Dear Governor DeSantis:

The Florida Native Plant Society (FNPS) was heartened by your early commitment to tackle Florida's pressing water quality issues. Harmful algal blooms, degraded springs and unending outbreaks of red tide are undeniable symptoms of chronic declines in our water quality. While SB 712 makes important steps towards addressing these declines and their associated environmental and economic impacts, it falls far short of what is needed to actually restore our waters. We believe it is vitally important that you recognize and openly acknowledge the existence of these shortcomings if you sign SB 712 into law.

We know many conservation organizations are encouraging you to veto SB 712. FNPS, on behalf of our 34 chapters and 4,000 + members statewide, did not choose to join the chorus of those recommending a veto. There are many competing needs and interests that must be accounted for when governing a state as large and complex as Florida, and our water quality problems are correspondingly complex. So while we are concerned about the shortcomings of SB 712, it can serve as a significant first step towards implementing the comprehensive approach that is needed – provided we continue expeditiously towards taking the next steps. For example, BMPs alone will not be sufficient to account for the water quality impacts associated with agriculture.

The challenges facing you have been compounded in a profound way by the coronavirus pandemic. The pandemic is rightfully dominating our attentions at present. However, now more than ever, we need leadership that acknowledges life will go on, and that systemic problems like our water quality declines cannot be pushed to the background for long. A dependence on clean, safe water is shared by all of us.

If you decide to sign SB 712, please make it clear that you intend to work with the legislature to make more progress on addressing Florida's severe water quality problems during the 2021 session.

Respectfully,

Susan Carr, Ph.D.  
President of the Florida Native Plant Society

Eugene M. Kelly  
Chair of Policy and Legislation

cc: Nikki Fried, Commissioner, Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services  
Noah Valenstein, Secretary, Florida Department of Environmental Protection

Preserving, conserving and restoring the native plants and native plant communities of Florida