The results of Florida’s 2018 Legislative Session, which ended earlier this month, were a mixed bag when it comes to priorities for the state’s environmental advocates. Governor Rick Scott’s budget priorities prior to the start of session came out strongly in favor of environmental issues, and in the end lawmakers appropriated $100 million for the state’s primary conservation land-buying program, “Florida Forever.” Although that amount is less than what environmental advocates had been hoping for, it is still an improvement over the zero dollars allocated to the program in 2017. Meanwhile, a proposed ban on hydraulic fracturing, or ‘fracking’, (HB237 / SB462) went down in defeat...
for another year. Lawmakers also approved a measure (SB1402/HB7043) that transfers wetland protection authority in the federal Clean Water Act away from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and into the hands of the Florida Department of Environmental Protection. Proponents say the move clears away unnecessary red tape for development permitting, but opponents worry it will reduce environmental review and protections for the state's sensitive wetlands. We'll get perspective from Audubon Florida's interim Executive Director Julie Wraithmell and the Conservancy of Southwest Florida's Environmental Policy Director Nicole Johnson.