

**1000 Friends of Florida Alliance to Protect Water Resources Inc.  
American Health Trust Inc. Audubon of Florida Audubon of SW FL  
Clean Water Action Florida Chapter Sierra Club Florida Defenders of the Environment  
Florida Federation of Garden Clubs Florida Wildlife Federation Friends of Lake Apopka  
Gulf Coast Restoration Network Halifax River Audubon Hernando Audubon Society  
Kissimmee Valley Audubon Society Oklawaha Valley Audubon Society  
Orange Audubon Society Our Santa Fe River, Inc.  
Putnam County Environmental Council Inc. St. Johns Riverkeeper  
Santa Fe Audubon Society Santa Fe Lake Dwellers Association Inc. Save Our Aquifer Inc.  
Save Our Suwannee Save the Manatee Club Southeast Volusia Audubon Society  
Space Coast Progressive Alliance Volusia Soil & Water Conservation District**

May 29, 2009

Governor Charlie Crist  
State of Florida  
The Capitol  
400 S. Monroe St.  
Tallahassee, FL 32399-0001

RE: Request to Veto SB 2080

Dear Governor Crist:

The organizations listed below request that you veto SB 2080. This legislation will limit public access to water management district governing boards as a forum to evaluate environmental resource and consumptive use permit decisions. Because of the serious impact on public participation in decisions affecting Florida's water resources, we ask that you act to protect the rights of people to continue to make public comments regarding water use and environmental resource permits.

While the bill fulfills a legislative goal related to the water management district sunset process and has some otherwise good conservation policies, those good provisions do not outweigh the loss of public input to governing board appointees charged with making decisions on important water resources. The good parts of SB 2080 met little opposition during the legislative session and should be fairly easy to enact next year.

Our water management districts, with their volunteer citizen governing boards and their open meetings held "in the sunshine" have always stood out as a good way to manage and govern some of the most important decisions made in Florida – who gets water, how much water and under what conditions. The question of allocating Florida's water will only be more important in the future. That is why we need to keep the volunteer citizens appointed to governing boards in the role of reviewing and voting on permit applications rather than simply handing off vital decisions to agency staff.

Particularly objectionable in the bill is the provision that allows governing board review of only permit decisions where the staff of the agency is proposing to deny a permit, variance, or waiver. This right for applicants remains while the bill removes the ability of groups and individuals to address water management district governing boards about permits, variances, or waivers that would be harmful to the environment. Options for affected parties to object will be limited to filing a petition for formal hearing under FS 120, or an appeal of a decision to the Governor and Cabinet under FS 373.114.

Variances and waivers have broad policy implications that can set precedents for future agency actions. These decisions should not be made in closed rooms inaccessible to the public. Such variances and waivers could allow wetlands to be destroyed without mitigation, or lakes, rivers, and wetlands to be drained for consumptive use of water contrary to the protective requirements of agency rules. The absence of public scrutiny over these decisions may lead to some staff feeling unhindered in settling otherwise controversial issues with regulated interests.

SB 2080 eliminates review of individual permits and removes the governing boards from the dynamic role of considering regional water supply and the cumulative impacts of wetlands and stormwater decisions. Rather than have an informed group of citizen representatives working with the district staff to consider the broader implications of permits, those considerations will now be the exclusive province of staff.

In 1973 Florida citizens approved a Constitutional Amendment allowing water management district governing boards to levy ad-valorem taxes in order to spend that money protecting water resources. If these boards, appointed by the Governor, have been entrusted to set an ad valorem levy, approve an annual budget, and tax people's homes and businesses, they should be capable of making decisions in the sunshine about consumptive use and environmental resource permits and related variances and waivers.

Your consistent defense of the public's role in environmental decisions, especially those affecting public resources, shows the leadership needed to protect Florida's most valuable resource. We encourage you to extend that defense by exercising your authority to veto SB 2080.

Sincerely,

1000 Friends of Florida  
Charles Pattison, President

Alliance to Protect Water Resources, Inc.  
Terry Godts, President

American Health Trust, Inc.  
Terry Brant, President

Audubon of Florida  
Eric Draper, Deputy Director

Audubon of SW FL  
Carol Newcomb-Jones, Vice President

Clean Water Action  
Dawn Shirreffs, FL Program Coordinator

Florida Chapter Sierra Club  
Linda Bremer

Florida Defenders of the Environment  
Nick Williams, Executive Director

Florida Federation of Garden Clubs  
Carol Hall, President

Florida Wildlife Federation  
Manley Fuller, President

Friends of Lake Apopka  
Mona Phipps, President

Gulf Coast Restoration Network  
Joe Murphy, Florida Coordinator

Halifax River Audubon  
David Hartgrove, President

Hernando Audubon Society  
Mary Dowdell, President

Kissimmee Valley Audubon Society  
Larry Rosen, President

Oklawaha Valley Audubon Society  
Linda Bystrak

Orange Audubon Society  
Bob Stamps, President

Our Santa Fe River, Inc.  
Merrilee Malwitz-Jipson, President

Putnam County Environmental Council, Inc.  
Karen Ahlers, President

St. Johns Riverkeeper  
Neil Armingeon, Riverkeeper

Santa Fe Audubon Society  
Joyce King, President

Santa Fe Lake Dwellers Association, Inc.  
Jill McGuire, President

Save Our Aquifer, Inc.  
Amy Mosher, Secretary

Save Our Suwannee  
Annette Long, President

Save the Manatee Club  
Pat Rose, Executive Director

Southeast Volusia Audubon Society  
Don Picard, President

Space Coast Progressive Alliance  
Bill Whitehead, President

Volusia Soil & Water Conservation District  
Michele Moen, Chair