that would otherwise flow down Florida's rivers to the coast. Outbreaks of toxic algae are threatening Floridians' health; for example, over just two days in 2018, 15 people sought medical treatment after coming into contact with water from the St. Lucie River. Outbreaks can also kill fish and marine animals. In 2018, the governor declared a state of emergency in seven counties because of algal outbreaks. By removing federal protection from many wetlands, the Dirty Water Rule will make Florida's toxic algae even worse.

The loss of wetlands will also leave Florida — and the Tampa Bay region in particular — more vulnerable to flooding. Right now, Florida's wetlands are capable of holding billions of gallons of floodwater.

Without wetlands to absorb it, stormwater from heavy rains can flood neighborhoods. For example, when new development paved over wetlands in Tampa's Seminole Heights, the neighborhood experienced severe flooding.

The Dirty Water Rule also threatens our drinking water. Roughly 1.8 million Floridians depend on seasonal streams as drinking water sources, and the rule eliminates protection for many of those streams.

Budget cuts would mean more sewage overflows, less seagrass

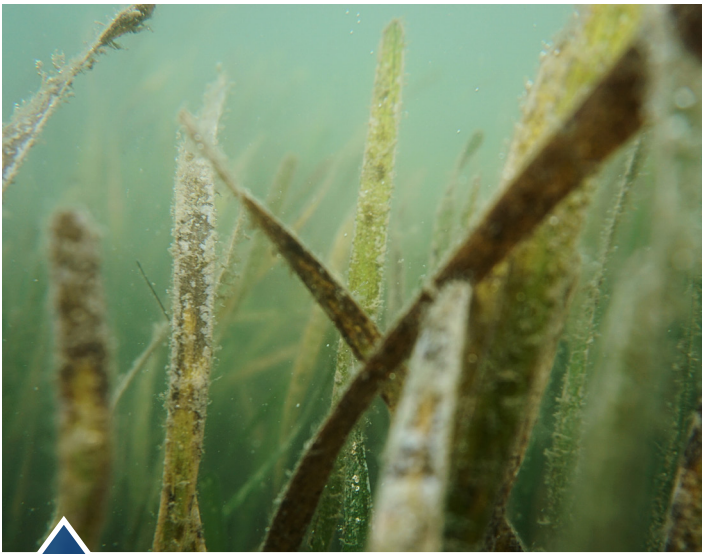
The administration has proposed deep cuts to clean water funding for Florida in the EPA's budget, which would stymie efforts to stop sewage overflows and restore Tampa's seagrass.



Toxic algal outbreaks killed nearly 100 manatees in 2018.

Florida has a major sewage pollution problem. This winter, Fort Lauderdale spilled a record 211 million gallons of sewage, killing fish and endangering manatees and public health. Federal funding is crucial for communities to repair treatment plants and prevent pollution. For example, millions of dollars from the Clean Water State Revolving Fund (CWSRF) and Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (WIFIA) are helping the Largo Reclamation Facility in metro Tampa reduce its sewage overflows into Tampa Bay. Yet under the president's proposed budget, Florida would face a nearly one-third cut in CWSRF funding in FY2021, and total funding for WIFIA would be cut by more than half. The budget also zeroes out all \$172 million for a separate grant program to help states reduce runoff pollution. The administration will make matters even worse if the EPA moves forward with its "sewage blending" plan, which would allow treatment plants to release more sewage into our waterways.

Federal funding is also critical for restoring waterways. For example, seagrass is a vital resource in Tampa Bay. It provides feeding grounds for various marine and bird species and helps absorb carbon from the atmosphere. After decades of development and pollution decimated Tampa Bay's seagrass, efforts of the Tampa Bay Estuary Program restored the seagrass to levels not seen since 1950. But the gains are fragile and will be lost without



Turtle grass is one of the common types of seagrass in Tampa Bay.

continued effort. Support from the EPA provides more than half of the Tampa Bay Estuary Program's funding. Unfortunately, President Trump has proposed cutting all funding for the National Estuary Program, which provides approximately 10 percent of the Tampa Bay program's funding.

Lack of enforcement threatens our health and environment

Robust enforcement has been vital to protecting Florida's waterways. In the Tampa Bay area, for example, the EPA's 2015 settlement of an enforcement lawsuit with the phosphate company Mosaic requires the company to clean up billions of pounds of hazardous waste that put local waters at risk.

Unfortunately, the Trump administration's environmental enforcement has been lackluster from the get-go. In President Trump's first year in office, the dollar value of penalties issued to environmental polluters by the EPA fell by 96 percent compared to the last year of the Obama administration. The EPA also initiated 49 percent fewer civil enforcement actions against polluters in the Southeast from 2017 to 2018.

The EPA's temporary enforcement policy during the coronavirus pandemic doubled down on this lax approach, with the EPA assuring companies it would not seek penalties if they failed to monitor or report their pollution. Yet reporting is at the core of Clean Water Act compliance; without it, facilities can pollute our waterways without the EPA or the public knowing.

In addition, the Trump administration has proposed cutting the EPA's enforcement budget, which will make it even more likely that polluters face no consequences for polluting waterways.



In early 2017, enforcement action by the EPA required a horse racing facility to reduce the amount of horse manure polluting the scenic Intracoastal Waterway.



The undamaged ecosystem at Big Cypress National Preserve supports a range of wildlife.

Opening Big Cypress National Preserve to the oil and gas industry

The Big Cypress National Preserve is a vital and cherished gem in Florida's environment. Larger than the state of Rhode Island, Big Cypress hosts a wide range of wildlife, including the endangered Florida panther. Nearly one million visitors come to Big Cypress each year to hike, fish, canoe and explore. Big Cypress waters also flow into Everglades National Park.

Yet the Trump administration has given a green light to oil and gas exploration in Big Cypress. In 2017, the administration allowed an oil company to drive 30-ton trucks through the sensitive swamplands. The trucks crushed mature trees, including one that was 330 years old, and left deep ruts in the wetlands.

And in spring 2020, the Army Corps of Engineers declined to review the company's activity under the Clean Water Act, despite acknowledging that previous oil exploration surveys had caused damage. If the administration opens Big Cypress to actual drilling, the damage to water and wildlife — and potentially the western Everglades — would be irreversible.

Policy recommendations

Waterways in the Tampa Bay region and across Florida are a vital and precious resource. Residents and lawmakers should help protect them by challenging the Trump administration's recent actions. Necessary steps include:

- **Repeal the Dirty Water Rule.** Already challenged in court, this new rule has removed federal protections from more than half of the wetlands in the country.
- **Stop other actions that weaken water protection.** Reduced enforcement and ideas such as "sewage blending" threaten the environment and public health, and should be opposed.
- **Fully fund federal clean water programs.** These are especially vital to curbing sewage overflows and restoring natural areas in Florida.
- **Reverse all decisions to expand oil and gas production** at the expense of our ocean waters and natural areas, from the Gulf and Atlantic coasts to Big Cypress.



Trump administration policies jeopardize water quality in the Tampa Bay area and across Florida.

Find more information online:
www.EnvironmentAmerica.org

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