

A local northeast Florida story with a statewide impact. Unfortunately, not a good one.

Several major northeast Florida developers — including one owned by the family of Palm Coast state Sen. Travis Hutson — invested tens of thousands of dollars to re-elect farmer John ‘Bucky’ Sykes to the St. Johns County Soil and Water Conservation District. Their aim was to block environmental activist Nicole Crosby from winning a seat.

Crosby became a target after defeating a developer’s plan to build 66 homes in Ponta Vedra Beach on 100 acres that had been designated for conservation.

Crosby stated that she wanted “to expand the role of the Soil and Water Conservation District to include educating the public and motivating residents to become involved in hearings on development proposals.”

Despite being swamped by campaign spending on Sykes’ behalf from the developers, Crosby won the election.

Not satisfied with accepting the results of the democratic process, Hutson filed a bill to do away with all of the soil and water districts across the state. Mind you, these programs have been around since the Depression Era, have unpaid board members, levy no taxes and function primarily to defend Florida’s natural resources from waste, particularly for water conservation.

Hutson’s attempt to do away with the boards was ridiculed, but he wouldn’t be denied and has amended the bill to only allow people to run for seats on soil and water conservation district boards who are farmers, farm workers, retired farmers, or anyone involved in “animal husbandry.”

[No more agitators like Crosby!](#) No more professors, engineers, scientists, landscape architects, accountants, or lawyers, either. Only people like that one losing candidate Hutson’s company had backed would be eligible for the seat now.

This is tantamount to requiring a candidate running for governor to be a lawyer. It’s an outrageous rollback of popular governance and democracy – or at least it would be if this wasn’t Florida 2022. Shockingly – or not – the bill passed both the House and the Senate and now awaits the governor’s signature.

LINK: <https://floridaphoenix.com/2022/03/31/florida-senator-helps-developers-get-revenge-on-conservation-boards/>

BTW, Travis Hutson is also the senator who wants to make it cheaper and easier for developers to transplant gopher tortoises... and riskier for the animals.

Beach nesting bird season has begun across Florida. What can you do to help protect the birds?

- Respect posted areas, even if you don’t see any birds inside.
- If birds dive-bomb you, carefully move away as there may be a nest nearby.
- Ensure no trash or food remnants are left behind, as this can attract predators.
- Keep dogs on a leash, on board your boat or at home.

The Florida Cabinet has approved more than 16,000 Acres in new conservation lands including 241 acres in Duval County within the Pumpkin Hill Creek Florida Forever project.

LINK: <https://www.tampabay.com/news/environment/2022/03/30/desantis-cabinet-back-shielding-17000-acres-from-development/>

With the seagrass gone from the Indian River Lagoon, [manatees switched to eating the algae](#) that had killed it off new scientific study finds. Unknown: The health impact.

LINK: <https://miami.cbslocal.com/2022/03/30/fiu-study-with-seagrass-gone-manatees-resort-to-eating-more-algae/>

Pushed out of wilderness by development, Florida panther strolls through neighborhood.

LINK:

<https://twitter.com/craigtimes/status/1508850808380698625?s=11&t= 0DxPQjZd0w4xW4xNPXN7Q>

Don't forget Ixia's Native Plant Sale this Saturday, April 9th, at Native Park (3306 Park Street, Jacksonville, FL) from 10 AM – 2 PM.

DETAILS: <https://ixia.fnpschapters.org/calendar/>