

# Florida PIRG



FLORIDA PUBLIC INTEREST RESEARCH GROUP & FLORIDA PIRG EDUCATION FUND

## Annual Report

Fiscal Year 2005





# FROM THE DIRECTOR

Mark Ferrulo, Executive Director

*In the past year at Florida PIRG and the other state PIRGs made history. Young people registered and voted in record numbers in the presidential election, and it was our staff that helped lead the peer-to-peer grassroots mobilization effort.*

*I'm happy to report the project as one of our past successes, but what I'm really excited about is the future of the project. Research shows that citizens who get involved early develop stronger citizenship skills in the future.*

*That's good news for our democracy because, as you know, it's not enough to vote every four years. Important decisions are being made every day. All too often they're made behind closed doors and out of the public's sight.*

*Here in Florida and in Washington, D.C., our elected officials decide daily whether to side with powerful special interests or with the public interest.*

*That's where Florida PIRG comes in. Armed with thorough research, tough-minded advocacy, grassroots action and citizen support, we work to help Florida's elected officials make the right decisions. For example:*

- *Federal lawmakers moved to eliminate the federal moratorium on new offshore drilling, which has protected Florida's coastal waters since the 1980s. Florida PIRG and allies worked closely with the Florida Congressional delegation to keep the moratoriums in place. (see page 2)*
- *Florida PIRG and its allies helped to keep pollution from contaminating Florida's air by defeating the Bush administration's "Clear Skies" plan. The bill would have allowed Florida's oldest and dirtiest power plants to emit more mercury, soot and smog into our air. (see pages 5-6)*
- *The Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) announced the recall of 10,500 toy drum sets sold at Toys-R-Us stores across Florida. Florida PIRG's toy safety survey revealed that they posed a hazard to children. (see page 7)*

*We need to monitor the choices our elected officials are making every step of the way. Thank you for helping to make that happen. Your generosity is helping to ensure that, day after day, year in and year out our leaders make the right decisions.*



*Cover photos: Mark Ferrulo opposes offshore drilling (ABC News); Dave Algozo talks to reporters about increasing fuel economy standards (Staff photo); Holly Binns (pictured left) calls on Florida residents to oppose new coal plants (Staff photo); Sea oats on the Florida coast (Istockphoto.com).*

# SAVING OUR SHORES

Oil and gas industries tried to eliminate moratorium on offshore drilling

Florida PIRG and allies defended shores and urged lawmakers to increase coastal protections

Florida's coasts remained "Rig Free" in 2005, thanks to the efforts of Florida PIRG and its allies. However, attempts by the oil and gas industries and their friends in the Bush administration continued to threaten the state's beloved coast.

Throughout the year, federal lawmakers, urged by special interests, moved to eliminate the federal moratorium on new offshore drilling leasing that has protected Florida's coastal waters since the 1980s.

Florida PIRG and its allies worked closely with the Florida Congressional delegation, especially Sens. Bill Nelson and Mel Martinez and Rep. Jim Davis (Tampa), to keep the moratoriums in place.

Because Florida's world-famous coastal environment is the foundation of the state's tourism economy and recreational and commercial fishing industries, the environmental damage caused by oil drilling would also be financially devastating.

A single offshore rig dumps thousands of pounds of toxic pollution into the surrounding water, polluting the marine environment and posing dangerous risks to Florida's tourism and fishing based economy.

Accidental spills are always a major risk as well. Just this past June, a spill from a drilling rig off the Louisiana coast killed hundreds of endangered brown pelicans



*Florida PIRG Director Mark Ferrulo discusses offshore drilling issues with Florida's U.S. Sen. Bill Nelson.*

and covered several thousands more in toxic oil.

The oil industry, working with its allies in Congress, sought to undermine the moratoriums on oil and gas leasing in Florida's federal waters. They also made plans to conduct an environmentally harmful inventory of oil off Florida's shores.

Florida PIRG will continue its efforts to protect Florida's shores by urging Gov. Jeb Bush and Florida's congressional delegation to stand up to the oil and gas industries.

## Our Mission

When consumers are cheated, or our natural environment is threatened, or the voices of ordinary citizens are drowned out by special interest lobbyists, Florida PIRG speaks up and takes action. We uncover threats to public health and well-being and fight to end them, using the time-tested tools of investigative research, media exposés, grassroots organizing, advocacy and litigation. Florida PIRG's mission is to deliver persistent, result-oriented public interest activism that protects our environment, encourages a fair, sustainable economy, and fosters responsive, democratic government.

## In Their Own Words



**Jim Davis**  
United States  
Congressman,  
Tampa

*"Florida PIRG has played a critical role in educating the public about important issues and making sure that the public's voice is heard in Congress."*

# PROTECTING FLORIDA'S WATERS

## Waterways faced increasing danger from poorly planned development and pollution

Florida PIRG launched a new campaign to protect the state's most treasured pristine waters

In the summer of 2005, Florida PIRG launched a forward-looking campaign called the "Pristine Waters Project". The campaign's focus is to win stronger protections for three of the state's most treasured waterways—Wakulla Springs, Cypress Creek and the Everglades.

As Florida's population continues to boom, these precious waterways, and others all across the state, face increasing danger from poorly planned development and nutrient run-off pollution.

Many of Florida's cleanest, most pristine waterways are threatened with future pollution from industrial discharges and municipal and agricultural pollution—sources which increase with population.

"Florida's population grows by over 900 new residents every day, increasing stress on our waterways," said Florida PIRG's Mark Ferrulo. "Better enforcement of existing laws and holding polluters accountable helps, but ultimately the state must protect its waters before they are polluted, not after."

Florida PIRG worked to make sure that protecting these magnificent waterways was a top priority for policymakers.

Florida PIRG called on the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and key local decision makers to take immediate action against the

most imminent threats and to strengthen existing water protection laws to prevent anticipated problems for the future.

### Wakulla Springs

The crown jewel of north Florida, and one of the most famous freshwater springs in the world, Wakulla Springs has become choked with algae blooms, hydrilla and other contaminants as a result of nutrient pollution. Waterways collect much of the pollution of the surrounding area, and Wakulla Springs is no different. Studies have shown that a major source of the pollution is a Tallahassee City-owned sewage treatment sprayfield, but the city has resisted efforts to clean up the facility.



*Wakulla Springs is choking on algae blooms and hydrilla plants being fed by pollution runoff coming from Tallahassee's sewage sprayfield.*

Florida PIRG continues to work to convince the Tallahassee City Commission to implement pollution controls at this sewage sprayfield that would reduce the flow of harmful nitrogen pollution into Wakulla Springs. There a number of steps the city of Tallahassee could take to reduce pollution emanating from the sewage sprayfield, including better pre-treatment of the wastewater before it is sprayed on the ground and timing sprayfield operations so they don't coincide with heavy rainfall events.

### Cypress Creek

Cypress Creek, a tributary of the Hillsborough River just north of Tampa in Pasco County, is threatened by developers' plans to build a large mall adjacent to the creek. As with every mall, construction would bring parking lots, cars and run-off of dangerous contaminants into the Creek.

The proposed development, which would despoil the pristine area and threaten Tampa's drinking water supply, was initially opposed by the Florida Department of Community Affairs and the Florida DEP. However, pressure from developers has weakened state opposition to the mall's construction.

Florida PIRG continues to work to convince the water management district and Army Corps of Engineers to reject the wetland destruction permits needed to build the mall.

### The Everglades

In what has become a common scenario for some of Florida's most famous land-

scapes, developers have been pushing building proposals that would further encroach on the Everglades. Miami-Dade County commissioners are under pressure from developers to shift the Urban Development Boundary, which is designed to protect this world-famous ecosystem against sprawl, farther west.

Florida PIRG joined the “Hold the Line” Coalition, a group of state and local organizations devoted to protecting the Everglades from further urban encroachment. Working closely with the coalition, Florida PIRG helped to turn out 150 concerned citizens to a Miami-Dade County

## Outstanding Florida Waters

In addition to stopping critical threats to specific areas in Florida, Florida PIRG is also looking to the future—toward a more comprehensive plan that will protect all of Florida’s waters. Florida PIRG has focused on winning special protection for Florida’s remaining pristine waters through the “Outstanding Florida Water” (OFW) program.

According to Florida PIRG’s research, polluters discharge over 9.5 million pounds of toxic chemicals into state waters annually. Nearly half of Florida’s wetlands have been dredged, filled and



*Over 700 waterways in Florida, including Lake Kissimmee, much of the St. Johns River and the Indian River Lagoon, are too polluted for safe fishing and swimming.*

Commission meeting this past summer to oppose expansion of the Urban Development Boundary.

Additionally, Florida PIRG staff generated thousands of postcards to policy makers urging them to oppose movement of the boundary further west into the Everglades and generated great media coverage in the Miami Herald and Florida Public Radio.

The County Commission is expected to make a final decision in late 2005 or in early 2006.

paved to accommodate sprawling over-development, and over 30 percent of state waters are unsafe for fishing and swimming.

Once a body of water has received OFW designation, the Florida DEP is charged with ensuring that existing water quality levels are not degraded.

Florida’s quality of life and economy are inextricably linked to the health of state waterways. Florida PIRG staff will continue to work to convince policymakers to protect these waterways.

## Accountability

Each year, Florida PIRG publishes a congressional scorecard to educate the public about the voting records of Florida’s elected officials and to help citizens hold those officials accountable.

Florida PIRG distributes the scorecards to tens of thousands of households across Florida. The scorecards are also available online at [www.floridapirg.org](http://www.floridapirg.org)

The scorecards track public interest votes on a variety of issues, such as protecting Florida’s coast from drilling, defending the Clean Air and Clean Water Acts, preventing future “Enron”-like fiascos, and increasing access to affordable prescription drugs.

They also list information about campaign contributions, biographical data, past Florida PIRG scores and telephone numbers for citizens to contact their representatives.

## In Their Own Words



**Sen. Bill Nelson**  
United States Senator

*“From their efforts to stop offshore drilling to their work protecting Florida’s rivers, lakes and springs, Florida PIRG has been a champion for our natural environment and quality of life.”*

# CLEARING THE AIR

## The Bush administration tried to relax clean air laws

Florida PIRG's advocacy and research helped convince Florida's senators to oppose the changes and advocate stronger policies

In 2005, Florida PIRG and its allies defeated an attempt to open dozens of new legal loopholes that would allow polluters to add more harmful toxins to Florida's air.

On March 9, 2005, in a victory for public health and the environment, the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee rejected the Bush administration's "Clear Skies" bill when it failed on a tie vote of nine to nine..

The bill, one of the Bush administration's top policy priorities, would have handed over big breaks to energy companies, allowing more pollution from power plants into our air. Contrary to its name, the bill would have actually weakened the standards regulating the country's air quality.

### Florida's Mercury Threat

One loophole in the Bush administration's "Clear Skies" bill would have exempted 28 percent of Florida's power plants from regulations that would keep our air cleaner, instead allowing them to emit toxic mercury indefinitely.

A Florida PIRG report entitled "The Fine Print" examined Environmental Protection Agency data. The report determined that the effects of "Clear Skies" loopholes would exclude from all regulation power plants that emit 30 pounds or less of mercury per year.

The "Clear Skies" bill would have exempted a pair of units at Pensacola's coal-fired Crist power plants—plants that collectively emitted 29.6 pounds of mercury into the air in 1999.

Studies have found that even very small amounts of mercury present a grave danger to public health and the environment.

Low-level mercury exposure can cause learning disabilities in children and heart attacks and other problems in adults.

Just one drop of mercury can contaminate the fish in an entire lake, and mercury is



Florida PIRG's Derek Brockbank calls on Florida's Congressional delegation to oppose the "Clear Skies" bill.

a toxin that lingers in an ecosystem for years.

"This was a bill that only polluters could love," said Florida PIRG Field Director Holly Binns. "Our goal now is to make sure Sens. Bill Nelson and Mel Martinez oppose this legislation if it reincarnates itself in some other form," she concluded.

### Florida's Air Pollution On The Rise

As the Bush administration pushed their "Clear Skies" bill, a Florida PIRG report found that soot-forming sulfur dioxide (SO<sub>2</sub>) and smog-forming nitrogen oxide (NO<sub>x</sub>) emissions increased by more than 60 percent in Florida's power plants from 1995 to 2003.

Pollution from power plants triggers over 28,000 asthma attacks in Florida's children each year. It has also been linked to cancer, heart disease and respiratory problems.

The Florida PIRG report was released at the same time that a key U.S. Senate committee considered President Bush's "Clear Skies" bill, the one that would delay and weaken clean air safeguards already included in the Clean Air Act.

The plan would repeal the New Source Review provision, which enabled the EPA to win significant pollution reductions from Tampa Electric Company's Big Bend and Gannon power plants.

"We know how to solve the air pollution problem, but the President's bill would allow more pollution into our air," said Binns. Florida Sen. Bob Graham, at the

urging of environmental and public health advocates, opposed the bill last year. Florida PIRG is urging Sen. Mel Martinez to oppose the bill this year.

### Tampa's Air Among Worst In Nation

While the Bush administration pushed the "Clear Skies" bill, Florida PIRG analyzed survey results on air pollution problems in the state. The survey found significant air pollution problems in the state, and revealed that Tampa's air was the worst among Florida cities.

The Tampa Bay area suffered from six "smog days" in 2003, the latest year

fine particle "soot" pollution, which has been linked to serious respiratory and cardiovascular problems.

Power plants are the nation's largest industrial source of air pollution. They contribute 23 percent of smog-forming nitrogen oxide emissions and 67 percent of soot-forming sulfur dioxide emissions nationwide, according to EPA data. Motor vehicles are also a major source of nitrogen oxide emissions.

"The Bush administration's plan would have prevented future cleanup efforts and weakened protections by letting



Florida PIRG Field Director Holly Binns meets with Rep. Debbie Wasserman-Shultz (what region?) to discuss the implications of the Bush administrations clean air plans for Florida's air.

where data is available. Smog days are days when air pollution levels exceeded the EPA's 8-hour ozone health standard.

In Tampa alone, soot pollution from power plants causes 265 premature deaths, 380 heart attacks, and over 26,000 lost days of work annually—more than in any other metropolitan area in the state.

Florida PIRG's research throughout the state found elevated levels of ozone smog pollution—pollution that triggers 400,000 asthma attacks in Florida each year—and

power plants emit more than one and a half times more smog- and soot-forming pollution than the Clean Air Act allows," said Binns.

Stopping the so called "Clear Skies" initiative was a great victory, however, many threats to Florida's air quality remain, including efforts to build new coal fired power plants across Florida.

Florida PIRG will be at the forefront in this and other battles to protect our air quality and public health.

## Coalitions

Florida PIRG and Florida PIRG Education Fund work with a diverse array of organizations across the state in forwarding our public interest mission. Here are some of the groups we worked with on various issues and initiatives in 2005:

### ACORN

Big Bend Climate Action Team  
Citizens Against Cypress Creek Town Center  
Clean Water Action  
Clean Water Network of Florida  
Common Cause  
Defenders of Wildlife  
Earthjustice  
Florida AFL-CIO  
Florida Conservation Alliance  
Florida Consumer Action Network  
Florida League of Women Voters  
Florida Water Coalition  
Friends of Wakulla Springs State Park  
Hold the Line Coalition  
League of Conservation Voters  
NRDC  
Sierra Club  
Southern Alliance for Clean Energy

## In Their Own Words



**Alan Katz**  
Tallahassee City  
Commissioner

*"Florida PIRG's expertise on the dangers of mercury, smog, soot and global warming pollution is top-notch, and they are playing a critical role in protecting Florida's environment."*

# STANDING UP FOR CONSUMERS

Identity theft, rising textbook prices and unsafe toys placed consumers at risk

Florida PIRG worked to identify consumer concerns, protect privacy, end price gouging and recall unsafe toys

## Accurate Credit Reporting

In June, Florida PIRG released a report showing that 1 in 4 credit reports contains errors serious enough to cause consumers to be denied a loan, an apartment or a job. Of the 200 reports surveyed across the nation, 79 percent contained some kind of error and 30 percent incorrectly listed open accounts the consumer had closed.

“Most people don’t know that their credit reports contain errors until it’s too late—when they have been denied the mortgage or turned down for an apartment,” said Florida PIRG Consumer Advocate Brad Ashwell.

Three national credit bureaus—Equifax, Experian and TransUnion—maintain reports on nearly every American. The Fair and Accurate Credit Transactions (FACT) Act now gives Floridians the right to a free annual credit report.

## Price Gouging

College textbook publishers have been artificially inflating prices at nearly four times the rate of inflation, according to a Florida PIRG study. Florida PIRG called on publishers to stop price-gouging. On average, textbooks cost Florida students \$900 annually, the equivalent of one-fifth the tuition at a public, four-year university.

Common price-gouging tactics include issuing nearly unchanged editions of text-

books at new edition prices and bundled “bells and whistles” such as CD-ROMS and workbooks. The study, conducted by student PIRG chapters, found that American students pay 20 percent more for textbooks than those in other countries.

## Recalling Unsafe Toys

A toy drum set identified in Florida PIRG’s November 2004 “Trouble In Toyland” report was recalled because of choking hazards to children under three years old. The Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) and Kids Station, Inc. announced the voluntary recall of 10,500 toy drum sets sold at Toys-R-Us stores across Florida.

Florida PIRG’s report offers safety guidelines for purchasing toys for small children and provides examples of products that pose potential safety hazards. Florida PIRG’s toy safety reports have led to more than 120 CPSC recalls so far.

## Shareholder Advocacy

Green Century Capital Management, a PIRG-founded investment advisory firm that administers two environmentally responsible mutual funds, worked in partnership with PIRGs around the country to advocate improved corporate environmental responsibility. Green Century’s campaigns included encouraging ConocoPhillips to commit not to drill in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, calling on Ford to respond to global warming by improving its fuel economy, and requesting that Kraft cease using genetically engineered ingredients.

*Florida PIRG Field Director Holly Binns releases “Trouble In Toyland,” Florida PIRG’s annual survey of unsafe toys, in November of 2004. The report led to the recall of a toy drum set sold at Toys R Us.*

# GETTING VOTERS TO THE POLLS

## Young people turned out to vote in record numbers in 2004

Florida PIRG and others launched the New Voters Project, a massive youth-run voter education drive, to sign up young voters

Youth voting has been declining over the past two decades. That's bad news for American democracy. In the year 2000, only 36 percent of the eligible population between the ages of 18 and 24 voted in national elections.

That's why, in the fall of 2004, Florida PIRG and state PIRGs across the country joined the George Washington University Graduate School of Political Management, with support from the Pew Charitable Trusts, to sponsor the largest youth voter mobilization campaign in history—the New Voters Project (NVP).

“The strength of a democracy is measured by the participation of its citizens,” said Audrey Wallace, Florida PIRG’s New Voters Project director. “We’re better off when young people possess the habits of voting and engaged citizenship.”

NVP is a nonpartisan voter registration and get-out-the-vote campaign focused on 18- to 24-year-olds. During last fall’s elections, the campaign registered hundreds of thousands of new voters nationwide. Relying on research showing that young people are persuaded to vote when they’re asked to vote by another young person, the project sent thousands of young organizers and volunteers onto college campuses across the country.

By November, these staffers and volunteers had registered 265,000 new young



*Audrey Wallace, an organizer for the Florida PIRG New Voters Project, meets with Secretary of State Glenda Hood.*

voters. One of the key successful strategies of the campaign was to find issues of common concern to young people, and relate those issues to the outcome of national and state elections.

By demonstrating that, with the right techniques and approach, new young voters will come to the table, the New Voters Project continues to encourage politicians and candidates for office to address the issues that affect young people. More importantly, these new voters will likely continue to vote, in election after election, strengthening America’s democracy.

## Results

In the 2004 elections, turnout among 18- to 24-year-olds increased 11 percent, while voter turnout increased by only 4 percent among the general population. The New Voters Project organized voter registration and turnout at the following Florida schools:

Broward Community College  
Florida A&M University  
Florida International University  
Florida State University  
Miami-Dade Community College  
Nova Southeastern University  
Palm Beach Community College  
Tallahassee Community College  
University of Florida

## In Their Own Words



**Cliff Thael**  
President, Florida Association of Counties and Chairman, Leon County Commission

*“Florida PIRG has been an effective champion on many public interest issues, from championing product safety to protecting consumers from unscrupulous business practices. I have enjoyed working with Florida PIRG for many years.”*

# DEFENDING DEMOCRACY

Voters' rights were threatened as the state moved to limit the ballot initiative process

Florida PIRG and the Save the Voters' Voice coalition defended the process and called for an independent redistricting commission

Florida PIRG continued its efforts to strengthen democracy by defending voters' rights to amend the constitution and by supporting an independent redistricting commission.

## Defending The Ballot Initiative

The crucial right of Florida voters to amend their constitution when the Legislature fails to address important issues was under fierce attack during the 2005 legislative session.

Florida PIRG joined the Save the Voters' Voice coalition and fought to preserve the ability of citizens to play a direct role in shaping public policy.

Four measures to weaken voters' rights overwhelmingly passed through the Florida state House, but due to the strong work of the Save the Voters' Voice coalition, only one passed through the Senate and will appear on the 2006 ballot. If approved, this amendment would make passage of future citizens' initiatives into law more difficult by requiring a 60 percent voter approval rather than a democratic majority of 51 percent.

Other proposals, if passed, would have created criminal penalties for constitutional amendment petition gatherers who

make clerical errors; limited the subject matter that amendments could address; and required an even higher percentage of voter approval for initiatives bearing financial impacts.

## Independent Redistricting Commission

In contrast to the anti-democracy efforts by the state Legislature to limit citizen participation, a new statewide campaign is underway to create a 15-member independent commission that would draw

the lines for federal and state legislative districts.

The commission would reduce the influence of self-interest and partisan politics in Florida's redistricting process, a process that currently makes it easy for incumbents to retain power, by allowing them to use election data to draw their own districts.

Following each census, legislators and the political party in power basically guarantee their own re-election. This self-protective process inevitably leads to non-competitive races and further entrenches the power of incumbency.

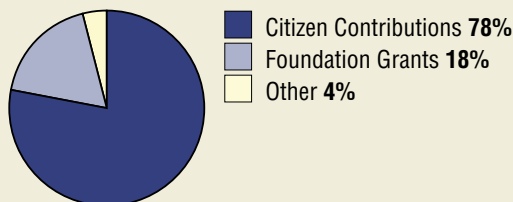


Florida PIRG Democracy And Consumer Advocate Brad Ashwell (right) discusses the Save the Voters' Voice campaign with Florida AFL-CIO Communications Director Rich Templin (left).

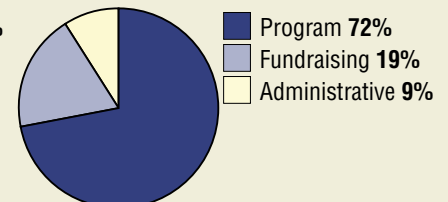
## Financial Information

Charts reflect combined financial information for Florida PIRG Citizen Organization, Florida PIRG Education Fund, Florida PIRG Center For Student Action and Florida PIRG's citizen outreach programs.

### FY04 Income



### FY04 Expenses



# FLORIDA PIRG SUPPORTERS

## Florida PIRG and Florida PIRG Education Fund

Citizen support is the cornerstone of Florida PIRG and Florida PIRG Education Fund. Thousands of Floridians supported Florida PIRG by making membership contributions in 2004. The members listed below were particularly generous in backing the organization's research and advocacy. Names that appear in italics denote Florida PIRG Public Interest Partners. These members provide stability to the organization's resources through our monthly giving program.



### Sponsors

The following members are Sponsors, who supported Florida PIRG with contributions of \$500 or more or are Public Interest Partners giving \$40 or more each month.

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### Foundations

Florida State Public Interest Research Education Fund, a 501(c)(3) organization, conducts research and public education on emerging public interest issues. Contributions to Florida PIRG Foundation are tax-deductible. For more information, call (314) 454-9560.

The following members were particularly generous in their support of Florida PIRG Education Fund.

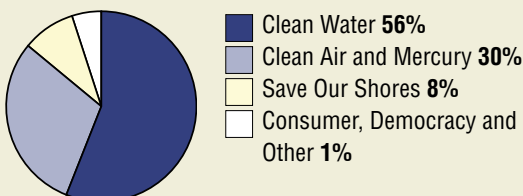
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Educational Foundation of America  
Energy Foundation

### Planned Giving

Members who include Florida PIRG in their wills leave a legacy of activism that will preserve our environment, protect public health, and defend the rights of consumers for decades to come.

For more information about including Florida PIRG in your estate and major giving plans, call (800) 841-7299 or e-mail [plannedgiving@floridapirg.org](mailto:plannedgiving@floridapirg.org).

### FY04 Program Expenses Breakdown



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Design by Public Interest GREFX (215) 985-1113; Editing and layout by The Principled Pen (215) 990-7334. Printed on recycled paper.

# 2004 Annual Report

## Contact us:

### Florida PIRG

926 E. Park Ave.  
Tallahassee, FL 32301  
(850) 224-3321 (ph)  
(850) 224-1310 (fx)

[www.floridapirg.org](http://www.floridapirg.org)  
[info@floridapirg.org](mailto:info@floridapirg.org)

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