

ENVIRONMENT FLORIDA Your Winter Report

Shifting the politics of offshore drilling

In 2008, Environment Florida and Environment Florida Research & Policy Center became the new home of Florida PIRG's environmental advocacy. The following story outlines Florida PIRG's, and later, Environment Florida Research & Policy Center and Environment Florida's roles in advocating against offshore drilling.

On Sept. 8, 2020, then-President Donald Trump traveled to Jupiter, Florida, where he ordered the extension of a 10-year moratorium on offshore drilling along Florida's Gulf Coast and Southeastern states' Atlantic coasts.

In extending this moratorium, the president broke from his own stance in favor of offshore drilling.

Yet political observers at all levels know that the health of our oceans is a priority to Floridians across the state, making the opposition of offshore drilling our crystal-clear waters a no-brainer.

As true as that is today, it hasn't always been the case.

In 1981, Florida PIRG launched the Save Our Shores campaign to halt the proposed leasing of 93 million acres of water off the Gulf Coast and Florida Keys for oil and gas development.

The Save Our Shores campaign sought to raise awareness of and opposition to the dangers of offshore drilling in Florida's waters. Unfortunately, it's easier to raise awareness in the wake of a disaster like that of the 1989 Exxon Valdez spill, in which an oil tanker spilled 11 million gallons of crude oil off the coast



Before Environment Florida and Environment Florida Research & Policy Center built a coalition, the Save Our Shores campaign had humble beginnings: In 1984, Florida PIRG's Ann Whitfield was the only citizen to testify at a U.S. Department of the Interior hearing on offshore drilling.

of Alaska.

The staff and volunteers of Florida PIRG didn't just watch in horror—we organized.

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Thanks
for making it
all possible

'The Fierce Urgency of Fire': Environment America Research & Policy Center hosts webinar on vital climate actions

If you're worried about extreme weather events, you're certainly not alone.

On Sept. 22, our national research partner, Environment America Research & Policy Center, hosted a webinar called "The Fierce Urgency of Fire" to discuss how wildfires,

in the environment, polluting waterways and ecosystems and putting wildlife at risk. This decision comes despite the fact that partisan politics at the state level have made it difficult to pass plastic bans within the state of Florida.

"[Even though] they are limited because of some state laws, ... this is a great step in the right direction when it comes to local communities protecting their waters," Jenna Stevens, state director of Environment Florida, told the Tampa Bay Times.

Environment Florida is continuing to build public support for bans on single-use plastics throughout the state.

Environment Florida joins lawsuit challenging the Trump administration's push to drill in Arctic National Wildlife Refuge

One of the Trump administration's last actions could end up spoiling one of America's last great wild places. We took action to save it.

On Aug. 24, Environment Florida, a coalition of environmental organizations, and the Gwich'in Steering Committee sued the administration over its plans to begin an oil and gas leasing program in Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. Home to polar bears, wolves, herds of caribou and more than 200 species of migratory birds, the refuge has been in the crosshairs of fossil fuel companies for decades.

"Not only will the Trump administration's slapdash and tragic plan threaten one of the world's most untamed wildlife areas, but it is also completely blind to the reality that, in 2020, dangerously extracting more fossil fuels from the ground is a fool's errand when clean, renewable energy options are rapidly on the rise," said Steve Blackledge, senior director for our national network's Conservation Program.

The suit alleges that the government's decision violates several federal statutes, including the National Environmental Policy Act and the Endangered Species Act.

Get more updates on our work online at <http://environmentflorida.org>.



The sky in parts of California and Oregon turned orange in September due to the nearby wildfires.

hurricanes and other extreme weather events underscore the urgent need for climate action. More than 100 people watched the presentation.

"Any time that you're faced with a huge problem, like how do we break our country and our planet's addiction to fossil fuels and decouple everything from that, it's a massive undertaking," said Johanna Neumann, senior director of our national network's Campaign for 100% Renewable Energy.

"Let's make bold steps on solar, let's make bold steps on wind, secure that progress and then do it again.

Tampa City Council bans polystyrene foam on public property

With a new ban, Tampa is beginning to tackle the plastic pollution crisis.

On Sept. 3, the Tampa City Council voted unanimously to ban the sale and distribution of polystyrene cups, plates and other items on public property. A harmful form of plastic foam, polystyrene breaks down and persists





Erin Voss

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Florida PIRG hosted packed public meetings, where concerned citizens weighed in on the potentially disastrous environmental and economic impacts of offshore drilling.

In 1987, businesses in Key West draped their windows in black crepe and shut down for two hours as 2,000 residents attended a raucous U.S. Department of the Interior public hearing. Congress responded by passing a series of moratoriums on Florida drilling.

Then, in 1990, then-President George Bush announced a 10-year ban on new leasing and drilling in federal waters off the Everglades and Florida Keys, and the Florida Legislature passed a permanent ban on drilling in all of Florida's state waters.

In the years since, our national network has worked to defend all of America's coasts from drilling. Again, the oil industry made our job easier, but not in the way we wanted.

In 2010, an explosion on the Deepwater Horizon drilling platform triggered the worst oil spill in U.S. history. The world watched for 87 days as 210 million gallons of crude oil gushed into the Gulf of Mexico.

With the public reawakened to the dangers of offshore drilling, we rallied communities to urge then-President Barack Obama to declare a moratorium on offshore drilling in most U.S. waters—an action he took before leaving office.

Then, in 2018, less than a week after then-Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke announced the Trump administration's plans to open all coastal waters to offshore drilling, Republican and Democratic opposition compelled Secretary Zinke to exempt Florida's waters from drilling. Later that year, Environment Florida and Progress Florida backed a state constitutional amendment banning

offshore drilling in state waters, which passed with nearly 70 percent of the vote.

Today, it's clear that supporting offshore drilling in Florida can sink a politician's career. That wasn't always the case—it took decades of canvassing, thousands of petition signatures, hundreds of lobby meetings, and dozens of op-eds and educational events to gather support from both sides of the aisle on an issue that affects everybody.

Because when oil spills, it doesn't care whether it lands on the beaches of a red, blue or purple state. And the people of Florida have now made it clear to candidates for office that threatening our beaches is a deal-breaker.

For decades, Environment Florida and Environment Florida Research & Policy Center have advocated to keep our shores safe from drilling. And we'll keep organizing and advocating until our shores receive permanent protections.



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Kimball Nelson

Thank you for supporting and sustaining our work—still done at a safe social distance—to keep our air and water clean, to defend our public lands, and to protect our climate and environment for future generations.

Your action and support allows us to keep up the work you'll read about in these pages. Thank you for standing with us.

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Our mission:

We all want clean air, clean water and open spaces. But it takes independent research and tough-minded advocacy to win concrete results for our environment, especially when powerful interests stand in the way of environmental progress.

That's the idea behind Environment Florida, Inc., a project of Environment America, Inc. We focus exclusively on protecting Florida's air, water and open spaces. We speak out and take action at the local, state and national levels to improve the quality of our environment and our lives.

Polluting companies quick to exploit Trump administration's 'Dirty Water Rule'

Companies have been asking the government whether waterways they'd like to pollute or pave over are still protected under the Clean Water Act. In short, the answer is "no."

On Sept. 10, a report from Bloomberg Law found that polluting businesses are taking advantage of the Trump administration's "Dirty Water Rule" to gain federal exemptions for their destruction of our nation's

streams and wetlands. In effect since June, the rule has narrowed federal protection of water bodies under the Clean Water Act, and companies have won rulings that no federal protection applies for 758 out of 1,085 waterways examined by federal officials—including, more recently, much of Georgia's wildlife-rich Okefenokee Swamp.

"Wetlands and streams are crucial to the health of our iconic waters—from the Okefenokee to the Puget Sound," said John Rumppler, senior director of our national network's Clean Water for America Campaign. "Yet the Dirty Water Rule wiped out protections for countless streams and wetlands—a move that was rebuked by the Environmental Protection Agency's own science advisors."

Environment Florida is working to overturn the Dirty Water Rule in Congress and the courts.

A White Heron in Okefenokee Swamp.



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