

June 20, 2005

Ms. Glenda E. Hood
Secretary of State
Florida Department of State
R.A. Gray Building
500 South Borough Street
Tallahassee, Florida 32399

Dear Secretary Hood:

I hereby transmit to you, with my signature, House Bill 759, entitled:

An act related to environmental permitting programs...

House Bill 759 contains provisions aimed at maintaining the phosphate industry financial solvency, consolidates federal and state wetlands permitting, and exempts northwest Florida from environmental resource permitting for the next five years.

I support the bill's permit consolidation provisions. Elimination of unnecessary, duplicative and overburdensome regulations is an excellent goal. Additionally, I have no objection to the bill's provisions relating to mine reclamation; they are arguably necessary to maintain the phosphate industry's financial solvency

I am most troubled by the section of the bill exempting the Panhandle from environmental resource permitting for the next five years. The Panhandle is blessed with some of the State's most beautiful natural treasures. It deserves the same environmental protections as the rest of our state.

I understand the reservations that residents of northwest Florida have about environmental resource permitting. State regulators are sometimes too quick to second-guess the judgments of property owners and too slow to approve or deny land use decisions. I am not wedded to imposing the current environmental resource permitting program upon northwest Florida residents; but I am committed to giving the Panhandle's natural resources the same level of protection as the rest of the state.

I am encouraged by the recent commitment of the northwest Florida legislative delegation to find a solution and put a plan in place during the 2006 legislative session. A number of options can be contemplated: raising the Northwest Florida Water Management District's millage cap (currently constitutionally capped at a level that inhibits deployment of environmental resource permitting in the region); enacting a new, streamlined statewide permitting system that includes northwest Florida; or providing

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funding from the State's general revenue to implement the program in northwest Florida.

I look forward to working with the members of the Northwest Florida delegation, the Department of Environmental Protection, the Northwest Florida Water Management District and other regional stakeholders to develop a plan that protects the Panhandle's natural treasures while ensuring respect for the region's land owners.

I hereby transmit House Bill 759 with my signature.

Sincerely,

Jeb Bush