



May 5, 2022

Honorable Secretary Shawn Hamilton
Florida Department of Environmental Protection
3900 Commonwealth Boulevard
Tallahassee, FL 32399-3000

Honorable Governor Ron DeSantis
Executive Office of the Governor
400 South Monroe Street
Tallahassee, FL 32399-0001

Florida Department of Environmental Protection
Office of the Ombudsman and Public Services
3900 Commonwealth Boulevard, MS 49
Tallahassee, FL 32399

Dear Honorable Officials,

As you know, Florida has an environmental commission designed to deal with water and air pollution. However, the group of governor-appointed members hasn't met in five years. With this letter, Waterway Advocates expresses serious concern relating to the so-called, "Florida Environmental Regulation Commission," and we urge for action now.

Through email correspondence with ERC staff, Waterway Advocates has confirmed that, "The Florida Environmental Regulation Commission last met on Feb. 8, 2017." In this same communication, the agency also claimed, "There have been no agenda items that have required [ERC] to convene since this time."

As an organization that is frequently in the field witnessing pollution, its effects, and working to restore habitats, we see *many* reasons on a daily basis for ERC to meet. We hear it from our community members, read it in the news, and witness it at our events. Here are just a few of our concerns:

- On the "ERC Members" page, all listed members have terms ending between 2017 - 2019. Who are the current members of the Commission? This website needs to be updated with 2022 data.
- There appear to be multiple vacancies that should be filled promptly. However, it is impossible to learn the current status since the page has not been edited in years.
- **In 2021, a record 1,101 Florida manatees died.** This was the deadliest year on record, compared to even 2020 when there were 637 manatee losses. **Only five months into 2022, and almost 500 have already fallen to this Unusual Mortality Event. If this trend remains at this rate, mathematically, we could see a potential loss of 1,500 manatees – this year!** Certainly this is something the ERC should be discussing?

- The Blue-Green Algae Task Force urged that health advisories be developed by the Departments of Health and Environmental Protection, “to inform the public about the potential health impacts associated with exposure to algae and/or algae toxins.” Lake Okeechobee and many other bodies of water have been “blanketed in blue green algae” within recent years. While our state has a Blue-Green Algae Task Force, the ERC’s failure to discuss or even acknowledge this growing issue is concerning.
- In March of 2022, Florida ranked first for the highest total acres of lakes too polluted for swimming or healthy aquatic life, in a new study by The Environmental Integrity Project examining water quality across the United States. In the same report, Florida ranked second in the nation for “lakes that cannot be used at all,” and “total square miles of impaired estuaries.”
- The Florida Department of Environmental Protection has determined that “nearly 9,000 miles of streams and rivers designated for recreation are impaired for fecal bacteria.” Public contamination warnings have been inadequate at best, and ERC must intervene in this and other water quality issues.

Florida’s economy and overall wellbeing is heavily fueled by our environment, along with the tourism, recreation, educational, and other opportunities it inspires. Our waters and ecosystems are in need of immediate attention from officials, agencies, organizations, and private citizens alike. Florida cannot be a phenomenal vacation getaway without healthy habitats, so let’s get to work.

Respectfully,



Caleb Merendino
Co-Founder



Benjamin Swanson
Co-Founder



David McVey
Board President

Cc: State Affairs Committee, Florida House of Representatives
Environment, Agriculture & Flooding Subcommittee, Florida House of Representatives
The Honorable John Calhoun, Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Office of the Ombudsman & Public Services
Committee on Environment and Natural Resources, Florida Senate
Environmental Regulation Commission, Florida Department of Environmental Protection
Blue-Green Algae Task Force, Florida Department of Environmental Protection
Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Technology Division
Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Honorable Chief Resilience Officer Dr. Wes Brooks
Bureau of Environmental Health and Water Programs, Florida Department of Health
Honorable State Surgeon General Joseph A. Ladapo, MD, PhD