

Put another nail in the coffin of whatever rural, natural character Nassau County had left. Rayonier has begun work on the [15,000 acre Phase 2 of its monstrous Wildlight development](#) at the intersection of State Road 200 and I-95 in Yulee. Phase 2 dwarfs Phase 1 in scale and will extend to the Georgia border in the north and nearly to Amelia Island to the east.

Think of the light pollution, the noise pollution, the air pollution, the trees cut down, the traffic, the birds and animals displaced, the impervious surface and groundwater runoff... the 15,000 new homes that may be built on the site.

It is to despair.

LINK: https://www.bizjournals.com/jacksonville/news/2022/01/25/rayonier-beginning-work-on-15-000-acres-for-second.html?utm_source=st&utm_medium=en&utm_campaign=me&utm_content=ja&ana=e_ja_me&j=26478232&senddate=2022-01-25

After that body blow, here's some good news: a federal judge [revoked the Biden Administration's](#) recent massive leasing of oil and gas permits in the Gulf of Mexico ruling that the Administration – which promised to make considerations of climate change a factor in every one of its decisions on the campaign trail – failed to consider the climate implications of the leases.

By comparison, these leases for oil and gas exploration in the Gulf are far greater than anything the Trump Administration approved. Remember that the next time Joe Biden tells you he cares about the environment.

LINK: <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/27/climate/federal-court-drilling-gulf.html?smid=tw-nytimes&smtyp=cur>

Back to reality and more bad news. Conservationists predicted disaster when approval of wetland permits for developers in Florida transferred from the Environmental Protection Agency, a federal organization, to the Florida Department of Environmental Protection – I mean Protection – a state body. FDEP's budget has been slashed and its offices loaded with political appointees over two decades of Republican rule.

In combination with the Trump Administration's narrowing of the definition of a "wetland," Pandora's box was opened and [the resulting damage to Florida's wetlands](#) has been tragic.

After taking office, the Biden Administration repealed Trump's definition of "wetland," but – SURPRISE – Red State Florida isn't abiding by the new, old definition.

LINK: <https://floridaphoenix.com/2022/01/27/florida-deps-handling-of-wetland-permits-has-become-a-colossal-charlie-foxtrot/>

The efforts of Florida utility companies to [restrict the growth of solar energy](#) in the state and continue our addiction to fossil fuels – a hotly discussed issue in this session of the Florida Legislature – is making national news.

LINK: <https://www.cnn.com/2022/01/23/politics/florida-solar-industry/index.html>

The anti-seagrass bill, SB 198, Water Resources Management (Sen. A. Rodriguez, R- Doral), would for the first time allow permits to destroy seagrass in state waters if those seagrasses were replaced in state waters elsewhere. The problem? Seagrass restoration efforts in Florida have a history of being both expensive and complex, with few success stories.

A mitigation program like one described in SB 198 would make the destruction of seagrass permissible in Florida to a new, nightmarish extent – all with little guarantee of lasting replacement through mitigation banks.

An additional danger in this legislation is that it might – again for the first time – open up a mechanism for healthy, undisturbed seagrass areas to be impacted by new channels and boat basins that the Florida Department of Environmental Protection and the Water Management Districts have routinely denied permits for over the last 30 years.

No matter, SB 198 was approved by the Environment and Natural Resources Committee by a vote of 3 yeas, 2 nays on January 18. Its House companion, filed by Rep. Sirois (R-Merritt Island), passed its first committee of reference on December 6, 2021, and is now referenced to the Agriculture and Natural Resources Subcommittee.

Expect it to pass into law by a legislature bought and paid for by industry, developers and Big Ag.

Florida State Parks – including Ft. Clinch, Big and Little Talbot Island, and Anastasia in our area are [threatened by climate change](#).

LINK: <https://floridaphoenix.com/2021/12/30/retiring-florida-parks-director-eric-draper-ranks-climate-change-as-a-major-threat/>

[On a recent episode of my “Welcome to Florida” podcast](#), I spoke with the outgoing Director of the Parks about the problem, with specific focus on our parks here in Northeast Florida.

LISTEN: <https://www.stitcher.com/show/welcome-to-florida/episode/episode-82-floridas-state-parks-89791910>