

FROM THE OFFICE OF
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Governor Ron DeSantis Signs HB 5401

Stuart, Fla. – Today, Governor Ron DeSantis signed HB 5401: Florida Department of Environmental Protection. The bill implements the directive in Executive Order 19-12, to transfer the Environmental Crimes Unit from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) to the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP).

“Charged with the task of protecting our environment, DEP is the appropriate department to house the environmental crimes unit,” **said Governor DeSantis.** “Our natural resources are key to the identity of our state, so we must ensure that our laws are being obeyed and enforced. I believe HB 5401 will help investigators solve crimes more quickly and will hopefully lead to fewer environmental crimes in the future.”



Photo Credit: Governor's Press Office

“Governor DeSantis has continued to make it very clear that it is his expectation that Florida’s environmental laws are enforced,” **said DEP Secretary Noah Valenstein**. “We are committed to carrying out this directive and are pleased to have this additional tool to do more for Florida’s environment now.”

“We thank Governor DeSantis for his bold leadership in allowing better aligned resources for conservation and public safety enforcement,” **said FWC Director of Law Enforcement Col. Curtis Brown**. “We’re ready to work with our partners at DEP and the Governor’s office to ensure a smooth transition of these positions so Florida’s residents and visitors can continue enjoying safe outdoor opportunities and healthy ecosystems.”

Highlights of HB 5401 include the following:

- Transfers the primary responsibility and powers for investigation and law enforcement of certain environmental crimes from FWC to DEP.
- Creates the Division of Law Enforcement in DEP and reassigns the department’s Office of Emergency Response to the Division of Law Enforcement.
- Establishes a transition advisory workgroup for the purpose of identifying any administrative rules that may need to be amended as a result of this consolidation.
- Adds DEP to the Joint Task Force on State Agency Law Enforcement Communications.

“I am proud to have sponsored this legislation that better aligns resources focused on environmental protection and ensures strong enforcement of Florida’s environmental laws,” **said Senator Rob Bradley**. “These protections and historic investments in our environment are a testament to the commitment of our legislature, working in lockstep with our Governor, to safeguard our water and our way of life.”

“Our strict water quality standards are essential to protecting our waterways and estuaries, and lack of enforcement is unacceptable,” **said Representative Dane Eagle**. “Thanks to this bill and Governor DeSantis’ leadership, we are putting polluters on notice.”

“As a representative of the beautiful, and environmentally sensitive Florida Keys, I am grateful that Governor DeSantis and the legislature are taking a hard stance on crimes against our precious natural resources,” **said Representative Holly Raschein**. “Never has it been more important to send a strong message to those who may inflict harm on our environment that Florida will not stand for it.”

Governor DeSantis was joined at the bill signing at the Florida Oceanographic Coastal Center in Stuart by First Lady Casey DeSantis, Senators Rob Bradley and Gayle Harrell, Representatives MaryLynn Magar, Erin Grall, Cary Pigman, Toby Overdorf and Delores Hogan Johnson, DEP Secretary Noah Valenstein, FWC Director of Law Enforcement Col. Curtis Brown, as well as representatives from the Everglades Trust, the Nature Conservancy, Florida Oceanographic Society, the Indian River Lagoon

Council, the South Florida Water Management District, the Everglades Foundation and the South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force.

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