How do we honor the rights of nature?

Welcome to the August issue of Green Flash!

In this issue we look at the five “rights of nature” ballot amendments for which petitioners are gathering signatures in Florida. Many in politics, law, and the rights of nature movement—and those in support of and opposed to the various proposed ballot amendments—have quite a bit to say about them and the ideas they put forth.

But rights of nature is not a new idea. What is new, is how the idea is being applied in the FL5.org proposals. Some might argue most, if not all, of these proposed ballot amendments have little to nothing to do with rights of nature. What, then, are rights of nature? Currently, under the U.S. legal system, nature has no rights. Increasingly, however, around the world and even here at home, nature is being acknowledged as having rights—to exist, be free from pollution and ownership, to thrive, to procreate, to evolve, and more.

Learn more about rights of nature by watching some of these videos, including this short 5 minute piece about the Toledo/Lake Erie Bill of Rights-rights of nature issue and a fun piece from The Daily Show. There are plenty of resources online to learn more, but there is also a point where we have to look inward and ask ourselves, how do we honor the rights of nature?

We are, after all, a part of nature and intricately connected even if we live in a way that feels separate from all the other life around us. It’s still there, and if
A group of Florida conservationists is spearheading what it calls rights of nature ballot amendments. The five proposals are in the signature-gathering phase now, with the hopes of landing on the 2022 ballot, for Florida voters to decide if they should become part of the state constitution.

The five ballot proposals are:

- **Right to Clean Water**
- **Florida Wetlands Protection**
- **Florida Iconic Species**
- **Stop New Toll Roads**
- **Captive Wildlife Hunting Ban**

On the surface, it seems difficult to argue with the idea of the right to clean water; further protecting Florida’s iconic species, like the manatee; or banning canned (fenced in) hunts. As with most things in politics, the issues aren’t all
that they seem. Some hunters take issue with the further protections of the Florida black bear, and some take issue with the way the captive wildlife hunting ban is written over concern it will impact family cattle ranches where invasive wild boar and alligators are hunted.

The way all of the ballot amendments are written seems to be a sticking point for many. One of the preeminent global rights of nature organizations, Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund (CELDF), is concerned these proposed ballot amendments don’t really give legal rights to nature at all--or endow people with the legal rights needed to protect nature from harm, especially at the hands of corporations with government-issued permits to pollute, drill, dump, fill, and more.

This brings us to the question: How do we honor the right of nature to exist, be healthy, procreate, and evolve? How do we do that in our own lives, and how do we do that in a legal and regulatory landscape that has skewed increasingly towards polluters? Check out our series on each of the proposed ballot amendments, linked above.

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**More WGCU Environmental Coverage of Note**

**LAKE OKEECHOBEE VIEW**
*PHOTO BY KATIE JOHNSON COURTESY FWC*

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers chose the “CC” option for its new Lake Okeechobee plan, which will be in effect through at least 2028. Lee County Commissioner Kevin Ruane, among others, is sounding the alarm that the plan has some serious shortfalls, and that the Corps should take more time to consider amendments to the plan. Lee County Commissioners, Tuesday, agreed to allow Ruane to lead the charge on advocating for changes to the plan, which may involve the county filing a legal challenge against the federal government including litigation under the Federal Administrative Procedures Act and the Endangered Species Act.

**RED TIDE BLOOM OFF NORTHERN PINELLAS COUNTY**
*PHOTO COURTESY FWC*

It’s been a busy month for red tide, with the Governor refusing to issue a state of emergency despite persistent high levels in the Gulf and the confusion of respiratory ailments due to red tide with coronavirus.

Citrus greening continues to be a problem and Saharan dust seems to be our friend – for now.
Species Act. You can listen to a special episode of Gulf Coast Life about the proposal.

Read more environmental reporting

Featured Florida Wildlife
Snail kite
Snail kites move north as the health of Lake Okeechobee and the Everglades wane. LEARN MORE.

FI RUST / AUDUBON PHOTO AWARDS /
PHOTO COURTESY AUDUBON

Consumer Alert & Tip
Paraquat is a threat again
PARAQUAT USE IN THE USA BY US GEOLOGICAL SURVEY

E&E news (the E's are for Energy and Environment) reports the EPA will not ban aerial spraying of paraquat, a weedkiller, reversing a Trump era recommendation. E&E reports, “In the interim decision approving the continued use of paraquat, the EPA said it would allow aerial spraying to continue, after all, based on new information provided by farm chemical manufacturers.”

Paraquat may increase the risk of Parkinson’s disease and is fatal when ingested. It has been banned in China and Europe.

To avoid agriculture products that have been sprayed with paraquat, connect with small local farmers and gardeners, limit processed food and commercial meat intake, and know where your food comes from.
Listen to WGCU's Mike Kiniry interview the investigators from the Palm Beach Post and ProPublica on their interactive report on 'Black Snow' and the air pollution caused by sugar cane burning.

LISTEN NOW and LEARN MORE

Calendar of Events

**GHOST ORCHID**
*Photo Courtesy Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary*

SEE: The "Super" Ghost Orchid at Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary. Ghost orchids live in wetlands and are only known to live in South Florida and Cuba. This one should be in bloom through September.

**‘CARRY-OUT LUNCH’**
*By Ellen Trevor, 2020*

DO: Submit your nature shots to the 29th annual “Ding” Darling Day Amateur Nature Photography Contest. LEARN MORE.

**HONEY BEES ON A DWARF POWDERPUFF**
*Photo Courtesy Edison and Ford Winter Estates*

LEARN: All about honey bees at the National Honey Bee Day Celebration and Plant Sale at Edison and Ford Winter Estates August 21 from 9 am-2pm. LEARN MORE.
Native mouse believed to be extinct for 150 years found off Western Australia

Gould's mouse found on several small islands off coast of WA after population collapse on mainland

Ending on a good note

The Guardian reports Gould’s mouse, thought to be extinct after its population collapsed on mainland Australia, has been found, living under the assumed name “Shark Bay mouse” on small islands off the coast of Western Australia. According to reports, native mice made up over 40% of all Australian mammals that have gone extinct since European colonization started in the late 1700s.

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