

In the waning days of the Trump Administration, the federal government and State of Florida concocted a scheme whereby transfer of authority for what is typically a federal responsibility under the Clean Water Act was rushed to the state of Florida. The unprecedented move allowed the Florida Department of Environmental Protection to make decisions about wetland dredge-and-fill permits without the necessary checks-and-balances.

In developer-run Florida, this has allowed developers to evade considerations and protections like those found in the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

On February 15, in a major victory for the environment and wetlands in Florida, [a federal judge struck down the arrangement](#) after it had been challenged in court by state and national conservation groups.

The judge's ruling will allow for a better review of proposed developments as the state of Florida is experiencing extreme pressure from growth. This landmark win goes even further, ensuring that other states that looked to copy Florida's flawed program will be dissuaded.

LINK: <https://conservancy.org/landmark-victory-for-floridas-future/>

Additional reading on the subject: <https://floridaphoenix.com/2024/02/16/feds-erred-in-transferring-wetlands-permitting-to-fl-agency-u-s-judge-rules/>

Tragically, a young female North Atlantic right whale was [found dead near Tybee Island, GA](#) last week. The cause of death, a boat strike. With fewer than 400 known individuals remaining, every death is a major blow to the population.

Tybee Island is near Savannah and Savannah is a major shipping port for huge container ships and other large vessels. Shipping interests have continually resisted efforts to slow the speed limits in shipping lanes which would reduce whale deaths from impacts.

LINK: <https://www.savannahnow.com/story/news/local/2024/02/16/right-whale-killed-off-georgia-coast-likely-hit-by-vessel/72635381007/>

Once again, there are riders in federal legislation that will make it more difficult to protect the North Atlantic right whales by slowing down vessels.

If you'd like to raise your voice against these riders which will limit or prohibit federal agencies from increasing right whale protections, you can contact the following individuals:

Congressman Aaron Bean

Phone: 904 319-9433

Or email via the contact links at: <https://bean.house.gov/contact/offices>

Congressman John Rutherford

Phone: (904) 831-5205

Email: https://rutherford.house.gov/zip_authentication?form=/contact

Senator Marco Rubio

Phone: 202-224-3041

Or email via the contact links at: <https://www.rubio.senate.gov/contact/>

Senator Rick Scott

Phone: 202-224-5274

Or email via the contact links at: <https://www.rickscott.senate.gov/contact/contact>

Here is a sample letter you're welcome to share and sign:

I am concerned about efforts to limit protection for critically endangered whales by manipulating the appropriations process. Whales provide the nutrient foundation of ocean fisheries, so your actions have imperiled the fishing communities that depend on those fisheries.

Specifically, I am concerned with the House's inclusion of policy riders as part of the Fiscal Year 2024 appropriations process which would be detrimental to the long-term conservation of whales. In the House Commerce, Justice, Science, and related agencies appropriations bill, a policy rider was included that would completely gut the federal government's ability to issue essential protections from one of the top threats to North Atlantic right whale: vessel strikes (H.R.5893, §602). There is also a rider designed to further entrench misinformation about the impacts of offshore wind on the marine environment and whales (H.R.5893, §601).

Legislative attacks and proposed riders to date have aimed at the North Atlantic right whale. The North Atlantic right whale population has been whittled down to around 356 individual whales due to entanglements in fishing gear and recreational and commercial vessel strikes.

Please ensure that these dangerous riders do not move forward.

Sincerely,

Your name, address and email
