



Everglades
Law Center, Inc.

2021
Annual Report

Message

from the Executive Director

To our Supporters,

Despite the challenges that Covid threw all of us in 2020, restoration efforts moved forward at record speeds in 2021. Major Everglades projects broke ground throughout South Florida and ELC worked to ensure these restoration efforts will deliver the greatest benefits possible to the natural system.

A key point of progress was the development of an update to the Lake Okeechobee Regulation Schedule which will significantly reduce the damaging discharges to coastal estuaries, including the Lake Worth Lagoon, and increase beneficial water flow to the Everglades and Florida Bay. We also recognize the need to prevent the mistakes of the past that necessitated these major restoration efforts and we engaged in multiple forums to oppose destructive development within critical habitats and to protect the public's right to challenge these harmful proposals.

The State of Florida finally seemed to acknowledge the inevitable with its Sea Level Rise Impact Projection rulemaking effort, and with support from the Environmental Defense Fund, ELC coordinated a coalition of stakeholders to support the strongest rules possible.

ELC also launched a new summer advocacy program to teach kids about our environment and how they can have an impact on the decisions that affect it. Dubbed "ECAP", the program introduced students to local leaders like our beloved Maggie Hurchalla and concluded with each student successfully presenting an advocacy project in their community.

With many more advocacy efforts also moving forward, 2021 was a great year and we couldn't have done it without your support. We hope you will join us to provide lawyers for our environment.

Sincerely,

Lisa Interlandi

Lisa Interlandi
Executive Director



Readying for Sea Level Rise

With support from the Environmental Defense Fund, ELC coordinated a powerful coalition of NGO's in support of strong and meaningful state rules to study the potential impacts of sea level rise on developments prior to construction. Developed by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, the Sea Level Rise Impact Projection Study or "SLIP" rule is the first resilience focused regulation of its kind in the state. The months-long slog through meetings, comments, and outreach paid off, as the adopted SLIP rule incorporated many of the recommendations that ELC advocated for, including mandating the use of uniform sea level rise projections.

"Because the state is beginning to take steps [to address sea level rise], we want to make sure that the steps they do take are of high quality."

*Elizabeth Fata Carpenter
ELC Managing Attorney
Miami Herald February 28, 2021*

Photo Credit: South Florida Water Management District
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/sfwmd/52394863201/in/album-72177720302513876/>





Photo Credit: FWC Fish and Wildlife Research Institute
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/myfwc/32726348926/in/photolist-RRV6nh-4sQ7Qc-VJm1qt-SYsrK>

Protecting

the Public's Right to Challenge Harmful Development

ELC joined the fight to protect both critical wetlands and the public's right to challenge irresponsible development by filing an amicus curiae "Friend of the Court" brief in the Conservancy of Southwest Florida's appeal challenging the Rivergrass development. Representing Tropical Audubon Society and Friends of the Everglades, ELC argued that the interpretation of the law has the potential to significantly limit the ability to enforce comprehensive plans and challenge development orders that harm natural resources, including the Everglades.

"The Rivergrass appeal is about much more than just Rivergrass. The public's ability to challenge irresponsible development could be eviscerated throughout much of Florida if the lower court's incorrect ruling is upheld."

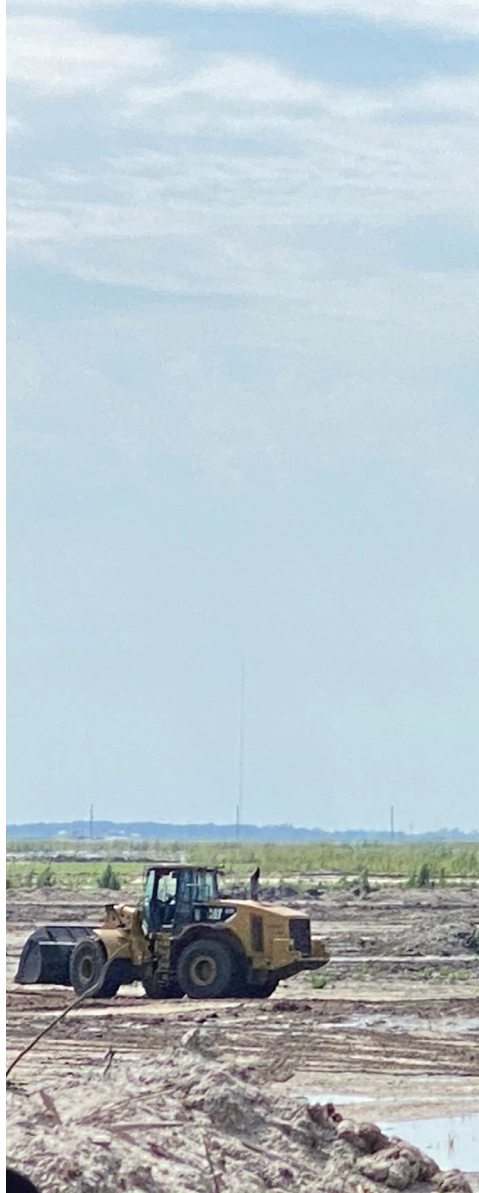
Nicole Johnson
Conservancy of Southwest Florida

A New STA

in the EAA!

And if you are left wondering by that headline, the South Florida Water Management District broke ground on a new Stormwater Treatment Area in the Everglades Agricultural Area south of Lake Okeechobee and ELC Executive Director Lisa Interlandi was there in support. Expected to be completed in 2023, this “STA” is a key part of the EAA Reservoir project which will help increase the flow of clean water to the Everglades, and reduce damaging polluted discharges to our coastal estuaries.

Photo Credit: South Florida Water Management District



A Lot at Stake

for Lake Worth Lagoon

What's Our Water Worth? We now know!

A generous donation by the Durst Family allowed ELC to commission the PFM Group to conduct an Economic Valuation of the Lake Worth Lagoon. The purpose of the report was to support ongoing efforts to protect and restore the Lagoon both by raising awareness of the important role the Lagoon plays on Palm Beach County's economy and by providing a reliable estimate of the overall economic value of the Lagoon ecosystem. By assigning economic values to all of the myriad values the Lagoon provides, the report conservatively assessed an overall economic value of over \$5.3 billion dollars, which represents the combined one time value of the Lagoon plus the present value of ongoing economic benefits and spending derived from the Lagoon over the next 25 years.

Lagoon's the Big Winner in Lake O Plan

In response to repeated prodding from ELC, Palm Beach County and our partners, water managers made major changes to operations affecting the Lake Worth Lagoon when releasing water from Lake Okeechobee. Previously the Lagoon was considered merely part of the stormwater management system and as a result, it received frequent harmful discharges from the Lake. In considering the Lagoon's values as an estuary, water managers committed to operational changes that will significantly reduce the frequency and harm of discharges from the Lake into the Lagoon.



Development Interests

vs. the Public Interest

Last year a prominent Florida official tasked with protecting Florida's endangered wildlife and their habitats sought to fill and develop 19 acres of privately owned submerged seagrass beds in the Lake Worth Lagoon. Representing the Lake Worth Waterkeeper, ELC pushed back hard. We moved to intervene in his legal action seeking permission to fill the submerged land to ask the Judge to dismiss the case, unleashing a torrent of public outrage and negative publicity in the process. The public official eventually had enough and dismissed the suit, abandoning his efforts for now. Palm Beach County has sought to purchase the property for environmental preservation, but as a government entity, the County is limited to paying no more than the appraised value, and unfortunately, the public official has not been willing to sell for that price.

**MANY WANT STATE WILDLIFE CHAIR
TO RESIGN OR STOP PLANS TO FILL
HIS LAND OFF SINGER ISLAND**

**FWC'S RODNEY
BARRETO SELLS
LAKE WORTH
LAGOON LAND AFTER
PRESSURE FROM
ENVIRONMENTALISTS**

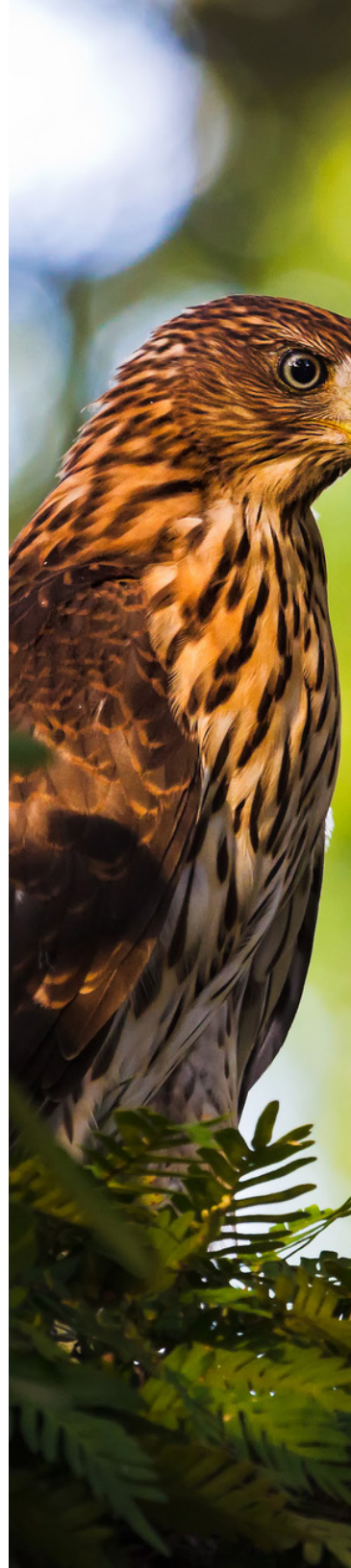
**EDITORIAL:
A REPRIEVE FOR SINGER
ISLAND SHORELAND -
FOR NOW**

**WILDLIFE CHIEF SAYS HE'LL DROP
LAGOON DEVELOPMENT PLAN AND
WILL SELL SINGER ISLAND LAND**

**TOP FLORIDA WILDLIFE OFFICIAL
WANTS TO FILL, BUILD ON LAGOON
WHERE TURTLES, MANATEES ROAM**

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1000 Friends of Florida
Apalachicola Riverkeeper
Audubon Florida
Audubon Society of the Everglades
Captains for Clean Water
CLEO Institute
Conservancy of Southwest Florida
Everglades Coalition
Environmental Defense Fund
Everglades Foundation
Everglades Trust
Florida Oceanographic Society
Friends of the Everglades
Indian Riverkeeper
Kissimmee Waterkeeper
Lake Worth Waterkeeper
Matanzas Waterkeeper
Miami Waterkeeper
National Parks Conservation Association
National Wildlife Federation
Palm Beach Civic Association
REEF
Rivers Coalition
Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation
Sierra Club
St. Johns Riverkeeper
Surfrider Foundation
Suncoast Waterkeeper
Sustainable Palm Beach County
Tampa Bay Waterkeeper
Tropical Audubon Society





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Engaging

the Next Generation of Environmental Leaders

ELC kicked off its 2021 Environmental Advocacy and Citizen Activism Program (ECAP) to engage Martin County students of varying ages in a common theme of education and advocacy. For 6 weeks over the summer students participated in workshop-style virtual meetings followed by in-person, outdoor fieldwork. ELC strengthened community partnerships through the program while students engaged with prominent speakers, including Maggie Hurchalla, Audrey Peterman, and Jacqui Thurlow Lippisch. The project concluded with each student creating a final advocacy project to benefit the local environment.



Staff Spotlight

the Next Generation of Environmental Leaders



Elizabeth Fata Carpenter joined ELC in 2019 to expand our reach and impact in Miami-Dade County and the Southern Everglades. And she has! This report highlights two critical projects she spearheaded in 2021, representing Everglades advocates as “Friends of the Court” in a critical case determining the ability of citizens to protect their communities from unsustainable growth, and leading a coalition of environmental and growth management groups advocating for the strongest possible rule requiring Florida coastal development to consider the impacts of sea level rise. As a water resources point person, Elizabeth was also chosen as the Chair of the Village of El Portal’s Sustainability and Resiliency Task Force in 2020 and was El Portal’s 2021 Citizen of the Year!

“It has been a pleasure working at ELC to advocate for our critical natural resources. It is heartening to see that with our team of dedicated advocates, we can truly make a positive impact on our South Florida communities and environment.”

*Elizabeth Fata Carpenter
Managing Attorney, Everglades Law Center*



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