

## **Green-lighting Everglades Drilling a Troubling Sign**

By Melissa McKinlay

The Sunshine State is blessed with one of the world's most biodiverse and scenic natural wonders: the Florida Everglades, which spans more than 730 square miles in South Florida and draws nearly one million visitors each year. I join the generations of public servants who recognize the need to preserve this state treasure through increased funding for restoration projects, protections for wildlife such as wading birds and Florida panthers, as well as smart restrictions on development near sensitive Everglades habitats. As Marjory Stoneman Douglas once said, "there are no other Everglades in the world," so we must preserve it while we can.

I'm proud to have spent my time in public service advocating for Florida's River of Grass. Having worked for Senator Bill Nelson, who was one of the Everglades best champions, I witnessed firsthand how universally treasured the Everglades are not only in Florida, but also in Washington, where Everglades restoration regularly receives a significant share of the federal natural resources budget. As a county commissioner representing an area bordering the Water Conservation Areas of the Everglades, I remain fully committed to sustainably using natural resources and leaving them cleaner than we found them.

With so much time and taxpayer dollars invested into saving the Everglades, it's disappointing that our courts - so-called "protectors" of the Everglades - have seemingly turned a blind eye to one of the greatest threats it has experienced in our lifetime: oil and natural gas drilling. Recently, drilling on a site in the Everglades was given the go-ahead by a three judge panel in the 1<sup>st</sup> District Court of Appeals. We need to call on Governor Ron DeSantis and the Florida Legislature to step in and vehemently oppose this decision.

Florida leaders on both sides of the aisle have strongly rejected offshore drilling, because we all recognize the risk it poses to our beaches and economy. Florida's environment and our economy go hand in hand. Without a clean and healthy environment, Florida wouldn't be a desirable place to live, work, retire and vacation. If our beaches are important enough to protect from drilling, why aren't our Everglades?

I encourage all Floridians to consider the consequences of remaining silent on the threat oil drilling poses in Florida, especially in environmentally sensitive areas like the Florida Everglades. Now is the time for engagement and activism, starting with our leaders in Tallahassee and Washington.

*McKinlay is the District 6 commissioner from Palm Beach County. She served as Mayor of Palm Beach County from 2017-2018.*