

THE BUZZ ON FLORIDA POLITICS

On climate, DeSantis is full of contradictions

The governor focuses on climate resilience while not discussing climate change.



Gov. Ron DeSantis gives a speech in the Florida Everglades on Tuesday, Aug. 3, 2021. [AL DIAZ/ADIAZ@MIAMIHERALD.COM | Miami Herald]

By

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At a campaign stop in September 2018, soon-to-be Gov. Ron DeSantis **laid out his plans** to restore the Everglades, adapt to rising sea levels and combat toxic algae blooms.

But he stopped short of mentioning climate change.

“I’m not in the pews of the church of the global warming leftists,” DeSantis told a crowd of reporters. “I’m a Teddy Roosevelt conservationist.”

Almost six years into his governorship, DeSantis has been praised and criticized by environmental groups. He has earmarked billions of dollars for conservation efforts and waterway projects, including more than \$850 million for Everglades restoration in the 2024-25 budget he signed last week. Yet he has rejected the **“politicization of weather”** and disparaged **“the agenda of the radical green zealots.”** He has grappled with extreme weather but refused to acknowledge that human activity drives climate change and its effects.

Floridians are bracing for another summer of intense heat and an “extremely active” storm season that experts say could be more severe because of global warming. In 2023, during one of the hottest years on

record, waters off the Gulf Coast reached 90 degrees. Increasingly extreme storms batter the state each year, costing billions of dollars in damage.

Voters on both sides of the aisle are concerned. [A recent poll](#) from Florida Atlantic University found that 90% of Floridians believe climate change is happening, regardless of the cause, while 40% of Florida Republicans and more than 70% of Democrats think humans largely cause it.

A conflicting record

During his campaign for governor in 2018, DeSantis rode a wave of environmental tumult.

When months-long red tide splashed Southwest Florida shores and fish carcasses washed up on beaches, he promised to clean up polluted waterways. When Hurricane Michael pummeled the Panhandle, he raised money for veterans impacted by the storm.

DeSantis listed the environment as a top priority after taking office in 2019. He committed [\\$625 million to Everglades restoration](#) projects in

his first month as governor and [appointed Florida's first chief resilience officer](#), tasked with preparing the state for rising sea levels.

“Florida is a low-lying coastal state susceptible to hurricanes and severe weather,” Jeremy Redfern, press secretary for the governor’s office, said when asked last week about DeSantis’ environmental record. “This issue is not new but a fact of Florida’s geography and topography. As such, strengthening and fortifying our beaches, infrastructure and homes is the correct focus for the state.”

Some voters and environmental groups were optimistic after DeSantis took office, said Walter A. Rosenbaum, professor emeritus of political science at the University of Florida.

“Considering the fact that he succeeded Rick Scott, who was overtly opposed to climate policy, many environmentalists looked upon DeSantis as a relief,” Rosenbaum said.

Two days after the governor’s election, the [Everglades Foundation](#) said DeSantis’ environmental platform marked “the beginning of a new and more hopeful era for the Sunshine State.” Sierra Club Florida also [praised the new governor](#) for his commitment to water policy reform.

DeSantis has supported programs to make Florida more resilient to the effects of climate change, including legislation to address [rising sea levels and coastal flooding](#) and \$1.2 billion for emergency response and preparation in the 2024-25 budget.

Yet in 2022, Florida was the only state to [decline millions](#) in federal funding to reduce tailpipe emissions. And in 2023, DeSantis [vetoed a popular bipartisan bill](#) that would have made it easier for officials to choose electric cars for government fleets. He also [turned down \\$346 million](#) from Washington that would have helped Floridians make their homes more energy efficient.

Rosenbaum said DeSantis doubled down on his stance on climate change during his brief run for president. His [plan for the economy](#) would have reduced regulations and permitting requirements on the energy sector. He pledged to “reverse the federal government’s attempt to force people to buy electric vehicles.”

That platform, Rosenbaum said, “appealed to the Republican base he was trying to cultivate.”

Some environmental groups have remained staunch supporters of DeSantis, pointing to things like his focus on the Everglades.

“The money that has flowed since January of 2019 has been incredible,” Eric Eikenberg, CEO of the Everglades Foundation, said in an interview. “We’ve just been delighted to work with him.”

Eikenberg cited the governor’s commitment to building a reservoir south of Lake Okeechobee. He said the project aims to rehydrate the Everglades, reduce water pollution and help protect coastal communities during tropical storms.

“When it’s over and done,” Eikenberg said, “it’s a benefit to the overall environment of the state.”

In recent weeks, DeSantis has received pushback over a bill he signed that [erases most mentions of climate change](#) from Florida statutes.

The law, along with two other bills DeSantis signed that day, banned offshore windmills from Florida’s waters, deleted requirements that state agencies purchase climate-friendly products and prevented

municipalities from restricting the kinds of fuel used in appliances like gas stoves.

Brooke Alexander-Goss, an organizing manager for the Florida chapter of the Sierra Club, said of the bill, “Removing climate change language further deepens the rabbit hole that DeSantis and some of his supporters like to go down that this is some sort of hoax.” The Sierra Club in 2020 and 2022 gave DeSantis a D-minus grade for his work on climate policy.

“He likes the optics of saying, ‘Look at all of these things that I’m doing to help make Florida more resilient,’” she said. “But he refuses to acknowledge the root cause here, which is climate change.”