

It is the position of Waterkeepers Florida that moving forward with this rulemaking is deeply inappropriate at this time. At the drafting of this letter, there have been more than 26,000 COVID-19 cases in the state of Florida, more than 3,800 hospitalizations as a result of the virus, and more than 780 deaths (see <https://floridahealthcovid19.gov/#latest-stats>). Additionally, more than 450,000 people in the State of Florida have filed for unemployment in the last month as a result of the pandemic. Moreover, K-12 schools across the state will remain closed through the end of the school year, forcing many parents to juggle childcare responsibilities. Finally, on April 1, 2020 Governor DeSantis issued a state-wide stay home order, instructing Floridians to stay home but for essential activities.

Given this body of evidence, we ask: is FDEP's rulemaking an essential activity at this time? We believe the answer to be a resounding "no."

Waterkeepers Florida is deeply committed to ensure public involvement in this rulemaking process. In fact, public involvement is the hallmark of our collective mission. We do not feel that these rulemaking proceedings have been adequately inclusive for all members of the public. Not only is it our position that this rulemaking and its motivations are deeply flawed to begin with, but the Department's attempts to fast track these decisions while the public is preoccupied with a global pandemic is unsettling at best.

We formally request that FDEP suspend Clean Water Act Section 404 rulemaking until, at a minimum, Governor DeSantis has lifted his stay at home order. We also request that FDEP schedule in-person public hearings at that time.

Respectfully,

Lisa Rinaman
St. Johns Riverkeeper
Board Chair of Waterkeepers Florida

