



# Everglades Coalition

*Sent Electronically*

April 27, 2020

Commissioner Nikki Fried

Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services

Plaza Level 10, The Capitol

400 S. Monroe St.

Tallahassee, FL 32399-0800

**RE: Stop pre-harvest sugar field burning in and around the EAA**

Dear Commissioner Fried:

The Everglades Coalition has over 60 member organizations committed to the protection and restoration of America's Everglades. We urge you to take action now to stop the toxic practice of pre-harvest sugar field burning. An end to the practice would mean fewer climate impacts, less water pollution, and more soil regeneration -- all critically important for the restoration of the Everglades.

The facts:

- Over 400,000 acres of sugarcane is grown in the EAA, where the pre-harvest field burning season lasts 6-8 months (October-March/April/May).
- Pre-harvest sugar field burning is estimated to release over 3,000 tons of hazardous air pollutants a year including carcinogenic pollutants like Formaldehyde, Benzene, and Acenaphthylene.
- Pre-harvest sugarcane burning also releases greenhouse gas emissions, contributes to the pollution of nearby waterways through atmospheric deposition, and increases rates of soil subsidence that threaten the long-term viability of agriculture within the EAA.

*Committed to full protection and restoration of America's Everglades*

1000 Friends of Florida  
Angler Action Foundation  
Audubon Florida  
Audubon of Southwest Florida  
Audubon of the Western Everglades  
Audubon Society of the Everglades  
Backcountry Fly Fishers of Naples  
Calusa Waterkeeper  
Cape Coral Friends of Wildlife  
Center for Biological Diversity  
Conservancy of Southwest Florida  
Defenders of Wildlife  
"Ding" Darling Wildlife Society  
Earthjustice  
Environment Florida  
Everglades Foundation  
Everglades Law Center  
Everglades Trust  
Florida Bay Forever  
Florida Conservation Voters Education Fund  
Florida Defenders of the Environment  
Florida Keys Environmental Fund  
Florida Native Plant Society  
Florida Oceanographic Society  
Friends of the Arthur R. Marshall  
Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge  
Friends of the Everglades  
Hendry-Glades Audubon Society  
International Dark-Sky Association,  
FL Chapter  
Izaak Walton League of America  
Izaak Walton League Florida Division  
Izaak Walton League Florida Keys Chapter  
Izaak Walton League Mangrove Chapter  
Lake Worth Waterkeeper  
Last Stand  
League of Women Voters of Florida  
Martin County Conservation Alliance  
Miami Pine Rocklands Coalition  
Miami Waterkeeper  
National Audubon Society  
National Parks Conservation Association  
National Wildlife Refuge Association  
Natural Resources Defense Council  
North Carolina Outward Bound School  
Ocean Research & Conservation Association  
Peace River Audubon Society  
Reef Relief  
Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation  
Sierra Club  
Sierra Club Florida Chapter  
Sierra Club Broward Group  
Sierra Club Calusa Group  
Sierra Club Central Florida Group  
Sierra Club Loxahatchee Group  
Sierra Club Miami Group  
South Florida Audubon Society  
Southern Alliance for Clean Energy  
The Florida Wildlife Federation  
The Institute for Regional Conservation  
The National Wildlife Federation  
Theodore Roosevelt Conservation  
Partnership  
Tropical Audubon Society

- Medical research has linked exposure to pre-harvest sugar field burning pollution to a wide variety of health issues including respiratory disease, cancer, kidney disease, and poor infant health outcomes; those most at risk are children and the elderly.
- Current wind-based sugarcane burning regulations deny burn permits if winds are projected to blow the toxic smoke and ash plumes toward the more affluent Eastern Palm Beach County and Eastern Martin County communities near the coast while burn permits are currently approved with minimal/ineffective protections provided when the wind blows toward the predominately African-American and Latinx residents of Western Palm Beach County, Western Martin County, Hendry County, and Glades County.
- The EPA’s Environmental Justice Screening and Mapping Tool show the Glades communities rank on average in the 80–100 percentile risk range for both cancer and respiratory health impacts as compared to the other EPA region, state, and national census block groups.
- The Florida sugar industry already “green harvests” small amounts of sugarcane each year when it is convenient for them.
- The Florida industry is behind the times: Sugarcane growers in Louisiana, Brazil, Australia, Zimbabwe and elsewhere in the world are already switching from pre-harvest burning to modern, sustainable, green harvesting and benefiting from the utilization of sugarcane trash (leaves and tops) as an added resource and/or source of income.
- A switch to green harvesting will not only improve public health and protect the environment but will also provide new economic opportunities for communities in and around the EAA and the industry itself; this has been exemplified in every nation around the world where the switch has been made.

The current burn permitting regulations are discriminatory in nature and we request that you utilize your authority as Commissioner of Agriculture to protect Floridians from this type of outdated agricultural practice that endangers the health and economic well-being of many in and around the Everglades Agricultural Area (EAA).

In a press conference on October 1, 2019 you said, “keeping Florida’s residents, communities, and environment safe is my number one priority.” But as of today, the health and safety of Florida residents living in and around the Glades continue to be threatened by smoke and ash, while simultaneously being put at further risk by Covid-19. Per the Florida Forest Service’s active burn tracking tool, ash plumes often travel well over 20 miles. The Covid-19 threat is the perfect impetus for you to finally institute the first phase of the end to pre-harvest sugar field burning right now around homes, schools, streets, and churches.

A 27-30-mile buffer around Moore Haven, Clewiston, South Bay, Belle Glade, Pahokee, Indiantown and other impacted communities will be a first step toward providing those Florida citizens the protection to which they have a right but have been denied for generations.

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We understand that the eventual complete ban of pre-harvest burning must be effectuated in a series of phases; the Covid-19 threat requires that phase one begins now.

The news is frightening:

- “The coronavirus is deadly enough. But some experts suspect bad air makes it worse.”  
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-environment/2020/03/15/smoking-air-pollution-coronavirus/>
- “Air pollution likely to increase coronavirus death rate, warn experts”  
<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/mar/17/air-pollution-likely-to-increase-coronavirus-death-rate-warn-experts>
- “Air pollution increases coronavirus vulnerability, experts say”  
<https://www.foxnews.com/science/air-pollution-increases-coronavirus-vulnerability-experts-claim>

To truly prioritize the health and safety of Glades residents, you must take the steps to institute a 27-30-mile buffer zone now; because Glades lives matter.

We expect bold leadership from you Commissioner. We expect you to protect the health, safety, and welfare of Florida’s most vulnerable communities first. Institute the first phase of a ban on pre-harvest sugar field burning and you will be true to your promise and be the catalyst for a brand new, improved economic future for the Glades.

Sincerely,



Mark Perry  
Co-Chair



Marisa Carrozzo  
Co-Chair

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