

FROM THE OFFICE OF
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Governor Ron DeSantis Announces Appointments to the Red Tide Task Force

Englewood, Fla. – Today, Governor Ron DeSantis announced the appointments of 11 expert researchers and leading scientists to the recently re-organized Red Tide Task Force. The Governor was joined by Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Secretary Noah Valenstein and Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) Executive Director Eric Sutton. For over 15 years, this Task Force had been inactive and without funding until its re-organization by FWC today at the direction of Governor DeSantis. Governor DeSantis originally called for the re-organization of the task force on his second day in office via [Executive Order 19-12](#).

“The Red Tide Task Force will focus on the causes of Red Tide and will be supported by FWC’s Center for Red Tide Research, which received \$4.8 million in the budget,” **said Governor DeSantis**. “My administration will continue to press forward to find solutions and empower our brightest minds to help protect our environment. The issues of Red Tide are complex, but with the appointments of these leading scientists and researchers, we hope to make a difference.”

“Governor DeSantis has made it clear that the water quality in this state is a top priority,” **said DEP Secretary Noah Valenstein**. “Bringing some of the state's top environmental scientists together to address Red Tide will complement the efforts of the experts on the Blue-Green Algae Task Force and enable us to expedite our efforts to restore and protect our fresh and marine waters.”

“Thank you to Governor DeSantis for his commitment to water quality and our environment. We are excited about the announcement today of these task force members,” **said FWC Director Eric Sutton**. “We look forward to working with the task force and partners as we continue to protect the state’s resources.”

The Red Tide Task Force will complement the Blue Green Algae Task Force and the Florida Red Tide Mitigation and Technology Development Initiative, which is the

partnership between the Fish and Wildlife Research Institute within FWC and Mote Marine Laboratory.

Red Tide blooms have been documented along Florida's Gulf coast since the 1840s, and recently Florida experienced one of its most severe red tide blooms on record. Over the course of 16 months, from November of 2017 until February of 2019, this Red Tide event was recorded as the fifth longest since 1953, and the first since 2007 to impact Florida's southwest, northwest, and east coasts simultaneously.



Photo Credit: Governor's Press Office

Dr. Donald Anderson

Dr. Don Anderson is a Senior Scientist in the Biology Department of the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution. He earned three degrees from MIT – a B.S. in Mechanical Engineering, and a M.S. and Ph.D. in Civil and Environmental Engineering. Dr. Anderson is the former director of WHOI's Coastal Ocean Institute, and presently serves as Director of the Cooperative Institute for North Atlantic Research. Dr. Anderson also serves as Director of the U.S. National Office for Harmful Algal Blooms.

Dr. Duane De Freese

Dr. Duane De Freese currently serves as the Executive Director of the IRL Council, an independent Special District of Florida and the Indian River Lagoon National Estuary Program. Dr. De Freese holds a B.S. degree in Zoology from the University of Rhode Island and M.S. and Ph.D. degrees in Marine Biology from the Florida Institute of Technology.

Dr. Quay Dortch

Dr. Quay Dortch currently manages two National Atmospheric and Oceanic Administration programs that provide federal funding for research on the causes and impacts and prevention, control and mitigation of harmful algal blooms. She received her B.A. in Chemistry from Randolph-Macon Woman's College, M.S. in Chemistry from Indiana University and Ph.D. from the University of Washington in Oceanography.

Ms. Jill Fleiger

Ms. Jill Fleiger is an Environmental Administrator for the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Division of Aquaculture. She received her B.S. in Animal Biology from University of Alberta and M.S. degree in Chemical Oceanography from Florida State University.

Dr. Leanne Flewelling

Dr. Leanne Flewelling is the Ecosystem Assessment and Restoration Section Leader for the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's Fish and Wildlife Research Institute, directing research groups focused on harmful algal blooms, fish and wildlife health, and Florida's diverse terrestrial and aquatic habitats. She earned her M.S. in Environmental Sciences from the University of Massachusetts and her Ph.D. in Marine Science from the University of South Florida.

Dr. Charles Jacoby

Dr. Charles Jacoby is the Supervising Environmental Scientist for the Estuaries Section at the St. Johns River Water Management District. Dr. Jacoby has over 40 years of experience in designing, conducting, and interpreting research that guides management of natural resources, and he has led or co-led projects worth over \$30M.

Dr. Barb Kirkpatrick

Dr. Barbara Kirkpatrick is the Executive Director for the Gulf of Mexico Coastal Ocean Observation System. She has more than 35 years of experience in human and environmental epidemiology and started her career as a Respiratory Care Supervisor at Duke University Medical Center before going on to receive a master's degree in Health Occupations Education at North Carolina State University and a Doctorate in Educational Leadership from the University of Sarasota.

Dr. Sherry Larkin

Dr. Sherry Larkin is a natural resource and environmental economist tenured in the Food and Resource Economics Department at UF. Her main area of interest involves projects relating to the sustainable use of marine resources. She earned her Ph.D. in agricultural and resource economics from Oregon State University and has been a faculty member at UF/IFAS since 2000.

Mr. Andrew Reich

Mr. Andrew Reich is the scientific advisor to the Chief of the Bureau of Environmental Health at Florida Department of Health. Mr. Reich has a M.S. degree in Public Health from the University of Alabama in Birmingham as well as a master's degree in Medical

Science from Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia with a concentration in Intensive Care Medicine.

Ms. Rhonda Watkins

Miss Rhonda Watkins is a Principal Environmental Specialist with Collier County Pollution Control. She has been monitoring red tide for nearly 26 years and has participated in various research programs and grant panels involving red tide. She holds a bachelor's degree in Biology from Wittenberg University with focused studies in limnology and aquatic biology including special studies in oceanography and marine biology completed at Duke University.

Mr. David Whiting

Mr. David Whiting works for the Florida Department of Environmental Protection as the Deputy Director over the Laboratory and Water Quality Standards Programs within the Division of Environmental Assessment and Restoration. Dave has a B.A. degree in Fisheries and Wildlife Management and a M.A. in Ecology from the University of Missouri-Columbia.

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