



FLORIDA SPRINGS COUNCIL

The Honorable Ron DeSantis
Governor of Florida
Plaza Level 05,
The Capitol
400 S Monroe St
Tallahassee, FL 32399

August 27, 2020

Dear Governor DeSantis,

Florida's five water management districts are among the most important institutions in our state for protecting water resources and balancing the needs of our citizens and our environment. In your 2019 letter calling for the resignation of the entire South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) Governing Board you said "the people of Florida deserve nothing less" than water management district governing boards which support a "bold vision for action on the environment."

More than twenty months later, you have not fulfilled your minimum statutory duty to appoint governing board members to fill the vacant seats on Florida's four other water management districts, leaving these districts unprepared and, in some cases, unable to carry out their core responsibilities. Because of your inaction, the St. Johns River Water Management District has been operating without a quorum for months.

Florida Statute 373.073 requires you to appoint a specific number of governing board members to each water management district each year you are in office. During your first year in office, you were statutorily required to appoint thirteen governing board members to the four water management districts besides SFWMD. However, you neglected to make nine of the thirteen required appointments, leaving millions of Floridians without representation while their taxes fund District operations.

This year, you are required by law to fill three vacancies on the Southwest Florida Water Management District Governing Board and two vacancies on each of the St. Johns River Water Management District, Suwannee River Water Management District, and Northwest Florida Water Management District Boards. You have made none of these required appointments.

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The terms of seven current board members appointed by Governor Scott in 2016 will expire at the end of this month. If you don't replace these members, the St. Johns River Water Management District, Suwannee River Water Management District, and Northwest Florida Water Management District will be unable to reach a voting quorum. Meanwhile, the Southwest Florida Water Management District will be left hanging by a thread with only seven of thirteen members appointed.

Florida law also requires you to consider appointing board members who represent an equitable cross-section of regional interests and technical expertise. The current make-up of water management district governing boards is not equitable.

Next week, the St Johns River Water Management District Governing Board will be left with three of nine members, none of whom represent a geographical area. Their respective backgrounds are defense contractor, real estate developer, and government relations director for a waste collection company.

The Northwest Florida Water Management District Governing Board will also be left with only three of nine members, whose backgrounds include turf and irrigation company C.E.O., construction company vice-president, and the executive director of the Washington County Chamber of Commerce.

There is nothing wrong with representatives of these industries and perspectives serving on water management district governing boards, but there is something very wrong when only these industries and perspectives are represented.

Eighteen months ago, soon after your inauguration, the Florida Springs Council wrote to you applauding your bold initiative and vision for Everglades restoration. We asked for your leadership to protect Florida's springs and rivers and recommended nine respected applicants from the conservation, scientific, and legal communities for open seats on Southwest Florida Water Management District, St. Johns River Water Management District, and Suwannee River Water Management District. We received no response to our letter, and these seats remain unfilled.

With major decisions pending on budgets, taxation, minimum flow and level rules, the Central Florida Water Initiative, and the high-profile Nestle consumptive use permit, you have left our water management districts short-handed and ill-prepared. There is no time left to lose.



It is disingenuous and a disservice to the people of Florida to continue to allow Florida's water management districts to operate without a quorum when the vacancies on the boards are a result of your inaction, not Covid-19. Your indifference to the waters of central and north Florida and neglect of Florida's water management districts dates back to well before the Covid-19 pandemic.

We urge you to do your job as Governor, to follow the laws of our state, and to appoint qualified applicants to fill the nine 2020 vacancies on Florida's water management districts pursuant to Florida Statute 373.073(1)(b)3. Further, we ask that these appointments correct the current lack of representation by scientists and conservationists on these governing boards.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ryan Smart".

Ryan Smart, Executive Director
Florida Springs Council