



Summer 2019

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**SIERRA  
CLUB**

FLORIDA CHAPTER

# The Pelican Sierra Club Florida



THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF SIERRA CLUB

INSIDE: FLORIDA 2019 LEGISLATIVE REVIEW

## Stop the Burn

### Sierra Explores Green Cane Project



In 2007, the Brazilian government and sugarcane industry partnered to enact the “Green Protocol” which was a long-term plan to phase out pre-harvest sugar field burning in Brazil and replace it with the type of green-mechanical harvesting pioneered by the Green Cane Project. Now nearly all of the sugarcane grown in Brazil is green harvested and pre-harvest burning is largely viewed as a backward counter-productive agricultural practice.

Photo/Patrick Ferguson

BY PATRICK FERGUSON

Billowing smoke, falling ash, heavy chemical fertilizer and pesticide applications -- these are some of the realities of large scale sugarcane production here in Florida. But it doesn't have to be that way. As Sierra Club's Stop Sugar Field Burning Campaign organizing representative, I was invited to Brazil to tour Native Brand's Green Cane Project which is the world's largest organic agricultural operation.

I witnessed a completely different paradigm of sugarcane agriculture in action, one that works with nature rather than against it. I came back with a lot to share about how sugarcane should and can be grown in Florida.

The Native Green Cane Project was started in 1986 by the Balbo Group, a family-owned company that grows sugarcane in the state of Sao Paulo, Brazil under the Native Brand name. I went there to learn more about “green harvesting” the sustainable alternative to the toxic practice of pre-harvest sugar field burning, which had long been abandoned by Native Brand's sugarcane farmers. Over 30 years ago, Native Brand farmers recognized that pre-harvest sugarcane burning wreaked havoc on the surrounding ecosystem: it ruined soils, destroyed animal habitats, and produced toxic air pollution. This led them to pioneer modern mechanical green harvesting whereby sugarcane trash became utilized as soil

*(Continued on page 3)*

## MEET THE STAFF

As the new Government Affairs and Political Director of the Florida Chapter, **Deborah Foote** has been working to elevate the voice of the Sierra Club on the political stage. Born in the Lakes Region of New Hampshire, Deborah served three terms as a state representative in New Hampshire where she served a leadership role on a committee focused on water, forestry and state parks.



The title of Government Affairs and Political Director requires her to build and maintain relationships with elected officials as well as members of the staff. Much of her job also includes providing support to our legislative lobbyist and advocating for the Sierra Club's best interest. Although she has taken up a title that leads her indoors toward the administrative side of environmentalism, Deborah hasn't seemed to lose touch with her love for the outdoors. The Sierra Club is incredibly fortunate for her dedication and excellent work ethic.

**Raquel Fernandez** is our new Beyond Coal Organizer. Originally from Venezuela, she has lived in Orlando for the past 11 years, speaks four languages, and has a background in international relations and comparative politics. During her first Chapter leaders meeting in June, she described herself as always believing in the effects of climate change -- especially within minority communities. Her primary goal is to work toward retiring the Stanton Energy Plant which has two coal units. She explains, "the Mayor (of Orlando) has already committed to 100% renewable energy by 2050. My goal is to help them do that before then." She also hopes to strengthen and diversify the First 50 Coalition which is the driving force behind Orlando's 100% renewable commitment.



As the charismatic conservationist that she is, **Brooke Alexander** has taken on the challenge as the Ready for 100 Organizer in Volusia County. She has proven herself through her 10 years of work on political campaigns. While working for the State Democratic Party, she found that most issues spanning from health care to the economy all relate back to our crippling environmental state. She explains that "with cleaner air and water, and cleaner energy sources, come better health (and clean energy jobs) for our citizens." She made the switch from politics to the Sierra Club when she realized that she wanted to have a front seat in driving change throughout our communities. Brooke explains that she was tired of waiting for politicians to act on promises they had pledged to during the campaign trail; therefore, she joined the front line in bettering our world for a healthier, cleaner tomorrow.



— Victoria Vulgamore

## A NOTE FROM THE CHAIR

ALYSSA CADWALADER



Even though the legislative session has wrapped up for the year, the Florida Chapter has not turned down the heat on its work. We've been busy keeping up the fight against anti-environment legislation, including the toll roads bill and a bill that would impede citizens' ability to challenge new developments. Earlier this year, we hired Deborah Foote as the Florida Chapter's Government Affairs and Political Director. Deborah hadn't been on the job for even a month when she jumped right in on the legislative session. Deborah provided much-needed additional strength during session alongside our chapter lobbyist, Dave Cullen.

Deborah has brought additional knowledge and experience to our already thriving chapter political committee. She is working closely with the political committee and lobbying advisory committee to strengthen the Florida Chapter's political program, collaborating to develop key strategies for the 2020 elections. Deborah's leadership, under the direction of Florida Chapter Director Frank Jackalone, is setting the Sierra Club up to be a powerhouse in the 2020 election season.

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Marcia Biggs, Editor

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#### Sierra Club Florida Director

Frank Jackalone

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## Stop the Burn

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strengthening mulch instead of wasted to produce smoke and ash as is the practice of Florida sugarcane farmers. Over time Native Brand's green harvesting methods created fertile soils producing 20% higher yields than conventionally grown sugarcane. They have also completely phased out the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides on their farms.

In addition to increased soil fertility, the Green Cane Project also boosted the overall biodiversity recorded on their farms. Research has shown their farms support 23 times more biodiversity than conventional sugar cane farms and 50% more biodiversity than a nearby national park in the state of Sao Paulo. Field surveys conducted on the Native Green Cane Project's fields and 11,000 acres of forests they maintain on their land as "biodiversity islands" have found over 340 species, including 49 endangered species.

The Green Cane Project's sugarcane cultivation and production is 100% carbon neutral with soils that act as a carbon sink. In addition to supplying over a third of the world's supply of organic sugarcane and providing their own mulched trash soil amendments, they also produce bioethanol (including or-



**The dirty practice of burning sugarcane in South Florida takes a toll on the air, land, animals and people who live nearby. Below, Patrick Ferguson inspects a sugarcane specimen at the Native Brand laboratory in Brazil./Photos Patrick Ferguson**

ganic carbon-neutral ethanol), molasses, animal feed, bioplastics, as well as enough electricity to process over six million tons of sugarcane per year and to power a city of more than 540,000 people.



The success of Native Brand's Green Cane Project shows sugarcane farming can actually benefit the surrounding envi-

ronment instead of polluting it and remain profitable at the same time.

Look for more details in the Florida Sierra news blog at [www.sierraclubfloridanews.org](http://www.sierraclubfloridanews.org). It is important that Floridians become aware of this organic sustainable form of ecosystem regenerating agriculture and create a public demand for these methods to be adopted within the Everglades Agricultural Area to benefit the surrounding environment.

Contact Patrick Ferguson at [patrick.ferguson@sierraclub.org](mailto:patrick.ferguson@sierraclub.org)

## Tampa Bay Says No to TECO Fracked Gas Plant Expansion

Sierra Beyond Coal organizer Gonzalo Valdes led a team from Tampa Bay Sierra and supporting groups who mobilized in two rallies in downtown Tampa to oppose Tampa Electric Company's (TECO) plans for a fracked gas expansion and continued coal burning at its Big Bend plant.

The massive fossil fuel plant plans to burn fracked gas for 30-50 years into the future, even though reasonable predictions for sea level rise say that the roads leading to Big Bend will be routinely flooded by a normal high tide long before then.

As part of our #TelltheTruthTECO campaign, over 150 activists and elected officials came together to hold a People's Forum on March 11, just before an official public hearing. Then on July 19, we convened another rally, The People Vs. TECO.

For both rallies, a powerful coalition brought together voices from the NAACP, League of Women Voters, the Florida Council of Churches, Organize Florida, Physicians for Social



Responsibility, and others all calling for TECO to drop plans for the expansion of fracked gas and coal, and instead spend the money on solar. With the national leadership of Congresswoman Kathy Castor as Chair of the U.S. House Select Committee on the Climate Crisis, we have a renewed sense of optimism that climate change will be taken seriously before it's too late. We urge all utilities across the state to do their part.

# 2019 LEGISLATIVE REVIEW

BY DEBORAH FOOTE

## Florida Sierra Government Affairs and Political Director

The 2019 legislative session was full of disappointment as the environment took a pummeling. The legislature refuses to address pollution at its source, preferring to fix it after it happens. Local governments continue to lose their regulatory authority through preemption to the State - which typically means no regulation at all. New laws will now make it tougher to legally challenge the State and developers as the loser pays the winner's legal fees and costs. All these add up to more sprawl, more pollution, and continued eroding of what makes Florida special. Our biggest disappointment was the approval of the toll roads through the heartland of Florida. We aren't done with that battle. We will continue to elevate local voices against the toll roads and work to defeat future funding bills.

We can't change these types of outcomes without electing candidates who share our priorities. Now is the time to be thinking about the 2020 elections and working collectively to flip the Florida Senate. This is possible and a victory would block more terrible legislation from becoming law.

Here is a summary of key bills we worked on:

**Toll Roads:** SB 7068 would construct three toll roads through the heartland of Florida. The urban sprawl that would accompany the new toll roads would be deadly, devouring hundreds of thousands of acres of rural and natural lands, fragmenting wildlife habitat and polluting rivers, springs, lakes and coastal waters. Florida taxpayers will pay billions for these needless roads for decades. Money that could

be spent on relieving our actual highway congestion issues will now instead be funneled into 320 miles of toll roads that will create massive sprawl and traffic. Approved by the Governor.

**Property Development:** (HB 7103) turns the growth management law upside down by requiring comprehensive plan amendments to conform to pre-existing development orders and awards costs to prevailing party in challenges to development orders which will have a chilling effect on citizen challenges- the only mechanism to enforce comprehensive plans. Approved by the Governor.

**Attorney Fees and Costs:** HB 829 provides fees and costs will always be granted to the prevailing party in a challenge involving an ordinance that is "expressly preempted by the State Constitution or by state law." Even if the preemption is expressed, the scope of the preemption may legitimately be in doubt - exactly the sort of disagreement the

courts are designed to settle. The risk of being assessed the local government's fees and costs may be chilling for regular citizens challenging an ordinance, but not necessarily a developer or other large landholder. The bill attempts to coerce localities to cave to any challenge they are not absolutely sure they're going to win. In addition, the bill is unnecessary as Florida Statute already provides for awarding costs to victims of unscrupulous or frivolous suits. Additionally, a newly added section 2 of the bill adds an implicit preemption of local bio-solids regulation that would begin on the effective date of DEP regulation of same. Approved by the Governor.

**Tree Cutting:** HB 1159 allows tree cutting/trimming/removal irrespective of local tree protection ordinances when a certified arborist determines that the tree is a threat to person or property. It does not allow local government to require the tree be replaced. There is no protection for specimen or heritage trees but protections for mangroves remain. Approved by the Governor.

**Red Tide:** HB 1552 creates the "Red Tide Mitigation & Technology Development Initiative" between Mote Marine



## New Advisory Committee Seeking Applicants

One of the responsibilities of our new Government Affairs & Political Director Deborah Foote, is to serve as our Executive Branch Lobbyist. This includes building relationships with key personnel in the state agencies that oversee rules and regulations and have programs that impact the environment.

To gain knowledge of these inner workings, a new Florida State Agency Advisory Committee in being established to provide Foote with insight into the operations of state agencies whose work impacts Sierra Club Florida's priorities including:

- How best to lobby specific agencies/departments/divisions/offices

- Identification and introduction to key personnel
- Historical context
- Agency decision making processes

If you are a former employee/contractor of a key state agency or have had recent experience in working with these state agencies or any of their leadership, please consider applying to join this Committee. This is a great way to serve Sierra Club Florida for a minimal time commitment!

Contact Deborah Foote at [deborah.foote@sierraclub.org](mailto:deborah.foote@sierraclub.org) or 251.533.1798



# 2019 LEGISLATIVE REVIEW

and the Fish and Wildlife Commission and provides \$3 million/year for the next six years to research control and mitigation of Red Tide. This continues the false narrative that *karenia brevis* is “naturally occurring” and takes attention away from the only real solution, stopping pollution at its source. Approved by the Governor.

**Plastic straws and sunscreen:** Of the multitude of bills on this issue, only HB 771 passed the legislature. It would place a 5- year moratorium on enforcing local regulations on plastic straws and requires that OPPAGA conduct a study of “each ordinance or regulation adopted” by local governments related to single-use plastic straws. This bill was vetoed by the Governor. HB 1299, which would have pre-empted local regulation on plastic straws and sunscreen, died.

**Fracking:** The good and bad bills all died. With some environmentalists opposed to bills that did not include matrix acidizing and industry opposed to bans in general, the legislature chose to do nothing. Sierra Club staunchly opposed any legislation that does not include all forms of well stimulation (fracking techniques and matrix acidizing).

**Vegetable Gardens:** Legislation passed preempting local regulation of vegetable gardens (HB 145). This does not impact HOA agreements. Signed by the Governor.

### “Anti Voter”

HB 5 was amended last minute to include the very bad citizens' initiative petition gatherers language which will make it harder for citizen initiatives to

## How Did Your Legislator Vote?



Sierra Club Florida has released its [Florida Legislator Scorecard for 2019](#). Designed to give a snapshot of legislators' votes on environmental bills of significant importance to the Sierra Club, it also includes “thumbs up and thumbs down” award winners noting those who



either championed or actively worked against the environment.

**DID YOU KNOW ...** Florida Senate Democrats, with one exception, cast their votes to support the horrible toll roads bill. This new law has the potential to produce the most damaging impacts in recent memory to Florida's environment. Sierra Club Florida hopes the Scorecard will raise awareness on how legislators vote on the environment and how you vote.

Check out the 2019 Sierra Florida Legislative Scorecard at <https://tinyurl.com/sierrafloridascorecard2019>

get on the ballot. The bill makes it illegal to pay petition gatherers based on the number of petitions they collect. It requires submission of information about petition gatherers, including their permanent and temporary addresses, and would require the gatherers to sign sworn statements that they will follow state laws and rules. The bill also would require petitions to be turned into county supervisors of elections no more than 30 days after being signed by voters and includes penalties of up to \$50 for each late submission. Fines could grow to \$1,000 for any petition “willfully” not submitted on time. Signed by the Governor.

When two Voting Rights Restoration (Amendment 4) bills failed, SB 7066

was amended with the restoration of rights language. The legislation will harm all returning citizens who have prior felony convictions but have completed all but the financial obligations of their sentences by rendering them ineligible to vote. Signed by the Governor.

**Land Acquisition:** \$30 million was allocated to FL Forever, \$0 to Rural & Family Lands Protection Program. Funding continues to be diverted to costs not associated with land acquisition and management. In 2019, after debt service, more than \$900 million was available for land acquisition and management. The Governor approved these levels through his approval of the budget bill.

## Save a Tree ... Get Your Pelican Online

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# Around the State



## Hands Across the Sand

Big Bend Sierra gathered for Hands Across the Sand at the state capital in Tallahassee. They joined other Sierra groups, including the Northeast Group (right) in saying No to Drilling Off Our Coasts.



## Steppin' Out

Suncoast Sierra Club marched in the St. Pete Pride Parade and tabled at a festival the following day. Our theme was "Animals are Cute, Highways Pollute," bemoaning the planned creation of three new toll roads by the Legislature that would pave over much of Florida's remaining wilderness.



## Glades Office Hosts Tour

The Florida Poor People's Campaign held a field hearing in Belle Glade at the Sierra Club office on April 18 as part of the National Emergency Truth and Poverty Tour: A National Call for Moral Revival. Originally led by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the campaign has been revived and addresses systemic racism, poverty and inequality, ecological devastation, and other issues. The Belle Glade meeting was the final stop of a week-long tour across Florida.

## Florida Sierrans Honored with National Awards

Whitey Markle will be presented with the national Sierra Club's 2019 Special Service Award September 14 in Oakland, Calif. The award honors Sierra Club members for strong and consistent commitment to conservation or the Club over an extended period of time.



Whitey has been a Chair and leader in the Suwannee-St. Johns Group since 2003, guiding campaigns, speaking at public meetings, legal hearings and workshops on environmental and growth management issues around North Central Florida. He has held positions on the Silver Springs Alliance, Florida Springs Council, and has expertise in urban and regional planning. Whitey was instrumental in designing the 3 Working Groups concept in the SSJ geographic region. An accomplished musician, he has entertained many across the state with his traveling guitar singing Florida folk ballads. He is currently serving on the Florida Chapter Executive Committee.

Also receiving an award will be Karen Kerr who will receive the Madelyn Pyeatt Award honoring members for working with youth. Karen is being recognized for her decades-long work and commitment to the ICO (Inspiring Connections Outdoors) program where she has served as chair, outings leader, mentor and trainer, as well as for her lifelong dedication to the welfare and well being of kids in our community.



Photo/Brenda Wells/Florida Springs Council

Protestors symbolically "pave over" the community in a rally in May 15 in Gainesville against the bill to fund new toll roads in Florida. Other rallies took place in Hollywood and St. Petersburg.

# Around the State

## Sierra Joins Zero Hour

Sierra Miami showed support for the young voices fighting for climate action at the Zero Hour Youth Climate Summit July 13-14 in Miami. Sierra manned a table at the conference, engaging hundreds of youth in the two days filled with powerful speakers, workshops and trainings.

It was all geared for teens and young adults to energize and help set the tone for the work to be done in the coming year to address climate change and rising sea level.



**Miami-Dade County Commissioner Daniella Levine Cava joins Sierra volunteers at the Summit. /Photo from Comm. Levine Cava**

## Ancient Islands

In early May, Tom Palmer, chair of Ancient Islands group in Central Florida, drafted and submitted a proclamation to Polk County Commission declaring May 17 Endangered Species Day in Polk County. The proclamation recognized the large number of endangered plant and animal species found in Polk County. Palmer also prepared a presentation depicting some of those species that was distributed to commissioners.



## Paddling With Maggy

A group of 14 Sierra members, friends and family spent a very special Independence Day paddling with environmental hero Maggy Reno Hurchalla. Maggy is one of a kind and an inspiration to us all. She's a 78-year-old Floridian, born and raised in Miami, who has been a long-time defender of wetlands big and small, including the Everglades. She served for 20 years on the Martin County Commission where she advocated for smart growth and the preservation of natural areas. She is an inductee in the Everglades Coalition's Hall of Fame and this year she's receiving the Sierra Loxahatchee Group's Environmental Champion Award. She is currently fighting to protect our First Amendment constitutional rights against a wealthy mining family in a SLAPP lawsuit (Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation), which is now heading to the Florida Supreme Court.

The "mighty" caravan of canoes, kayaks and paddleboards began the expedition from Maggy's house at the edge of the intracoastal waterway that's part of the Indian River Lagoon near the mouth of the St. Lucie River. We all felt so lucky to have spent our 4th of July with such a remarkable hero doing what she loves the most: enjoying the planet. — Diana Umpierre

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## Miami Sierra Convenes Seagrass Experts for Biscayne Bay Forum

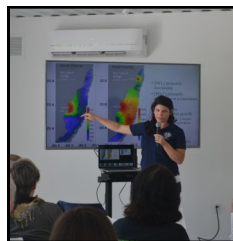
Nearly all the seagrass in Biscayne Bay is dead, according to scientific studies, equal to 25,000 acres of seagrass meadows. A Miami-Dade County environmental regulatory report blamed chronic pollution for the mass die-off, through dirty canals, increasing floodwater and leaky septic tanks in older neighborhoods.

In December, a contractor broke a sewer line spilling almost 10,000 gallons of sewage into the bay. Last September, a power failure caused by Tropical Storm Gordon caused 4.75 million gallons of sewage to be released by a wastewater treatment plant into the north bay. Other sewage leaks happen regularly due to fail-

ing infrastructure, causing dangerous conditions for those who live, work or play in Biscayne Bay.

In response to this unsettling news, Miami Sierra Club convened a Save the Seagrass Forum to bring together the scientific community in an effort to get a realistic forecast on where the bay is headed and what can be done.

The forum's keynote speaker was



Rachel Silverstein of Miami Waterkeepers, with Sean McCrackine of Daniella Levine Cava's political staff, Larry Brand of the University of Miami RSMAS who specializes in harmful algal blooms, Diego Lirman also of UM RSMAS who specializes in seagrass meadows, coral reefs and hardbottom communities, Laura Eldridge of Florida Department of Environmental Protection's Biscayne Bay Aquatic Preserves in the Office of Resilience and Coastal Protection, plus Galia Varona, the current field operations manager for the Submerged Aquatic Vegetation projects in the Restoration and Enhancement Section at DERM.



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# Right Whale Cause for Concern with Nassau Sierra

BY ZEN WATERS

Nassau County Sierra group believes awareness is important to the future of the North Atlantic Right Whale. To that end, a sub-committee called the Amelia Island Right Whale Action Group or AIRWAG was formed. Fernandina Beach is close to the southernmost area of the Right Whale calving grounds, so we have a special affinity and interest in these beautiful creatures who migrate annually from the waters off New England and the Bay of Fundy to have their babies in our warmer winter waters.

North Atlantic Right Whales are on the endangered species list and some sources consider them functionally extinct. Common causes of Right Whale deaths are entanglements in commercial fishing gear and ship strikes. Right Whale habitat and migration routes are close to major ports along the Atlantic seaboard and often overlap with shipping lanes, making the whales vulnerable to collisions with ships.

Six Right Whales have died this year,



Amelia the Right Whale was designed and created by the Nassau County Sierra group for the 56th annual Fernandina Beach Shrimp Festival Parade. Amelia is made out of recycled materials and is a people powered float. She continues to make guest appearances at the other Sierra Club events including the 2019 Nassau Sierra Hands Across the Sand and the Wild Amelia Nature Festival.

the last on June 30, 2019. These deaths are mostly thought to be ship strike related. Sadly this essentially negates the seven births that took place so far this year. The total number of remaining Right Whales are back to hovering around 419.

This past season, AIRWAG sponsored Julie Albert from the Marine Resources Council to educate interested citizens in Right Whale identification and becoming local Right Whale spotters. The spotters are trained to alert authorities by calling 1-888-97-WHALE giving known

landmarks so the latitude and longitude coordinates can be recorded and used to slow ships traversing these known Right Whale areas.

North Atlantic Right Whales should live 70 years and possibly as long as 100. Unfortunately their lifespans are becoming shorter and shorter due to ship strikes, entanglements with commercial fishing and lobster fishing lines, and changing food supplies due to climate change. Some scientists fear that Right Whales could become extinct within 20 years.