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SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT -- ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Setting the Record Straight on the Tampa Bay Times editorial: Protecting Florida's polluters

CLAIM: "An agency that time after time has put the interests of developers and the polluting industry ahead of the state's natural resources..."

SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT: The Department makes available hundreds of millions of dollars per year to improve stormwater and wastewater treatment plants, spends more than \$125 million per year to clean up leaking petroleum storage tanks and, in the last 24 months, has developed nearly half of the plans to restore impaired waterbodies in the history of the Department.. All of these actions are designed to ensure Florida's environment is protected.

CLAIM: "...laying off nearly 60 employees — many if not most of them responsible for enforcing compliance with environmental regulations."

SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT: Employees were ultimately laid off after months-long assessments of Department procedures and processes as well as staffing and workload levels. About 70 percent of those employees were not involved in compliance assistance and enforcement actions.

CLAIM: "But the loss in numbers is secondary to the loss in experience, program priority and institutional history that DEP caused with the layoffs."

SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT: Many of the Department's nearly 4,000 current employees have decades of experience, institutional knowledge and dedication to ensuring Florida's natural resources are protected.

CLAIM: "The agency makes a ridiculous argument that it would rather improve outreach to industry than to fine a polluter after the fact. Can't it do both?"

SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT: The Department does do both, as enforcement is still a tool used against environmental offenders. Working with the regulated community to ensure compliance with rules, regulations and statutes rather than waiting for environmental harm to occur has been a priority for the Department.