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# The entrepreneurial Sunshine State: Neoliberalism, growth management and environmental conservation in Florida

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## ABSTRACT

The severity of anthropogenic environmental change demands swift and effective conservation action in order to maintain the Earth's essential life support systems. In particular, long-standing best practice in conservation sciences suggests that integrated action both within and between levels of social organization is necessary to ensure coordinated efforts capable of dealing with the cross-boundary nature of environmental challenges. The increasingly hegemonic influence of neoliberal policy reform, broadly aimed at promoting competition and individual autonomy in governance arrangements, however, has been cast by environmental and social critics as running counter to those efforts aimed at conserving the collective environment for the public good. Focusing on the case of multistage restructuring of Florida's famed Growth Management Act (GMA), I articulate how the compounding effects of neoliberalization reform efforts have led to the complete transformation of the GMA's potential to facilitate adequate large-scale environmental management, precluding the possibility of achieving needed conservation results. From this, I conclude with reflections on the major challenges facing advocates of conservation in the coming decades, in particular the need to resist the dismantling of existing and promote the establishment of new mechanisms capable of facilitating coordinated and collaborative conservation in line with scientific best practice.

## Introduction

The severity of anthropogenic global environmental change demands swift and effective conservation action if society's collective use of natural resources is to remain within the Earth's carrying capacity and thus persist for current and future generations (Brooks et al., 2006; Steffen et al., 2015). Long-held best practice in conservation science has emphasized that effective conservation requires protecting larger areas that are better connected and have intact interiors (Haddad et al., 2015; Primack, 1993). Furthermore, because such large-scale environmental management spans traditional geopolitical boundaries, it necessarily involves interactions within and between levels of social organization (Hägerstrand, 2001). This need for coordination requires institutional arrangements capable of dealing with the public and cross-boundary nature of environmental challenges by facilitating cooperative efforts from (inter)national to local levels as means to ensure scientific best practice and political viability of conservation projects (Rands et al., 2010), including the effective use of interdisciplinary knowledge (Brister, 2016). It follows that institutional arrangements that unduly impede such cooperation should be avoided if the essential task of conservation is to be realized in practice.

Despite this apparent urgency, governance trends in the United States since at least the late 1980s (Teitz, 1996) have been moving away from cooperative models predicated on cross-boundary coordination and toward deregulation and heightened competition, indicative of what Perry Anderson (2000, p. 13) once called “the most successful ideology in world history,” namely, neoliberalism (also see Himley, 2008). The characteristics that connect the variety of policies and reforms often labeled as neoliberal, a label that Ostry, Loungani, and Furceri (2016) of the International Monetary Fund remind us is “used more by critics than by the architects of the policies,” (p. 38) can be said to rest on two fundamental principles:

The first is increased competition—achieved through deregulation and the opening up of domestic markets. ... The second is a smaller role for the state, achieved through privatization and limits on the ability of governments to run fiscal deficits and accumulate debt. (Ostry et al., 2016, p. 38)

These principles presuppose that the market mechanism is the best way to both create wealth *and* organize society; in other words, increased competition and less government intervention are not only viewed as important in terms of wealth creation but are seen as fundamental to the realization of individual *freedom*. Von Hayek (2005) put it this way:

Liberalism is opposed ... to supplanting competition by inferior methods of guiding economic activity. And it regards competition as superior not only because in most circumstances it is the most efficient method known but because it is the only method which does not require the coercive or arbitrary intervention of authority. (p. 45)

The governance approach resulting from an operationalization of these principles is based on the ideological conviction that “open, competitive and unregulated markets, liberated from state intervention and the actions of social collectivities, represent the optimal mechanism to socio-economic development” (Peck, Theodore, & Brenner, 2009, p. 50). However, in the context of environmental conservation, this dual goal of enhanced competition and individual autonomy runs into inherent tensions that point to fundamental contradictions in the neoliberal environmental governance strategy. First, the assumption that nature should be dealt with and disposed of following the same logic as any other commodity in the interest of economic growth has been found wanting even within the field of economics; instead, conserving an essential level of natural capital has been recognized as necessary for the long-term viability of production. In other words, the unlimited substitution of natural capital with manufactured capital can ultimately undermine economic growth (Stern, 1997). Secondly, though conservation sciences teach us that natural capital is most effectively maintained through multiscale management that relies on cooperation and higher-level coordination, the organizational consequences of neoliberal reform are antithetical to these requirements, promoting competition over cooperation and local autonomy over coordination.

Though sharing basic principles, the nature of neoliberal reform is such that its outcomes look different in every context because, as *reform*, it is necessarily manifest in the restructuring of existing institutions. This reliance on the never-ending reform of preexisting social structures underpins recent suggestions by authoritative scholars that neoliberalism is perhaps best conceptualized as a compounding process rather than a monolithic ideology (Brenner, Peck, & Theodore, 2010). As Peck et al. (2009, p. 51) put it, “We are not dealing here with a coherently bounded ‘ism’, system, or ‘end-state’, but rather with an uneven, contradictory, and ongoing *process of neoliberalization*.” Following this line of thinking, understanding the implications of neoliberalization on the collective capacity for large-scale environmental conservation is best investigated through historical analyses of concrete cases; put differently, an investigation into the consequences of neoliberal reform is “necessarily an exercise ... in historical geography, as any such effort must be attentive to the spaces in and through which the neoliberal project has been (re)constructed” (Peck, 2010, p. 8). I take the U.S. state of Florida, perhaps the greatest growth story of 20th-century America, as an exemplary case to analyze the concrete implications of neoliberal reform efforts on the capacity for large-scale public conservation. I look in

particular at the consequences of the transformation of the state's pioneering growth management legislation through a series of reforms that I argue can accurately be labeled as neoliberal in character.

I begin by reviewing the development of ideas regarding how to overcome the seemingly conflictual relationship between environmental conservation and economic growth, more specifically in terms of weak and strong approaches to sustainable development, as well as the particularities of the relationship between economy and environment in the context of Florida. I then turn to explaining the design and intention of the celebrated 1985 Growth Management Act (GMA) in Florida, including a description of the mechanisms it established as means to control development and promote environmental conservation. Here I draw primarily on official legislation as well as authoritative scholarly sources that have analyzed the GMA's development over time in detail. Also included here is a brief overview of the scientific principles of ecosystem conservation biology and how the GMA contained mechanisms capable of realizing these principles. I then turn to describe the guiding principles of neoliberalization and how they conflict with conservation science best practice, drawing on both critical scholarly studies that synthesize neoliberal reform patterns from a variety of contexts as well as exemplary direct quotations of statements of intent and ideological commitment from prominent intellectuals, political parties, and economic interest groups that reflect the core principles of neoliberalization.

Using this conceptual framing, I then analyze significant moments of restructuring of the GMA during two distinct phases of policy reform, namely, following Brenner et al. (2010), the *disarticulated* phase and the *deepening* phase, names that signify qualitatively different periods of legislative change. I include here an explanation of how such changes to legislative structure may be in conflict with the needs of large-scale landscape conservation, drawing on secondary sources such as scholarly studies of the GMA institution, comparisons between pre- and postreform legislation, and public commentary largely in the form of newspaper articles, many of which were either cited in other studies and subsequently retrieved or selected during the process of snowballing from the reference lists of authoritative sources.

To further demonstrate the implications of these policy reforms for current conservation practice, I look into a case example from Flagler County to highlight how the devolution of responsibility to local authorities couples with preexisting structural constraints, causing problems for conservation of the coastal environment. This section builds heavily on fieldwork conducted between 2013 and 2017, as well as local newspaper coverage between 2013 and 2017 in the case study area. I then offer some conclusions regarding the necessity of safeguarding existing and implementing new multiscale mechanisms for growth management and conservation coordination. Such efforts are particularly urgent in light of recent political trends in the United States and elsewhere, more specifically the hostile position taken toward environmental regulation currently promoted for example in the Republican Party platform (Republican National Committee, 2017), a position that encourages structural changes to existing conservation mechanisms that may prove extremely difficult to undo.

## **Economy, environment, and sustainable development**

The notion of sustainability has from the start been contested, but this contestation is what underpins its persistent relevance as a boundary concept (Scoones, 2007). In the mid-20th century, the convergence of two global concerns, one being the increasing recognition of environmental degradation and the other being the need for development of the world's poor, resulted in well-known debates over sustainable development (SD), most famously formulated in 1987 by the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development (1987), which continue to promote fruitful deliberation today (Scoones, 2016). In the footsteps of the World Commission on Environment and Development's celebrated report, Nobel Laureate Economist Robert Solow was among the first to pick up the SD debate and generalize its practical operationalization. "If sustainability means anything more than a vague emotional commitment," (Solow, 1993, p. 167–168) wrote,

“it must require that something be conserved for the very long run. It is very important to understand what that something is: I think it has to be a generalized capacity to produce economic well-being.” This general capacity to produce is determined by a country’s total capital stock, measured in terms of net national product (NNP), the sustainability of which requires the NNP indicator be at least maintained if not increased over time (Solow, 1993).

Understanding SD as the generalized capacity to produce can have disheartening implications for avid supporters of conservation. Solow, like most mainstream economists, sees natural resources as performing the same function as any other kind of capital asset in the economy, the only real difference being that (many) natural resources are nonrenewable (Solow, 1974/2000). Following Solow’s understanding, SD requires that “capital” be interpreted in the broadest sense” (Solow, 1993, p. 168) to include everything in which the economy can invest or disinvest, without special attention paid to any particular form that capital takes:

A sustainable path for the economy is thus not necessarily one that conserves every single thing or any single thing. It is one that replaces whatever it takes from its inherited natural and produced endowment, its material and intellectual endowment. What matters is not the particular form that the replacement takes, but only its capacity to produce the things that posterity will enjoy. (Solow, 1993, p. 168)

Solow’s approach to SD thus is grounded in the assumption of near perfect capital substitutability; this assumption has, however, been criticized by heterodox economists as overlooking the complementary relationship between manufactured and natural capitals (Stern, 1997). Ecological economist Herman Daly and others have pointed out that Solow’s substitutability assumptions lead to serious contradictions. While agreeing with Solow that SD involves bequeathing to future generations a generic productive capacity, Daly’s (1995) “strong sustainability” approach emphasizes that such a productive capacity requires that at least a minimum level of the limiting factor in economic production remain intact, namely, natural capital:

... the welfare of future generations is beyond our control and fundamentally none of our business. As any parent knows, you cannot bequeath welfare. You can only pass on physical requirements for welfare. Nowadays natural capital is the critical requirement. A bequest of a fishing fleet with no fish left is worthless. But even the bequest of a world full of both fish and fishing boats does not guarantee welfare. The future is always free to make itself miserable with whatever we leave to it. Our obligation therefore is not to guarantee their welfare but their capacity to produce, in the form of a minimum level of natural capital, the limiting factor. This can be operationalised in some simple rules of management. (Daly, 1995, p. 50)

Thus, moving from Solow to Daly means moving from maintaining the total stock of capital in general to preserving at least a basic foundation of natural capital to allow the economy to produce well-being. Conservation of the natural environment, rather than a fancy of sentimental environmentalists, has thus become a fundamental requirement for continued economic productivity, and the unabated conversion of natural capital into manufactured capital, evaluated solely in terms of contribution to NNP, becomes a potentially self-defeating contradiction.

## **Environmental conservation and economic growth in Florida**

Today, Florida is the third most populous state in the United States, but this has not long been the case. Florida experienced an immense amount of population and economic growth in the past half century, far outpacing practically every other state in the union. This population and economic growth has, however, come at a steep environmental price. As Nicholas and Steiner (2000) have noted, the development of Florida in the 20th century

... has yielded economic returns that defy measurement. Florida and Floridians have gone from a poor, small group of individuals living on the edge of devastation to major participants in the national and international economies. The developments that begat this transition have largely taken the form of draining interior wetlands and filling coastal wetlands. There is now recognition that a continuation of this historic form of development will not yield further economic gain. (p. 651)

Though the loss of environmental resources is not a problem for Solow as long as they contribute to an expanding productive capacity, Daly's critique of Solow forces us to recognize the complementary relationship between economic growth and environmental quality in the state, a relationship that has only grown stronger over time. Since the turn of the 21st century, by far the most dominant sector in what economic historian Stronge (2008, see specifically chapter 15) has called Florida's "Sunshine Economy," is the tourism–retirement sector, which makes up nearly three quarters of the state's entire economic base. The *Orlando Sentinel* recently reported that over 110 million tourists visiting the state in 2016 alone produced \$109 billion in economic impact (Dineen, 2017). The number of tourists visiting the state has increased substantially over the last 15 years, which has likewise been reflected in the increase in the number of jobs in the tourism industry as well as the expanding tax revenue collected from tourism spending (Florida Taxwatch, 2014). As Florida TaxWatch (2013, p. 14) put it: "Tourism is [Florida's] number one competitive advantage ... [it] provides the most jobs of any industry in the state and provides a significant amount of tax revenue for cities, counties and the state." In recent years, tourism-based consumption has accounted for roughly \$1 of every \$4 collected in tax revenue in Florida, and tourism-based industries employ over 1.2 million people (VisitFlorida, 2014).

What it is that actually attracts tourists to the state is important to understand, particularly regarding the relationship between economic well-being and environmental quality. Though attractions such as Walt Disney World often come to mind when Florida is mentioned as a tourism destination, the state's coastal environment, what the Florida TaxWatch and the Center for Competitive Florida called Florida's "natural competitive advantage" (Florida Taxwatch, 2013), in fact plays the largest role of any factor in attracting visitors to the state. Far from an industry "fad," ecotourism has become a significant part of the state's mainstream tourism industry over the past several decades (Patterson, 2007). Beach-based tourism in particular has been marked as the largest contributor to the "attractiveness" of Florida as a tourism destination (Office of Economic and Demographic Research, 2015). A study conducted by VisitFlorida, the state's leading private–public partnership tasked with developing the tourism industry, found that 40% of all U.S. visitors to Florida in 2011 reported beach and waterfront activities as among their main reasons for visiting the state (Florida Taxwatch, 2013). The Florida Office of Economic and Demographic Research (2015) points out that "beaches are the most important feature of Florida's brand and have the strongest effect in terms of attracting tourists," (p. 9) with spending on beaches producing a notably high return on investment compared to other industries.

Clearly, Florida's massive tourism industry heavily relies on the state's natural endowment of attractive sandy beaches and other ecosystems. The Florida Department of Environmental Protection (2005) perhaps put it in the most straightforward terms: healthy beaches = high revenues. As a result, the degradation of the state's environment is seriously detrimental to the continued viability of one of the state's most crucial industries. Thus, the conservation of the state's natural resources is an important precondition for continued economic prosperity and thus for the prospects of SD in Florida.

## **The political geography of the 1985 Growth Management Act**

In the face of the unprecedented population and related economic expansion in the mid-20th century, Florida was among the first states in the United States to adopt comprehensive growth management policies as a means to balance economic growth with environmental conservation (May et al., 1996). Building on a series of preceding legislative acts aimed at curbing and controlling environmental degradation, Florida implemented the 1985 Growth Management Act, a far-reaching, centralized planning approach touted by some as the "high water mark for the profession of planning" (Connerly et al., 2007, p. 2). The GMA, following the "best practices" of other states (e.g., Oregon; Pelham, 2007), sought to operationalize comprehensive, integrative, and coordinated multiscale planning from the state to the regional to the local level in an effort to promote what May et al. (1996) labeled as sustainable development. Formally, the GMA had a double-edged

ambition: to harness the benefits of development in a controlled fashion while protecting sensitive environments, natural resources, and agricultural lands (Ben-Zadok, 2005).

The implementation of Florida's GMA was meant to be regulated by way of a steering policy that consists of three distinct subpolicies: consistency, concurrency, and compact development. The "three Cs" serve both leadership and learning functions in the overall growth management strategy: "Consistency is known as the GMA's organizing doctrine, with concurrency and compact development as the 'twin pillars of the policy base'" (Ben-Zadok, 2007, p. 24).

### **Consistency**

The GMA consistency requirements provided the "structural framework for implementing the GMA" as it mandates coordination, compliance, and continuity between state, regional, and local plans (Ben-Zadok, 2007, p. 21). Oversight of local comprehensive plans and maintenance of the state comprehensive plan had been delegated to the newly created Department of Community Affairs (DCA), and a trilevel review process granted the state with ultimate authority to intervene in land development decisions that had almost entirely been left to localities in the past. This control process delineates "hierarchical compliance" among plans from top (state) to bottom (local) and has shaped the GMA as a state centralized process by granting the DCA with ultimate authority to approve local plans and apply legal sanctions (Ben-Zadok, 2007, p. 29). This hierarchical compliance, however, was also meant to be augmented with a bottom-up approach to monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the GMA by accumulating knowledge and experience from local governments at the regional and state levels through periodic review processes. This was meant to allow for coordination within and between levels while still providing possibilities for adjustments in practice as experience accumulates and state policy evolves (Powell, 2000).

Consistency was to be ensured by the adoption of comprehensive plans at the state, regional, and local levels. The 25-section Florida State Comprehensive Plan (SCP) is held under Florida Statutes, Title XIII—Planning and Development, chapter 187 (.101 and .201). The GMA's consistency requirements for intergovernmental coordination among comprehensive plans include the following:

- Consistency between the local plan and local development codes such as zoning.
- Consistency between the local plan and its counterparts in nearby jurisdictions.
- Consistency between local and regional plans.
- DCA's review and approval of local and regional plans against the SCP and other state policies.
- Periodic evaluation and updating of local plans including review by the DCA.

### **Concurrency**

Guided by comprehensive plans adopted under GMA consistency requirements, the GMA concurrency requirements were meant to facilitate the orderly control of growth and development by requiring that the expansion of the built environment only precede in synchronization with or following the construction of adequate public infrastructure to service new developments (Ben-Zadok, 2005). Limiting urban expansion to locations with existing or concurrently constructed public infrastructure provided a strong mechanism for controlling local growth and economic development through planning, though problems with commitment to funding concurrency hobbled the effective implementation of the policy in practice (Degrove, 1992). As Evers, Ben-Zadok, and Faludi (2000) explain,

The policy envisioned a future of responsible growth where infrastructure and urban services expanded at an equal rate to development. The problem, however, was funding. ... The only recourse, therefore, was to exact so-called impact fees for development. ... With the widespread use of this measure, the concurrency policy boiled down to a "pay-as-you-grow" approach, or at least it was so intended. (p. 15)

### **Compact development**

Considered as a complement to concurrency requirements in terms of directing and controlling the rate and geography of the expanding built environment, the GMA compact development requirements were meant to control urban sprawl and protect sensitive rural lands by directing growth and development to urban centers and promoting high-density communities (Ben-Zadok, 2006). In this way, the policy was aimed less at managing growth and more at managing the location of growth (Huckshorn, 1998). Though originally a relatively weak requirement in the original GMA, later amendments intended to strengthen the role of compact development in the state's growth management strategy (Sanchez & Mandle, 2007). The primary intention was that sprawl should be contained through "the coordination of compact land uses such as mixed use and multifunctional developments, with transport modes such as public transit and pedestrian ways" (Ben-Zadok, 2007, p. 39).

While facilitating control over economic growth and urban development in Florida, the three Cs of the GMA—consistency, concurrency, and compact development—also represent different but interrelated mechanisms by which public planners could pursue the environmental conservation portion of the GMA agenda and in many ways are well aligned with what are today recognized as core principles in conservation science.

### **Conservation principles and the GMA**

Since the mid-20th century, conservation sciences have come a long way both in terms of knowledge and in terms of comprehensive practice. As Doyle and Drew (2008) explain:

Until about 30 years ago, environmental degradation and habitat loss were addressed, if at all, on a piecemeal basis, river segment by river segment, species by species. Over time, however, scientists working to resolve problems of species and habitat loss understood what now seems obvious: the crucial aspect of water-shed and other natural systems is the interconnectedness of their component parts ... the advice of scientists to policy makers about how to restore damaged natural systems ... was that the traditional, segmented approach was largely ineffective. The only way to proceed was to use the best available science to comprehend the interconnected problems and to work on all aspects of restoration simultaneously and comprehensively. (p. ix)

In particular, over the years, conservation scientists have identified and built consensus around fragmentation of ecosystems as particularly harmful to biodiversity and ecosystem functions in both the short and long term. For example, after synthesizing the findings from 35 years of fragmentation experiments in different locations and at different scales, Haddad et al. (2015) found that habitat fragmentation reduces biodiversity and impairs key ecosystem functions, noting that "effects are greatest in the smallest and most isolated fragments, and they magnify with the passage of time" (p. 1). Furthermore, Ibsch et al. (2016), in a recent study of global forest fragmentation, found that nearly half of the 600,000 roadless forest fragments throughout the globe are less than one square kilometer in area, leading the authors to call for the urgent protection of unfragmented areas around the world to prevent further degradation.

Though such recent studies are important for furnishing further evidence that fragmentation is happening and does indeed cause problems, for decades it has been common knowledge in the conservation sciences that reducing the negative consequences of fragmentation and encouraging ecosystem diversity and health require promoting the protection of larger areas that are more connected, have as small an edge-to-area ratio as possible (i.e. more intact interiors), and cover the widest variety of ecosystems and species (Haddad et al., 2015; Primack, 1993).

These basic principles are well reflected in the overarching control mechanisms established in the GMA. The consistency requirement supported coordination and compliance through the establishment of comprehensive plans and interjurisdictional coordination. The concurrency requirement facilitated control of the rate of growth through mechanisms for regulating development, keeping it in places where infrastructure already exists, particularly transportation, thus reducing fragmentation



and encouraging connectivity in habitats. The compact development requirements facilitated control over the location of growth, reducing sprawl and thus fragmentation by concentrating the built environment.

The GMA laid out the guiding policy goals and intended operations, but its actual interpretation and implementation are constrained by other existing legal structures and informed by the logic of the prevailing governance regime. Though the potential of the GMA and its mandates for coordinated comprehensive planning was substantial, and in certain ways successful (e.g., the widespread adoption of local comprehensive planning), structural barriers to implementation combined with early contestation by growth management opponents caused problems, with both obstructionism and the active restructuring of the GMA being advanced in the name of increased competition and less regulatory burden; in other words, the GMA was both constrained and subjected to neoliberal reform.

### **Neoliberalization, entrepreneurial governance, and environmental conservation**

Holding together the loose pieces of the neoliberal puzzle are some underlying commitments and guiding principles that, either implicitly or explicitly, neoliberal reforms reflect, namely, increased competition and individual autonomy, convictions that assume a reliance on the market mechanism for social and economic organization:

Under competition—and under no other economic order—the price system automatically records all the relevant data. Entrepreneurs, by watching the movement of comparatively few prices, as an engineer watches a few dials, can adjust their activities to those of their fellows. (von Hayek, 2005, p. 58)

Rather than being a return to the 19th-century self-regulating market utopianism (cf. Polanyi, 1957/2001), however, Ridley (2016) argues that neoliberal reformists accept that perfect market conditions are not manifest naturally; rather, they recognize the role of government in ensuring the production of (more) perfect market conditions, which becomes “the end of all economic and public policy reform” (para. 4) Again, von Hayek (2005, p. 46) put the point plainly: “Planning and competition can be combined only by planning for competition, not by planning against competition. The planning against which all our criticism is directed is solely the planning against competition.”

For the public sector, the pursuit of this conviction means that it, too, must dawn the “entrepreneur’s new clothes” (Merrifield, 2014) if they are to stay afloat in the sea of increasing interspatial competition instigated by neoliberal governance. This shift in purpose and practice of public administration, as Harvey (1989) recognized early on, involves a fundamental but by no means complete and uniform shift from a managerial mode of governance to an entrepreneurial one. This entrepreneurial orientation, however, is at theoretical odds with the principles of conservation science.

The “defining characteristic” of entrepreneurial governance, argues Du Gay (1996, p. 155), is the “generalization of an ‘enterprise form’ to all forms of conduct—to the conduct of organizations hitherto seen as being non-economic, to the conduct of government, and to the conduct of individuals themselves.” The adoption of this “enterprise form” in public administrations results from the competitive pressures to which they are increasingly exposed as a result of neoliberal policy and institutional reform (Centeno & Cohen, 2012; Peck, 2013). And like businesses, state strategies under entrepreneurial governance by necessity tend toward emphasizing competitive advantage. This often leads to innovative governance arrangements that enhance competitiveness; for example, public-private partnerships that are organized to attract economic investment through place branding and by providing incentives in the form of tax breaks and business-friendly regulatory environments. Such a competitive orientation signifies the prioritization of the “speculative production of place” over the more traditional public agency goals of addressing territorially bound social and environmental needs (Harvey, 1989, p. 8).

Harvey (1989) initially identified four stylized strategies for entrepreneurial governance, namely, (a) the production of goods and services (e.g., resource base, location), (b) the spatial division of consumption (e.g., consumer attractions and entertainment), (c) command and control functions (e.g., communication and transportation networks), and (d) redistribution of surpluses through central governments (e.g., military, education, and health investments). All of these types could today be classified as early expressions of neoliberalism's now "customary" forms (Peck, 2014, p. 397). These options are not mutually exclusive, as Harvey (1989) acknowledged, but hybridist and potentially synergistic, their combinations and outcomes helping exacerbate uneven development and thus the uneven fortunes of metropolitan regions.

The basic principles of neoliberalization, competition and individual autonomy, are obviously at odds with the principles of large-scale conservation that necessitate co-operation and connectivity. The institution of environmental conservation, in Florida as elsewhere in the United States, is largely funded with public money and often viewed by market fundamentalists as expensive and bureaucratically cumbersome; as a result, conservation is likely to be among the first institutions to feel the shears when the neoliberal state decides to take a little off the top (Townsend, 2012). Take for example the position adopted by the current (Republican National Committee, 2017) Republican Party platform. Though implicitly acknowledging the effectiveness of federal environmental policies implemented largely in the 1970s, the 2017 GOP platform, notably relying on "firm belief" rather than scientific evidence, offers a take on environmentalism that clearly demonstrates the tension between conservation best practice and an ideological commitment to the neoliberal principles of enhanced competition and resistance to state intervention:

The environment is too important to be left to radical environmentalists. They are using yesterday's tools to control a future they do not comprehend. The environmental establishment has become a self-serving elite, stuck in the mind-set of the 1970s. ... Their approach is based on shoddy science, scare tactics, and centralized command-and-control regulation. ... Our air and waterways are much healthier than they were a few decades ago. As a nation, we have drastically reduced pollution, mainstreamed recycling, educated the public, and avoided ecological degradation. ... We firmly believe environmental problems are best solved by giving incentives for human ingenuity and the development of new technologies, not through top-down, command-and-control regulations that stifle economic growth and cost thousands of jobs. (Republican National Committee, 2017, para. 24)

Following this reasoning, neoliberal reforms aim to deconstruct those legal and institutional mechanisms that support collective action in favor of atomistic, competitive interspatial competition between individuals and local to federal governments. The realization of these principles in practice, however, is predicated on the transformation of preexisting institutional frameworks and thus the concrete outcomes of specific instances of reform are unique in that they are never free of some place-specific historical residue. In addition, the process by which neoliberal reforms have been pursued has qualitatively transformed over time, from what Brenner et al. (2010) call a *disarticulated* neoliberalization to a *deepening* neoliberalization.

### **Disarticulated neoliberalization and early problems with the GMA**

Because any reform, by definition, is not implemented *tabula rasa*, the outcomes from the restructuring of existing institutions are always a hybrid between the old and the new. The early implementation of the GMA, for example, was wrought with problems related to preexisting institutional structures in the state related to restrictions on the collection of public revenue. In addition to these preexisting conditions, many of the reforms undertaken after the GMA's adoption reflect a distinctly neoliberal orientation, in some cases exacerbating the problems stemming from inherited institutional constraints. The enactment of these reforms was, however, undertaken in a more *disarticulated* fashion than those in more recent years. By disarticulated I mean that the adopted reforms were "neither programmatically integrated nor orchestrated from some superordinate institutional site," instead being characterized by "a proliferation of relatively unconnected, conjunctural and

contextually bound projects of market-oriented institutional [reform]” (Brenner et al., 2010, p. 213–214). In the case of Florida and the GMA, these disarticulated reforms intermingled with and exacerbated already existing structures that placed constraints on enforcement. And as Gifford Pinchot (1998, p. 81), among the giants of American conservation policy, once said, “The best way to discredit a good system or a good law, or to perpetuate a bad one, is not to enforce it.”

Implementation of the GMA enjoyed some early success in terms of fulfilling consistency requirements, because all counties eventually adopted comprehensive plans. However, enforcing consistency did not go perfectly smooth, with some counties fighting legal battles and struggling to meet policy requirements. As Ben-Zadok (2005) has noted, prescription in consistency was a learning experience that led to more discretion in the implementation of concurrency and compact development requirements, discretion that significantly weakened the effectiveness of the policies overall. In addition to these challenges, there were from the start problems with funding; ideological resistance to the coercive, state-centric approach; and an overriding emphasis by some elected officials on economic growth rather than growth management.

### ***Failure to fund concurrency***

Among the most immediate problems encountered was the fact that the 1985 GMA failed to adequately provide mechanisms for funding the three Cs. This is in a large part due to the state’s tight restrictions on public revenue collection, particularly by local governments. Florida, for example, has no state income tax, and municipalities are in general limited to raising revenue funds by levying taxes on property, charging for services, and collecting development fees, and even these are strongly controlled on all levels, meaning that “local jurisdictions find themselves in the same basic situation as the state, with constitutional and statutory limitations on raising revenues” (Nicholas & Chapin, 2007, p. 55). As Pelham (2007) explains, this structural squeeze on revenues has affected local government’s ability to manage the problems that have come with the state’s rapid pace of growth and development:

Historically, Florida’s local governments have relied primarily on local property taxes to finance their operations. This reliance on the property tax carries with it a built-in incentive for local governments to approve development because it will increase the local tax base. Although the Legislature has provided for some other optional local taxes, such as local sales taxes, it has imposed a voter referendum requirement for exercise of these powers. ... The lack of adequate alternative revenue sources for local governments hinders their ability to effectively implement state growth management requirements. (p. 17)

The state’s failure to face up to the funding problem undermined support for growth management and impeded implementation of major growth management policies such as concurrency and compact urban form (Evers et al., 2000; Pelham, 2007). These structural limitations of effective enforcement were further exacerbated by disarticulated efforts to weaken or restructure the GMA in the interest of preventing its effective implementation and prioritizing economic growth.

### ***Nonenforcement and weakening of regional growth management structures***

Consistency was in many ways the key to the GMA, as concurrency and compact development requirements were meant to flow from the comprehensive plans developed under the consistency requirement. In line with consistency policies, the state of Florida had adopted the SCP, which was meant to be the comparison for all other plans, but it was never fully utilized or updated as was intended because of resistance from antiplanning legislatures and governors. As Chapin (2007, p. 120), put it, “[The SCP] has been ignored by the Legislature and sitting governors since its adoption in 1986.” In fact, in 2001, then-Governor Jeb Bush appointed a Growth Management Study Commission that recommended “the state scrap its comprehensive plan in favour of a short vision

statement that makes a healthy, vibrant economy the highest priority” (cited in Chapin, 2007, p. 120).

In another instance, a 1992 Environmental Land Management Study Committee (ELMS III) was commissioned by then-Governor Lawton Chiles to review the progress of implementation of the 1985 GMA. The resulting report recommended the removal of the powers of the regional development councils, reduction of the scope and significance of regional plans, and renovation of the assessment process known as Developments of Regional Impact, which applied special evaluative criteria to projects impacting more than one county; these recommendations were adopted virtually *in toto* by the 1993 Florida Legislature (Pelham, 2007). The hobbling of regional planning councils was particularly problematic because they had substantial powers to coordinate between local governments and the state, being originally tasked under Florida Statutes 186.504 and 186.505 with (Carriker, 2006)

- adopting strategic regional policy plans;
- reviewing local plans for consistency with regional plans;
- co-ordinating development decisions affecting multiple governments;
- reviewing developments of regional impact;
- administering grant funds for local communities;
- providing a forum for citizens to comment on growth issues and decisions;
- providing technical assistance to local governments on planning matters.

The dismantling of the regional planning councils removed both the requirement and the mechanisms for counties to cooperate with one another, leaving the counties to interact directly with a state that did not enforce its own SCP. The motivation for dismantling regional coordination mechanisms was in the end one of promoting “flexibility” in local planning to accommodate the differing needs and circumstances of various communities; as one ELMS III member remarked, “One size fits all is not true for pantyhose, and it’s not true for planning” (cited in Powell, 2000, pp. 528–529). Similarly, since their adoption, the GMA’s compact development requirements were amended by legislators and interpreted by courts in increasingly discretionary and excessively flexible ways with the intention of supporting economic growth and development interests, which severely retarded the effective implementation of the requirements and produced limited outcomes (Ben-Zadok, 2006).

The original structure of the GMA was intended to allow for coordination within and between administrative levels while still providing possibilities for adjustments in practice as experience accumulates and state policy evolves (Powell, 2000; Song, 2007). The regional councils were meant to play a significant role in this multidirectional process, and their removal as active agents in growth management practice in 1993 helps explain why this “bottom-up” dimension of Florida’s planning and growth management system had never been fully realized. The result of this “streamlining” of the regional dimension of the Florida growth management institution was the further weakening of an already contested and underfunded planning program. The post-1993 state and regional planning processes were substantially different than those envisioned in the original 1985 legislation, with the increasingly “hands-off” state allowing its own SCP to become out dated while the weakened regional planning component could not effectively deal with multijurisdictional issues (Stroud, 2012). Jeb Bush, who became governor of Florida in 1999, made further attempts to restrict state control over local planning practices by relaxing growth management enforcement, “predicated on the idea that the current system was ineffective and served only as a deterrent to growth in the state” (Chapin & Connerly, 2004, p. 449). At the time, some critics complained that the relaxing of growth management policy enforcement would exacerbate growing sprawl and “strip-mall” development (e.g., “Editorial: Bush Plan Won’t Stop Sprawl and Strip Malls,” 1999, cited in Ben-Zadok, 2005, p. 2186).

### ***Economic growth and the empowerment of public–private partnerships***

In the midst of a loosely enforced, underfunded, and structurally weakened GMA, the state legislatures also made moves to further promote economic growth. Though environmental planning was greatly extended in the 1970s, throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, planning that was in any way viewed as stifling economic growth in the United States was increasingly being challenged and deregulation increasingly being promoted in the name of economic growth (Peck, 2010; Teitz, 1996). As a result of these efforts, the state and regional planning overlay intended by the GMA has had limited influence over the local planning process (Pelham, 2007).

At the same time, while the 1993 Florida Legislature was busy reforming the regional-scale planning component of the GMA, plans were already in the pipeline to roll out a new and innovative approach to encouraging economic growth in the state; namely, the establishment of economy-oriented public–private partnerships (PPPs). Since the mid-1990s, the state of Florida has relied on PPPs to assist in specifying the state’s competitive advantages and attracting investment through lobbying and marketing activities, what Pugalís and Bentley (2014) portray as a characteristic strategy of entrepreneurial governance. Florida was among the first states in the nation to place the principle responsibility for promoting economic growth in the hands of a PPP called Enterprise Florida. Tourism, the largest single industry in the state, shortly after received its own PPP, which was established by the Florida Legislature in 1996, the Florida Commission on Tourism, which operates as VisitFlorida.

Though these PPPs are largely taxpayer funded, they are overseen by some of the largest and most politically powerful companies, law firms, utilities providers, and elected officials. Enterprise Florida, for example, is chaired by the state governor, but a private entity can pay up to \$50,000 for a seat on the board (Dixon, 2016).

### ***Environmental implications***

A combination of severe problems of implementation and enforcement of the GMA, including structural constraints on funding, and the public–private efforts to attract both private and government investment in the state led to a condition in which the GMA could not effectively put the brakes on growth, allowing development in the state to continue largely unrestricted:

The evidence ... suggests that while growth management in Florida may have managed growth, it did not limit it. Quite the contrary, the state’s population and employment growth continued largely unabated during the 1990s. Florida’s economy continued to boom, adding over 3 million residents and 1.6 million jobs, levels that were very similar to the pre-growth management decade of the 1980s. Further, when the annual growth rates for private sector jobs were reviewed, there is no evidence that growth management slowed the state’s remarkable job creation rate. Even in an era of mandated comprehensive planning and aggressive state and local planning, the Florida economy continued to create thousands of new jobs every year, with the state often leading the nation in new job creation. (Chapin, 2007, p. 137)

The removal of regional-scale coordinating mechanisms, which were meant to ensure adequate coordination and monitoring between local and state levels and to facilitate improvements in the legislation by learning from implementation on the ground, was particularly problematic. The outcome of an increased emphasis on deregulation and creating a competitive business environment through PPPs combined with weak enforcement and the lack of a midway coordination mechanism was that economic growth trumped environmental conservation rather than finding synergy with it. As an example, in a study of granted wetland conversion permits in Florida between 1993 and 2003, Brody and Highfield (2005) found substantial deviation between the number and location of granted permits and the formally intended land uses as represented in local comprehensive plans, reflecting a pervasive lack of local, regional, and state coordination and enforcement of land use regulations. They also found that the number and area of these permits increased in volume and density overtime, representing a geographically differentiated mixture of “small, isolated patches” and

“rapidly expanding” (p. 172) developments indicative of a lack of enforcement of both concurrency and compact development growth management goals.

### **Deepening neoliberalization: Inverting the GMA, devolving responsibility for conservation, and linking growth to conservation**

Florida emerged at the epicenter of the 2007 financial crisis after going from boom to bust in the inflated real estate market (Montes Rojas, McGuire, Ivey, & Durrenberger, 2007). The cumulative effects of chronic underfunding, piecemeal enforcement, and the removal of regional checks and balances produced a growth management institution with severely reduced capacity to control the extensive growth and development in the state throughout the 1990s and early 2000s (Ben-Zadok, 2006). At the same time, millions of taxpayer dollars were spent on PPP campaigns that encouraged growth in tourism and the production of business-friendly regulatory regimes that helped fuel a bubble of development speculation, the bursting of which instigated the worst economic recession in recent memory. States like Florida that experienced the highest rates of unemployment in the wake of the recession also had the highest proportions of subprime housing foreclosures, leaving many people without homes or jobs (Martin, 2011). With this backdrop, the GMA was put on the chopping block in the name of economic recovery. The reforms that followed, like those disarticulated reforms before them, were primarily focused on increasing competition and individual autonomy. But the neoliberalization of the GMA in Florida that followed the Great Recession of 2007 was indicative of what Brenner et al. (2010, p. 214) call “‘deep’ neoliberalization, the goal of which was to promote market rule as a readily available ‘silver bullet’ for confronting regulatory problems across all institutional contexts and spatial scales in which processes of marketization and commodification had previously been constrained.”

Though Governor Charlie Crist struggled to curb unemployment and restore confidence in Florida’s economy during his tenure between 2007 and 2011, it was the 2010 gubernatorial election between Democrat Alex Sink and Republican businessman Rick Scott that brought growth management back into focus as a target for further reform. Scott beat out Sink with a campaign message centered on job creation and deregulation. Upon winning the election, Scott proclaimed victoriously during his acceptance speech that Florida was “open for business” (“Scott Declares Victory After Sink Admits Defeat,” 2010). An excerpt from Scott’s 2011 gubernatorial inaugural address anticipates the breadth and depth of the changes to come and offers a window into the neoliberal priorities and antiregulatory position from which he began his tenure as governor:

Faced with a deep recession, some say the answer is to expand the role of Government. That’s the approach the Administration chose to take in Washington. It’s the WRONG approach. It requires magical thinking to expect Government to create prosperity. Government has no resources of its own. Government can only give TO us what it has previously taken FROM us—minus a huge cut for the government middleman. A lean and limited Government has a role to play in providing a safety net. But prosperity comes from the private sector. ... Florida has to offer the best chance for financial success. Not a guarantee—just the best chance. Three forces markedly reduce that chance for success—taxation ... regulation ... and litigation. Together those three form “The Axis of Unemployment”. Left unchecked they choke off productive activity. ... Unless they are pruned, regulations grow like weeds. While there are SOME regulations that are essential for health and safety, and others that are essential to the protection of our priceless environment, it’s PAST TIME to demand that every regulation be re-evaluated. We will conduct a top to bottom review of all state regulations and weed out unnecessary ones that hinder job creation. (Scott, 2011, emphasis in original)

Upon entering office in January 2011, Scott and his administration took particular aim at the GMA and sought, with the extensive support from development lobbyists (Deslatte, 2011a), to completely reconstruct the 3-decade-old growth management institution with the ultimate goal to place planning responsibility predominantly at the local level. Stroud (2012) has called this attack on growth management a “counter revolution,” a reference to its oppositional stance to the “quiet revolution” of large-scale land use planning popularized in the 1970s (see Bosselman & Callies, 1971), of which

Florida was a front-runner. This is despite the lack of evidence that growth management policies had actually been detrimental to economic growth, as its early critics had suggested would be the case:

... all indicators reveal that Florida's economy continued to boom during the 1990s and that the state's largest cities shared in this economic growth. Taken together, these indicators suggest that during the first decade of growth management in Florida, the state's approach to managing growth did not stop the flood of new residents, immigrants, and businesses. (Chapin, 2007, p. 139)

The same applies to environmental policies in that arguments put forward by their opponents, namely, that their removal is correlated with economic growth, have not been substantiated by empirical evidence (Meyer, n.d.). The lack of evidence to support the idea that growth management hurts economic growth and that deregulation of environmental regulations sparks economic growth speaks to the ideological foundations of neoliberal reform efforts, because they are based on strong commitments to a set of principles rather than evidence of the effectiveness of those principles in practice. Take, for example, this "argument" put forward in the 2017 GOP platform: "*We assert* that private ownership has been the best guarantee of conscientious stewardship, while some of the worst instances of degradation have occurred under government control" (Republican National Committee, 2017, emphasis added, para. 23).

### ***The GMA's neoliberal makeover***

The 2011 Community Planning Act (§163.3161(1), F.S.) (2017), as the revised growth management legislation is known, was signed into law by Governor Rick Scott and for many marked the end of Florida's 30-year experiment with comprehensive growth management, with some even drafting obituaries for what they saw as the legislation's premature death (Deslatte, 2011a, 2011b; Klas, 2011; "An Obituary for Florida Growth Management," 2011).

The newly adopted Community Planning Act policies substantially transformed the basic purpose of Florida's growth management institution from "controlling future development" to "managing future development consistent with the proper role of local government" (Florida Land Development Regulations, 2011, para. 2). The proposed reregulation of the GMA appeared in tandem with cries from business-oriented organizations such as the Florida Chamber of Commerce that Florida's "economic freedom was eroding" (Florida Chamber of Commerce, 2011). The substantial changes made to the GMA have had significant consequences for the future of growth management in Florida and for the possibility of fulfilling environmental conservation goals in particular.

One major adjustment to the GMA was the passing of Florida Senate Bill 2156 in 2011, which effectively dissolved the DCA, which had historically been responsible for oversight of the GMA since 1985, and transferred its growth management functions to the newly formed Department of Economic Opportunity (Shelley & Brodeen, 2011). The elimination of the DCA as a separate state entity and its incorporation into the Department of Economic Opportunity was accompanied by a significant reduction in staff and funding available for oversight of growth management activities, which is indicative of the state's underlying goal of reducing its role to "ad hoc protection of yet undefined 'important state and regional resources and facilities', with minimal administrative resources devoted to the task" (Stroud, 2012, pp. 414–415).

In addition to transforming the agency responsible for oversight, substantial changes were made to the process for making comprehensive plan amendments. The previously set limits on the frequency and geography of local comprehensive plan amendments have been removed and the approval process streamlined, making it much easier for local governments to amend local comprehensive plans without regulatory control by regional or state growth management agencies. In fact, as Shelley and Brodeen (2011, p. 50) point out, "The local government is no longer required to send a copy of the amendment to the state land planning agency, nor can the state land planning agency intervene in any challenge to a small scale plan amendment."

Furthermore, the ability of third parties to challenge comprehensive plan amendments, development projects, or permits has been fundamentally reregulated, shifting the burden of proof from the initiators of the change or project to the third-party challengers. The adoption of House Bill 993 by Rick Scott, with strong support from the Florida Chamber of Commerce, ensures that non-applicant third parties making claims against a requested permit would have the burden of ultimate persuasion and proof of evidence. (Florida Development Regulations, 2011). Challenging future development projects will be substantially more difficult and costly for concerned citizens and activists hoping to diminish harm to their local communities and environment. In addition, local “hometown democracy” efforts to put comprehensive plan amendments to public votes have been banned (Deslatte, 2011b).

Finally, the state’s long-held (and long underfunded) mandate for local governments to adopt management policies regarding concurrency for transportation, schools, and parks and recreational facilities has largely been eliminated, with many of them being made optional. This means that the burden of meeting concurrency requirements, which historically had been placed via, for example, impact fees on developers whose projects would have adverse impacts on public infrastructure and facilities, has in many instances been shifted to local governments, who are now responsible for controlling the impact of growth on public services and infrastructure. Given that these requirements were previously state mandated but are now locally optional, their potential removal by local governments in the interest of attracting investment is certainly possible and seems probable. Though it remains to be seen what impact removal of the state mandate will have, it is telling that any rescinding of optional concurrency provisions, which must be pursued via comprehensive plan amendment, is not even subject to state review (Shelley & Brodeen, 2011).

### ***Environmental implications***

The problems with effectiveness of the GMA are manifest in, for example, piecemeal conversion of wetlands identified by Brody and Highfield (2005), which collectively have unintended though substantial and detrimental effects on overall wetland cover, a classic case of what Odum (1982) called environmental degradation through the “tyranny of small decisions,” which can only be avoided by higher level coordination. The other side of the coin, of course, is the brutality of large decisions, including large-scale water management projects and megadevelopments aimed at inviting investment, such as those increasingly found in wetland-rich southern Florida (Cox, 2009). The combined result has been the continued and substantial loss of wetlands statewide (see Dahl, 2005, 2006, 2011), despite their preservation being an explicit part of several policies in the SCP. At the same time, Florida’s rivers and waterways are increasingly viewed as among the most endangered in the country, with the Apalachicola River topping the most recent list (American Rivers, 2016; also see Spear, 2016), despite water quality provisions in state environmental policy. Similar problems have been reported by local media for arguably the most biologically diverse ecosystem in the country, Indian River Lagoon, which has increasingly suffered from pollution resulting from urbanization and agricultural production in the area (Dearen & Schneider, 2017; Desai & Qureshi, 2016).

Another alarming environmental problem that requires large-scale planning and coordination to effectively address is coastal erosion (Swaney et al., 2012). However, in the absence of effective policies for controlling and directing coastal development, the urbanization of Florida’s coastlines, following the general global trend, has continued relatively unabated (Pilkey & Cooper, 2014). The fortification of infrastructure against coastal hazards, which is generally a question of monetary costs versus benefits, can be undertaken by state or private actors following current nationwide permits issued by the Army Corps of Engineers and the political geography of state coastal transportation networks (Boda, 2015). The result has been an increase in density of coastal infrastructure in the state, which in turn has increased the prevalence of conflict between coastal processes and man-made structures. The housing boom that led to the 2007 financial crisis in particular had “disastrous consequences” for



coastal environments, raising questions of whether or not current coastal management mechanisms are up to the task (Cooper & McKenna, 2009, p. 533).

Widely recognized successes in Florida's conservation history have largely come from initiatives such as the Florida Forever Program for land acquisition (Florida Department of Environmental Protection, 2016) and fundraising initiatives like the specialty license plates program for funding endangered species recovery, including programs specific to the Florida panther, the West Indian manatee, and the state's numerous species of sea turtle. These various initiatives are largely coordinated by state agencies such as the Department of Environmental Protection and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. The hard-fought successes in managing these endangered species, some, such as the manatee, which have bounced back from the brink of extinction, have come at the cost of millions of taxpayer dollars and countless hours of volunteer work by concerned citizens. Conservation efforts for the West Indian manatee alone had received over \$750 million in total federal and state funds as of 2012 (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 2012). However, under the increasing pressure of neoliberal reform policies, the thinning down of federal and state contributions poses a serious threat to the future of Florida's conservation agenda. Hard-fought but expensive progress like that made for the manatee is now being used by economy-minded politicians and tourism interests as an excuse to remove the very programs and protections that facilitated its recovery in the first place (Staletovich, 2016a).

A more general example of the neoliberal attack on environmental regulation comes from past and current efforts to dismantle the well-known Endangered Species Act (ESA). Like other locations in the United States, Florida's conservation efforts have significantly benefited from the characteristics of the ESA that promote large-scale, connected conservation practice:

Scientists have concluded that 227 species would have gone extinct between 1973 and 2005 without the ESA's protections. Its broad mandate that vast stretches of habitat require protection in order to preserve the creatures living in them has produced cascading benefits for ecosystems in the Pacific Northwest, the Everglades, the Chesapeake Bay, Shenandoah National Park, and along the New England coast. (Ketcham, 2017, para. 21)

In fact, Florida owes the bald eagle, the Florida panther, the peregrine falcon, the North Atlantic right whale, the American alligator, the wood stork, and the aforementioned manatee all to the conservation efforts facilitated by the ESA. Many of these animals and their habitats are important attractions for tourists and significant to the quality of life of residents. However, with a level of enthusiasm boosted by the 2007 financial crisis, downsizing and cuts to a variety of significant conservation agencies and programs at federal and state levels have been increasingly proposed, often successfully. The ESA in particular has long been a primary target for deregulation. Since the 1990s, and more so in recent years, hundreds of attacks on the ESA have been put forward by federal and state legislatures largely under the argument that the legislation kills jobs and impedes economic growth (Center for Biological Diversity, 2017). Attacks have become so fierce and frequent that *National Geographic* has warned that the ESA is in danger of "going extinct" (Nunez, 2017). All of these attacks on the ESA and other environmental regulations are being undertaken despite the lack of evidence that the ESA has in fact led to any detrimental consequence for economic development projects (Malcom & Li, 2015).

In Florida, similar attacks on conservation agencies and funding have been levied for similar reasons. The state Department of Environmental Protection, for example, has lost nearly half of its annual budget allocation since 2007 despite Governor Rick Scott's claim that his administration has invested record amounts of money in environmental conservation, a claim that *PolitiFact Florida* rated as false because of the extremely narrow focus of his proposed environmental spending (Sherman, 2014). At the same time, the Florida Forever Program, which had received around \$300 million in public support annually since 1990, has seemingly all but lost its funding altogether (Dunkelberger, 2014). Furthermore, recently adopted referendums to refund similar land acquisition programs have seen the collected public revenue diverted to normal operating costs in order to free up funds for further business tax breaks (Staletovich, 2016b). Such anti-environmentalism has

become a generic feature of the current Republican Party political position and is being pushed both at the state and the federal levels. Donald Trump, for example, recently said during an interview in November 2016 (cited in Schoen, 2016) that “environmental protection, what they do is a disgrace; every week they come out with new regulations.” “Who’s going to protect the environment?” replied the interviewer. “We’ll be fine with the environment,” Trump responded. “We can leave a little bit, but you can’t destroy businesses” (paras. 11–13).

What these changes to conservation regulations in general, and Florida’s growth management institution specifically, mean in practical terms largely depends on the object of interest. For development interests and financial capital, it is likely a big win (at least in the short term). For other social and environmental programs that heavily rely on state investment and maintenance, the future seems less bright. For example, though Florida has historically relied on substantial state support for land acquisition and management in the interest of conservation, under the newly reformed growth management institution, habitat conservation is largely expected to take the form of rural land stewardship, which relies on the opening up of rural areas for development as means to conserve them. This “conservation” incentive is most obviously at odds with any intention to reduce fragmentation by promoting compact development.

Basically, under the rural land stewardship scheme, land is expected to be conserved through a sort of offsetting approach to urban development in rural areas, where developers would be required to offer “conservation easements” proportional to their projects. Glen Storch, a long-time Daytona Beach-based environmental lawyer for the large land owning corporation Miami Corp., explained to local media that “[Rural Land Stewardship] is seen now as a model for how we can preserve wildlife corridors. ... From an environmental standpoint, this is the way we’re going to be able to proceed in the future. We have no money to buy conservation land anymore” (Deslatte, 2011b, para. 26). This paints a picture of a conservation future “beyond” the state, with corporate capital providing the means to conservation ends. A less enthusiastic response to these changes comes from Eric Draper of Audubon of Florida, who solemnly warns, “People are going to wake up in a couple of years and see the results of this growth management and say, ‘What can we do to keep our countryside from being chewed up by development.’ ... And the answer will be nothing” (Klas, 2011, para. 12).

### **Reregulating environmental management and constraints on conservation: Example from Flagler County**

The broad-based reform of Florida’s GMA, the defunding and restructuring of federal and state environmental agencies, and the devolution of responsibility for environmental management to local governments and private developers have different implications in different locations. This is, of course, because historical development in Florida has been uneven, leading to large disparities in terms of wealth and population between different counties and municipalities. Thus, a closer look at the concrete manifestations of these neoliberal reform efforts can be instructive regarding the practical consequences that these reforms have for the possibility of effective conservation on the ground. I take the case of Flagler County in northeastern Florida, with which I am most familiar.

Flagler County has a largely tourism and retirement-based economy and is well known for its Atlantic coast beaches, indicated by its marketing title Palm Coast and the Flagler Beaches. From humble origins, Flagler County became one of the fastest growing counties in the United States throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, sparking increasing interest in conservation by local government and residents (Boda, 2017a). Between 1970 and 2010, the county experienced average decadal growth rates of 120% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014), leading to increased environmental pressures. Having experienced a rapid expansion in development and real estate prices in advance of the 2007 housing crisis, Flagler County was also among the hardest hit in the financial recession, going from among the fastest growing to most economically distressed counties in the state (Williamson, 2011). The combined urgency of attracting investment while simultaneously conserving the county’s sensitive environmental lands makes Flagler County a well-situated case to demonstrate the local-

level challenges stemming from neoliberal environmental governance policy, including how pressures of increased competition and less public sector support interact with preexisting institutional limitations to constrain possibilities for effective environmental management.

To start, Flagler County government officials are increasingly placed in competition with other county and city governments for limited state and federal support for environmental projects, including those that are directly related to economic needs such as tourism beach restoration. Counties are pitted against each other to convince state funding agencies that investment in their community would be in the best interest of the state or federal government, the underlying principle being that public money goes to where highest return on investment is and where larger local/private funds can match state funds. As one local elected official told me in an interview in 2014:

If there's no grant money, you don't get [a beach management project], you don't get anything without a grant. [This city] is not gonna turn over 3 million dollars for a [beach restoration] study. We don't have it. So, whoever has it wins. You have 400 critically eroded miles in the state of Florida; 400. 200 are being dealt with in some way shape or form, there's still 200 out there that haven't been touched, were one of them. How do we get 2 miles of our little beach, how do we beat out the other guy? ... It's very frustrating, very very frustrating. The big boys down in Miami that have the big tourist money, the big hotels, all the hotels that have big money, their all gonna win over us, I mean let's face it. (Flagler Beach City Commissioner, personal communication, January 16, 2014).

This elected official's fatalism is largely based in fact. Though local governments are increasingly being asked to take on both the regulatory and the financial burden of environmental management, all find themselves butting up against preexisting constraints on public revenue collection that have been long-standing policy in the state. Florida, for example, has no state income tax, and municipalities are in general limited to raising revenue funds by levying taxes on property, charging for services, and collecting development fees, and even these are strongly controlled (Nicholas & Chapin, 2007). As Pelham (2007) explains, this structural squeeze on revenues has affected local governments' ability to manage the problems that have come with the state's rapid pace of growth and development:

Historically, Florida's local governments have relied primarily on local property taxes to finance their operations. This reliance on the property tax carries with it a built-in incentive for local governments to approve development because it will increase the local tax base. Although the Legislature has provided for some other optional local taxes, such as local sales taxes, it has imposed a voter referendum requirement for exercise of these powers. ... The lack of adequate alternative revenue sources for local governments hinders their ability to effectively implement state growth management requirements. (p. 17)

These constraints mean that many local governments rely heavily on tourism spending for public revenue collection as means to fund normal government operations. The Flagler County Emergency Manager, for example, explained to me in an interview in 2015 the potential repercussions to public operations of losing tourism dollars:

... If Flagler Beach loses ... business, now [they lose] the tax, now its back on the tax payers for residential [services], and if they get to a point where they are depending on nothing but residential tax dollars, they will defunct. They've got to have that business income. (personal communication, March 16, 2015).

And the fact of the matter is that, similar to Florida overall, much of the business in Flagler County, in particular in coastal communities such as Flagler Beach, the environment is among the main attractions for tourist visitors. For example, a survey conducted by researchers and students from Daytona State College in 2013 found that 68% of the nearly 430 tourists surveyed said that they would not come to Flagler Beach if it had no beach (Beach Management Ad Hoc Committee, 2015). In this way, the continued existence of high-quality beaches is crucial to the maintenance of the city's and county's tourism industry, but tourism income itself is linked to funding for coastal conservation, the idea being that the only way to fund further conservation is by expanding the tourism sector. In Flagler County, for example, a

specialty surcharge on the county sales tax, known as a “bed tax,” is applied to hotel, motel, RV, and other short-term rental charges. This specialty tax has become an increasingly important source of public revenue, growing nearly 10-fold over the last 15 years (FlaglerLive, 2017c). The bed tax collected is controlled by Flagler County’s Tourism Development Council (TDC), which uses the funds for capital improvement projects, beach management projects, and county tourism marketing, the latter of which gets the lion’s share of spending.

As a means to increase the TDC funds, some local politicians, such as the county administrator and vice president of the TDC, have turned to opening up community assets to for-profit events in order to attract tourism dollars to the county. This was the case with an historic ecological preservation known as Princess Place Preserve, what some locals refer to as the “crown jewel” of the county. In 2015, the preserve was offered up to host a Spartan extreme sports race in an attempt to attract public revenue through sales and bed room taxes (FlaglerLive, 2015a). Some local residents argued that the entrepreneurial move amounted to “pimping Princess Place,” even calling the pending event a “rape in the making” (Tristam, 2015). Strong and persistent resistance to the Spartan extreme sports event by concerned citizens did not prevent the event from happening but did lead to its relocation to private land (FlaglerLive, 2015b).

A final example of the constraints on environmental management experienced by local Florida governments comes from the recent devastation wrought by Hurricane Matthew in Flagler County in October 2016. After barreling through Haiti, killing over 1,000 people, Hurricane Matthew came within 35 miles of the Flagler County coastline, causing over 460 million in coastal environmental damage alone (FlaglerLive, 2016). After the storm, the scramble for environmental restoration funding has forced the county to take on substantial debt and, lacking state and federal support, the county has moved to adjust the percentages of its bed tax from 4 to 5% to fund beach recovery (FlaglerLive, 2017b). However, the necessity of increasing tourism spending as a means to achieve environmental restoration and conservation means that, though beach restoration will be boosted in the very short term, in the long run much of the collected funds will in fact go to the marketing efforts of the TDC to prioritize economic growth, which some local commentators have found seriously problematic (FlaglerLive, 2017d).

In the absence of adequate public funding and coordinated management, citizens have in some ways been forced to bear the financial and labor costs of restoring the local environment post-Hurricane Matthew; for example, by revegetating eroded sand dunes (FlaglerLive, 2017a). Local citizens are forced to undertake these conservation efforts even though the affected area is technically the responsibility of the state transportation agency (Boda, 2015). However, to paraphrase a Department of Transportation representative, the FDOT is not in the beach building business (FDOT Emergency Public Meeting, October 8, 2016), and they instead have tended to promote cost effective erosion control strategies known to be detrimental to the local environment in the name of economy (Boda, 2017b).

The example of Flagler County, increasingly forced to compete with other local governments for government investment, being made to take on more responsibility for environmental management without adequate means to carry out the responsibilities, and the resulting necessary intertwining of conservation funding with economic growth all represent the absolute antithesis of those long-held principles of conservation biology such as cooperation, connectivity, and large-scale coordination that lead to effective conservation outcomes.

## **Conclusion: Prospects for future conservation under continued neoliberal environmental governance**

Florida’s 1985 Growth Management Act can be seen as the peak of the rising wave of regulatory reform in the 1960s and 1970s at federal and state levels, which included the Clean Air and Clean

Water acts, the Endangered Species Act, and the creation of agencies like the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection. By putting in place a nested system of regulatory policy infrastructure that could help guide future development, the GMA had the rare potential to control and coordinate environmental change effectively at multiple levels of organization. This possibility, however, has at best been unevenly realized, because changes to the growth management institution have typically clashed with parallel efforts to conserve land because of a lack of legal or policy mechanisms for directing development to suitable places (Higgins & Paradise, 2007).

Environmental degradation is nothing new in Florida (Grunwald, 2006), but the scale and intensity of change have never been greater, leading some critics to speculate whether Florida is “just one new development away from environmental ruin” (Cox, 2009). More people and a bigger economy mean more productive activity, more houses, more roads, and more use of water, minerals, and land from the natural environment. Curbing such widespread environmental change and preserving essential habitat that maximizes biodiversity and ecosystem function while maintaining adequate standards of living in human settlements has often been suggested to be the job of some centralized (ideally accountable) authority. This is for good reason, because environmental policy decisions and their enforcement stretch across multiple spatial domains and thus require higher-level regulatory entities and aggregate resource pools to be effective (Hägerstrand, 2001). Absent such mechanisms (or the will to use them), piecemeal conservation prevails, which is generally inadequate to curb ecological degradation resulting from, among other things, habitat fragmentation and other cumulative human impacts.

Structural underfunding, the defanging of regional development councils, and the subsequent relaxation of state enforcement, combined with the increased intensity of marketing efforts, all contributed to the disconnect between environmental conservation efforts and actual GMA policy implementation (or lack thereof). This includes the substantial gap between local development activities and the upholding of growth management policy goals such as infrastructure concurrency, compact development, and rural lands and habitat conservation. The deepening of neoliberal reform efforts embodied by the restructuring of the GMA under Rick Scott’s administration raises serious questions regarding whether or not Florida is equipped to handle projected environmental challenges.

For example, given that sea level rise is expected to accelerate throughout the 21st century (Deconto & Pollard, 2016), with widespread implications for Florida’s densely populated coastlines (Hauer, Evans, & Mishra, 2016), it does not bode well for the future of Florida’s low-lying beaches and waterways that most lands that are vulnerable to sea level rise are actually slotted for development in local plans along the Atlantic coast, the majority of which, given current Army Corps of Engineers national permits, are likely to be protected against the rising seas to the detriment of coastal habitats (Titus et al., 2009). Recent accusations of Rick Scott’s administration “banning” climate change from use in official state language (Korten, 2015) add further reason to worry about Florida’s future in a climate-changed world. The localization of environmental management decisions under neoliberalized growth management is likely to exacerbate these problems and make the necessary larger scale solutions even more challenging to formulate and implement. The hostility toward environmental regulation currently promoted by the Republican Party, which now controls both the executive and legislative branches of Florida’s state government and the U.S. federal government, adds increased urgency to the need to safeguard existing and implement new sustainable conservation mechanisms both within Florida and around the United States. We need look no further than the history of environmentalism in the United States (e.g., Nash, 2001; Pinchot, 1998) to get a clear picture of how difficult it will likely be to reestablish those dismantled conservation mechanisms that in many cases took decades of persistent lobbying and activism to initially establish.

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