



# STATE ASSUMPTION OF 404 PROGRAM: A Wetland Destruction Plan

The Conservancy of Southwest Florida has been working to protect our wetlands for over 50 years. Our mission was seeded in 1964 when we worked to stop a proposal that would have destroyed wetlands and aquatic resources in Rookery Bay.

Today, we face continued threats, as Florida is now the third most populous state in the union. Southwest Florida is experiencing much of that growth directly, and is a hotspot of wetland loss in the nation.

On August 20, 2020, the state of Florida asked the US Environmental Protection Agency to assume the Clean Water Act 404 “dredge and fill” permitting program. This transfer of authority means that the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) would take over permitting destructive wetland development projects.

This would result in fast-tracking of development in Florida’s most treasured landscapes.

## **Why wetlands matter**

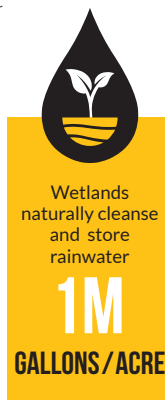
Wetlands are nature’s kidneys, naturally cleansing our water.

They also can store rainwater – over 1 million gallons per acre!

Wetlands help store and treat agricultural and stormwater runoff which degrades local water quality and fuels harmful algae blooms.

## **Protection of natural resources lost**

Important laws that protect our quality of life and natural environment, such as the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), would no longer be a tool in the wetland protection toolbox. NEPA has been an important factor in recent years to protect wetlands from mining impacts in southwest Florida.



Florida has not assured that wildlife species would be protected from going extinct. We have hundreds of protected species in the state, many in southwest Florida. Florida’s scheme to address impacts to endangered species is deeply flawed and does not meet the requirements of the Endangered Species Act.



Citizens and environmental groups would have less access and a heavier burden when trying to challenge bad permitting decisions in court.

## **Florida does not have the resources to take on the program**

FDEP moved forward to assume the program despite a massive budget shortfall, stating that they could take on the federal program with no additional funding. Less than one year later, the state admitted that the agency was under-prepared and under-resourced..

It is still unclear how the state process is addressing wildlife needs, and the state has yet to adopt a more protective standard to better preserve our wetlands.

Thousands of applications are before FDEP, many in lands and waters crucial to our imperiled wildlife, flood protection, aquifer recharge, and water quality. The state has shown they are not up to the job of taking on Clean Water Act 404 program permitting.

## **What Can I Do?**

### **THE CONSERVANCY HAS MADE IT EASY.**

Just go to [www.conservancy.org/404](http://www.conservancy.org/404) to learn more and stay informed.