

Democrats in Congress blast DEP water plan



Jeff Burlew, Democrat senior writer 6:45 p.m. EDT July 25, 2016



(Photo: Democrat files)

Florida Democrats in Congress are blasting a Department of Environmental Protection [proposal to allow higher amounts of certain carcinogenic chemicals \(/story/news/2016/07/23/controversial-water-standards-set-vote/87393646/\)](#) into the state's surface waters.

Those criticizing the plan include Rep. Gwen Graham, D-Tallahassee, Sen. Bill Nelson and Reps. Patrick Murphy and Alan Grayson, both of whom are running for the U.S. Senate. The Florida Environmental Regulation Commission is set to vote on the proposal on Tuesday.

The Democrats asked the ERC to reject the proposal. And they called on Gov. Rick Scott to fill two vacant positions on the seven-member board set aside for local government and environmental community representation.

Graham, who is [considering a run for governor in 2018 \(/story/news/2016/04/21/gwen-graham-considering-run-governor/83325548/\)](#), said Florida's waters, from Tallahassee to the Treasure Coast, are in crisis.

"Our state's environment and economy depend on clean water — and neither can afford lower quality standards," she said. "Gov. Scott must end his silence on this issue, appoint commissioners to represent the environmental community and work with the commission to improve our standards — not gut them."



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[Graham urges Scott to call special session on water](#)

<http://www.tallahassee.com/story/news/2016/07/14/graham-wants-special-session-water/87100510/>

DEP Secretary Jon Stevenson responded to criticism Monday, saying DEP's top priority is to "continuously protect and preserve the health of Florida's families, visitors and incredible natural resources." He said the proposal would nearly double the amount of chemicals DEP can regulate using "stringent and protective criteria."

"I've been in contact with the federal EPA, which has confirmed every change is in line with its own recommendations," he said in the written release. "Furthermore, each and every criterion protects Floridians, according to both the EPA and the World Health Organization."

DEP, under the Clean Water Act, is updating human health limits for toxic chemicals that can be discharged into its rivers, lakes, streams and estuaries. The agency in May unveiled its new standards, including regulation for the first time of nearly 40 toxic compounds. The proposal includes less stringent standards for about half the 43 chemicals it now regulates.



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[Public to DEP: No to revised pollution limits](#)

<http://www.tallahassee.com/story/news/2016/07/23/public-dep-no-revised-pollution-limits/87475170/>

The Democratic delegation called the proposal "harmful" in a prepared release and said it could have "severe consequences," from contaminating the water supply and hurting the state's seafood and tourism sectors.

"Florida's waterways are more than just beautiful scenery," Nelson said. "They are our way of life and they must be protected. The state's plan to allow more chemicals in our waterways defies common sense."

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Public hearing and protest

The Environmental Regulation Commission will take up the new standards starting at 9 a.m. Tuesday at the Marjory Stoneman Douglas Building, Conference Room A, 3900 Commonwealth Boulevard. Environmental groups are planning a news conference and rally outside the building before the meeting.

More from Florida's Democratic delegation

"Floridians want fewer poisons in our beautiful waters, not more. Passing this proposal would starkly contradict the commission's mission to keep Floridians safe, protect our wildlife, and preserve our state's pristine waterways. It flies in the face of the scientifically-sound EPA recommendations and puts Florida's standards well below others states."

— Rep. Ted Deutch

"Clean water and clean beaches are central to a healthy environment and healthy economy in Florida. Gov. Rick Scott and his Administration must stop their continued rollbacks of environmental protections in our great state. These types of rollbacks and lack of commitment have done serious harm, such as opening up Florida for fracking, algae-filled lagoons and shameful resistance to conservation lands that voters supported."

— Rep. Kathy Castor

"I am uncomfortable with the proposed rule and the impact it could have on the people of Florida. The decision the Environmental Regulation Commission makes this week regarding the adoption of the proposed rule risks not only the weakening of Florida's water safety standards but could also open the door to risky fracking in Florida. I hope you will do the right thing for the people of Florida."

— Rep. Alan Grayson

"In a time of crisis in our waterways, we should be making every effort to strengthen water quality standards not lessening existing protections," said Rep. Patrick Murphy (FL-18). "I urge the commission to reject this dangerous proposal that threatens public health, our environment, and the countless Floridians who depend on clean water for their livelihoods. Instead, the Governor should direct state officials to do their job of protecting the people of Florida and focus their efforts on addressing the environmental disaster currently taking place in our backyards."

— Rep. Patrick Murphy

"Clean water is imperative to the health and safety of our families and communities and to the health and safety of our economy in Florida. We must do all that we can to enhance our water quality. I have serious concerns with this proposal."

— Rep. Frederica Wilson

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