

Ban Fracking in Florida

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Current U.S. energy policy aims at maximizing production of oil and gas by drilling and fracking tens of thousands of new wells each year, across the country. Florida will be among the states that most suffer from this path.

Hundreds of peer-reviewed studies published in recent years have pointed to certain harms from fracking and have raised unanswered questions about significant risks. The negative impacts on communities include the air and water pollution, the marred landscapes and the waste disposal problems, along with radioactivity and earthquakes. Then there's the climate pollution from widespread fracking, which is on pace to bring unbelievably destructive climate change and sea-level rise, potentially flooding entire coastal economies. All of these impacts could become a reality in Florida.

Leaders in Florida's government are in denial

Floridians can expect oil and gas companies, and their lobbying forces, to continue to push for access to drill and frack in Florida, both onshore and offshore.

These forces also aim to continue to win the government's blessing — and partnership — in sinking billions of dollars into dirty energy infrastructure in the state, as with the Sabal Trail pipeline project and several liquefied natural gas (LNG, super-cooled natural gas) facilities. The latter come with remote but nonetheless unacceptable risks of explosions, which are not unprecedented.¹ Exports of LNG from Jacksonville, West Palm Beach, Miami, Pensacola and/or Tampa have been given the go-ahead.²

The state's Public Utilities Commission, which gives electric utilities their monopoly power, has even ruled that utilities, such as Florida Power & Light (FPL) and Duke Energy, can use the cash from Floridians paying their electricity bills to pay directly for drilling and fracking elsewhere.³ At the same time, Florida is undermining solar energy and energy efficiency solutions, allowing electric utilities to just use more gas (and cause more fracking) instead of pushing these utilities to take basic, proven steps to save consumers billions on electricity bills.⁴



Florida remains in the oil and gas industry's crosshairs

Florida could see considerable drilling and fracking — potentially over 1,000 new wells in the next decade or so.

In December 2012, Florida began getting applications for permits to drill new wells in the state.⁵ Of the 21 new drilling and fracking applications, 17 have been issued. Six of these permits were issued in the panhandle of Florida, and the remaining permits are in southwest Florida near Naples and Ft. Myers, and in the sensitive ecosystems around Big Cypress and the Everglades.



WATER FROM THE EVERGLADES SUSTAINS THE FISHERIES OF FLORIDA BAY. PHOTO CC-BY © DEROR AVI

The Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) gave industry the green light to experiment with their latest methods for getting oil to flow out of rock formations in Florida; hydraulic fracturing (i.e., fracking), acidizing and acid-fracking are typically authorized as just part of the “horizontal completion” process.⁶

The DEP claimed that it was caught by surprise, however, when concerned residents near Ft. Myers dug up the fact that Halliburton had been subcontracted to frack a new well over the Christmas holidays, in 2013.⁷ Farther south, residents in and around Naples stood up, organized and testified against another proposed well, and won.⁸

Water and wildlife under siege

Wastewater brought to the surface with drilling and fracking is a serious problem for the oil and gas industry, and no good disposal options exist in Florida (or elsewhere). Injecting the waste back underground is causing the swarms of earthquakes now being felt where fracking has run rampant. The other bad option is wastewater treatment, which creates solid waste problems by concentrating the contaminants and brings new headaches for public water treatment systems.

It’s likely that contaminants from oil and gas wastes have already flowed through the Miami-Dade water system. A mix of hydrocarbons and brines is brought regularly to Opa-Locka for “pre-treatment,” before being dumped into Miami-Dade’s sewer and storm water.⁹

Water systems and landfills in other Florida cities can expect to see these wastes in the future if Florida continues to allow more fracking — especially in places where public systems are privatized, and where the private water company sees a financial opportunity in treating the fracking industry’s toxic wastes.¹⁰

Given the spirit of the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan, as well as the decades of work on the plan and the

billions of dollars invested in it,¹¹ drilling and fracking for oil in the Everglades ecosystem is absurd and unacceptable. Accidents, spills, and releases of air and water pollutants, such as benzene, metals and hydrogen sulfide, become inevitable as the number of new fracked wells increases.

Only spills of more than 200 gallons get reported, but these spills add up.¹² A large spill in Big Cypress or the Everglades would create a nightmare scenario for the ecosystem, which feeds the spawning grounds of Ten Thousand Islands, and thus supports much of the state’s fishing industry.

The Sabal Trail Project would cut through Central Florida to transport natural gas through a high-volume, 36-inch pipeline, backed by FPL and Duke Power of Florida. The company would tunnel beneath vital rivers of the state — including the Ochlockonee, the Suwannee, the Santa Fe, and both Withlacoochees (twice beneath the one that flows into the Suwannee, and once under the one southwest of Ocala).¹³

As with oil and gas wells, the material used for the pipeline will age and degrade over time, increasing the likelihood of leaks over time. Pipeline accidents are a regular occurrence nationwide, with at least four in January 2015 alone. Buried underground, just tens of feet beneath the beds of these spring-fed rivers, these leaks would be a problem to find and fix. As for explosions, local emergency services will have to prepare for the worst if Sabal Trail and other LNG projects get built.¹⁴

Dirty infrastructure, climate change and the threat of sea-level rise

The people and companies bankrolling dirty energy infrastructure projects, such as the Sabal Trail pipeline and the proposed LNG facilities, expect a big return over the coming decades. Their expectation of profit is what threatens to lock in decades-more demand for drilling and fracking, with terrible consequences for our climate.

For our food and water, we rely on predictable patterns of weather and seasons. We depend on the highest high tides only rising so high, in order to keep roads and bridges from washing out, beachfronts in place, and property insurance a possibility.

Climate pollution* from drilling and fracking for oil and natural gas threatens to change all that, and Floridians will be paying the costs. The ocean's saltwater is already intruding into the fresh water of vital aquifers along South Florida's coast.¹⁵ Widespread fracking means that the seas will rise much faster, and much higher, than they have in the past 80 years.

A three-foot rise in sea level — entirely likely 50 years from now¹⁶ — would inundate Florida's coastal communities, with devastating consequences for the state. About 75 percent of Florida residents live in counties with coasts, and these counties account for 80 percent of the state's economy.¹⁷

To imagine some of the consequences (assuming that nothing changes in the state, as far as population and homes), a three-foot rise in sea level would leave 839,116 people and 566,043 homes under sea level.¹⁸ That includes:

- 7,214 people and 5,950 homes in Escambia, Walton and Bay counties, including Pensacola, Ft. Walton Beach and Panama City;

* Namely, methane (CH₄) from natural gas leakage and carbon dioxide (CO₂) from burning natural gas, diesel, gasoline and heating oils.

- 53,663 people and 28,217 homes in Duval, St. Johns and Brevard counties, including Jacksonville, St. Augustine and the Space Coast;
- 163,304 people and 111,085 in the Tampa Bay region, including Tampa, St. Petersburg, Bradenton, Sarasota and New Port Richey;
- 183,715 people and 136,450 homes in Charlotte, Lee and Collier counties, including Port Charlotte, Punta Gorda, Ft. Myers and Naples; and
- 333,242 people and 209,204 homes in Palm Beach, Broward and Miami-Dade counties, including West Palm Beach, Ft. Lauderdale and Miami.

But the seas wouldn't stop rising at three feet. A four-foot rise would mean that the 1.3 million homes where over 2.4 million Floridians now live would all be under sea level — as soon as 65 years from now.¹⁹

Move Florida forward — ban fracking now!

Fracking in Florida will bring more air and water pollution, waste disposal problems and health problems, as well as long-term risks to the state's crystal-clear waters. More broadly, fracking threatens to turn the state's coastal communities into ghost towns. Florida can ban fracking now, and should.

Endnotes

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