

FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND CONSUMER SERVICES
COMMISSIONER NICOLE "NIKKI" FRIED
THE CAPITOL

November 2, 2021

The Honorable Shawn Hamilton
Interim Secretary
Florida Department of Environmental Protection 3900
Commonwealth Boulevard
Mail Stop 49
Tallahassee, FL 32399

The Honorable Shawn Benge
Deputy Director, Exercising the
Delegated Authority of the Director
National Park Service
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240

Interim Secretary Hamilton and Deputy Director Benge,

I write today regarding proposed oil exploration throughout Florida, and particularly in the Florida Everglades region. As you know, Florida is one of the nation's most unique ecological treasures, with the Everglades a fragile ecosystem like nowhere else on Earth. Over 120 animal species listed under the federal Endangered Species Act, alongside more than 21 million Floridians, rely on clean water and a healthy environment to thrive.

For decades, it has been clear that oil drilling, fossil fuel exploration, hydraulic fracturing, and related processes are highly detrimental to their surrounding environments. These activities are even more harmful when they threaten our aquifers that are critical to Florida's water supply. This appears to be the case in Trend Exploration's current permit application, submitted to the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP), to undertake oil exploration within the Big Cypress Watershed in Collier County.

Numerous government agencies and environmental stakeholders have warned that allowing a directional well to be drilled in this area may harm regional drinking water supplies, endangered species, local residents, and the agricultural community. Both the South Florida Water Management District and the Immokalee Water and Sewer District have raised serious concerns about this permit application, including potential contamination of reservoirs and aquifers, inadequate protection of water supplies, and massive consumption and latent depletion of water sources.

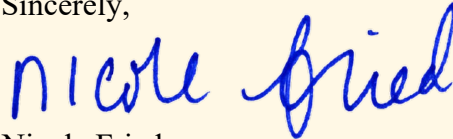
Farmworker advocates such as the Coalition of Immokalee Workers have expressed major concern about impacts to the water supply on which more than 27,000 agricultural workers rely, many of whom are low-wage immigrants with little recourse. As the regulator of Florida's \$149 billion agriculture industry, and home to the Office of Agricultural Water Policy, the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services takes these concerns very seriously.

I therefore request that FDEP deny this permit application, and request that the National Park Service exercise its broad authority to reject this oil exploration activity in the Big Cypress Watershed. Further, I encourage the Governor to issue an executive order halting all oil drilling and related activities anywhere within the boundaries of the State of Florida, just as I have called on the federal government to ban all drilling off Florida's coasts.

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Earlier this year, I called for the denial of Texas-based Burnett Oil Company's exploration drilling permit application, as did the Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida and other concerned stakeholders. As I said then, we cannot afford giveaways of our pristine environment to the fossil fuel industry. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "nicole fried". The signature is written in a cursive, lowercase style.

Nicole Fried

Florida Commissioner of Agriculture and Consumer Services

cc: The Honorable Ron DeSantis, Governor of Florida