

The most dangerous time of year for the environment in Florida is over with the 2023 legislative session coming to an end. In a Senate and House where pro-development, anti-conservation politicians hold super-majorities and kneel at the foot of a pro-development, anti-conservation governor, most news from Tallahassee is bad news. That was again the case this spring.

Surprisingly, however, an additional \$850 million appropriation appeared in the budget late last week with funds earmarks for habitat conservation in Northeast Florida (the “Ocala to Osceola Corridor” or “O2O”) and Southwest Florida (the “Caloosahatchee-Big Cypress Basin”).

The O2O acquisitions are already identified through the Florida Forever Program as a priority for purchase for conservation and include parcels in Alachua, Baker, Bradford, Clay, Columbia, Duval, Hamilton, Lake, Marion, Putnam, Union, and Volusia counties. The North Florida Land Trust is the key non-profit driver behind the O2O which seeks to help create an unbroken chain of undeveloped land for wildlife and conservation from Florida Bay through the Okefenokee Swamp.

The Caloosahatchee-Big Cypress Land Acquisition project in Hendry and Collier counties will protect and preserve approximately 72,000 acres of conservation and agriculture land. This acquisition falls into the “once in a generation” category for scale and significance.

Both of these projects will provide critical linkages for wildlife, recreational opportunities for people, and benefits for water quality and carbon sequestration.

This is the largest appropriation for land conservation in Florida history and presents a remarkable opportunity for progress in these two regions of the state.

Now the bad news...

The legislature has passed a bill [blocking local governments from adopting new local fertilizer ordinances or amending old ones](#) over the next year to include a ban or seasonal restrictions on fertilizer application. That means it's illegal for municipalities to forbid the use of fertilizer during the summer months when algae blooms are most likely.

Why would it do that? Because lawncare giant TruGreen asked it to. TruGreen spreads fertilizer all over Florida throughout the summer months and used its bought-and-paid-for politicians to do its bidding – the American way.

The Florida Legislature made a back-room, midnight-hour deal with TruGreen to rob local governments of the authority to enact ordinances that prevent the misuse of fertilizers on lawns. This offensive provision takes autonomy away from counties and cities to prevent pollution in their own backyards. From schoolbooks to fertilizer and everything in between, this legislature and this governor want to take power away from local governments and stockpile it in the capital.

Urban/suburban fertilizer runoff from lawns into stormwater is a major contributor of nitrogen and phosphorus into our waterways.

The only hope now is for a veto.

If you care to, ask DeSantis to veto the provision to SB 2502 (“Back of the Bill” provisions, Section 85, Lines 2455-2460) that would preempt local governments from adopting or amending fertilizer ordinances.

Let the Governor know:

- Fertilizer ordinances may be the most cost-effective way to reduce nutrient pollution.
- Research has determined these ordinances do not result in nutrient-starved lawns.
- It is contrary to his clearly-stated commitment to address Florida's water quality crisis.

Ask him not to deny local governments the ability to be part of the solution to Florida's water quality woes.

Call and/or email the governor if you're so inclined: 850-717-9337

[GovernorRon.DeSantis@eog.myflorida.com](mailto:GovernorRon.DeSantis@eog.myflorida.com)

LINK: <https://www.fnps.org/news/alert/2023-fertilizer-ordinance-preemption-sb-2502>

Now the worse news...

The bill that "[puts a nail in the coffin of growth management](#)," SB 540, heads to the governor's desk where it is expected to be signed. This is the bill that would have a chilling effect on the ability of citizens to challenge poor city and county land use decisions and fight sprawl in their own communities.

Under this bill, citizens who undertake the daunting and expensive task of challenging local comprehensive plan amendments would be responsible for the attorney's fees of the local government and developers they challenge if they are unsuccessful. The risk of an unsuccessful challenge will prove too great for most citizens and public interest nonprofits, effectively eliminating this important avenue for taxpayers to seek remedy and accountability from their local governments.

LINK: <https://www.fnps.org/news/alert/sb-540-veto-2023>