

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

September 5, 2024

The Honorable Ron DeSantis
Office of Governor
State of Florida, The Capitol
400 S. Monroe St.
Tallahassee, FL 32399-0001

Office of Inspector General
Florida Department of State
R. A. Gray Building
500 S. Bronough Street
Tallahassee, Florida 32399-0250

Dear Governor DeSantis and Chief Inspector General:

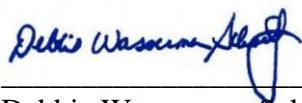
As Members of Congress, we were deeply alarmed by your administration's "2024-2025 Great Outdoors Initiative" that proposed the addition of golf courses, pickle ball courts, expanded hotel and lodging and other commercial activities within Florida's award-winning state parks. We insist that your office immediately turn over all public records that would lay out how such a hasty plan was ever conceived and direct the Office of Inspector General to conduct an independent formal investigation into what state procedures were violated, and which private parties lobbied for and stood to benefit from it.

Your proposal was quietly rushed into a public hearing process and timed to a summer travel period when residents were less likely to attend. It is also still not clear who is behind the plan.¹ Given this destructive, veiled affront, the public is owed peace of mind, honesty and transparency.

Similar schemes were floated by your predecessor, current U.S. Sen. Rick Scott, who quickly jettisoned them due to overwhelming opposition. It would be political malfeasance to be ignorant of the massive public outcry over former Gov. Scott's failed attempt to misuse Florida's parks. So, it appears this plan's success relied on hiding it from our citizens. The Florida Department of Environmental Protection's bid to bypass public input necessitates formal investigation.²

This corruption of our state's natural treasures is not the future we envision for Florida. Our state parks should be preserved as sanctuaries, free from commercial encroachment, and remain havens of natural beauty and biodiversity. We urge you to release the public records and start a formal investigation immediately.

Sincerely,



Debbie Wasserman Schultz
Member of Congress



Kathy Castor
Member of Congress

¹ WPBF-Channel 25, EXCLUSIVE: Michigan veterans group with ties to Jack Nicklaus may be behind controversial Jonathan Dickinson golf plan, Aug. 26, 2024, <https://www.wpbf.com/article/michigan-veterans-group-jack-nicklaus-golf-courses-jonathan-dickinsen-state-park-florida/61960025>

² Tampa bay Times, "DeSantis: How did secrecy work out for your Florida state parks plan?", Aug. 23, 2024, <https://www.tampabay.com/opinion/2024/08/23/desantis-how-did-secrecy-work-your-parks-plan-editorial/>

Maxwell Alejandro Frost

Maxwell Alejandro Frost
Member of Congress

Darren Soto

Darren Soto
Member of Congress

Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick

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Member of Congress

CC: Candie Fuller, FDEP Inspector General; Mara Gambineri, FDEP Deputy Secretary for Land and Recreation