

# **Jeb Bush will leave mixed legacy to state**

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With Jeb Bush's two terms as governor of Florida coming to a close, there is no denying he has had a powerful impact. To call it mixed would be an equally powerful understatement.

Bush's defining moment as governor has to be his handling of the 2004 hurricane season. Has any modern governor faced such a succession of serious natural disasters, especially in so short a period of time?

Bush was a true leader, managing a superb state response that seemed virtually non-stop. Bush was omnipresent, traveling from one end of the state to the other to lend moral and material support to people badly in need of it. It did more to humanize his often stiff public persona than anything else he did, largely because both his compassion and devotion to duty were so clearly genuine.

The impact of other Bush actions is, as we said, mixed.

He was a powerful advocate for Everglades restoration, and a strong proponent of Florida Forever, the land preservation program that will allow future generations to see and enjoy much of the best of wild Florida.

But he did too little, too late, to try to control the adverse impacts of Florida's rampant growth. And the Department of Environmental Protection appeared increasingly toothless and, especially in Northwest Florida, hollowed out every year of his administration, losing direction and talented employees in equal measure.

It has only been lawsuits by groups like the Clean Water Network and others that have prevented wholesale downgrading of water quality standards for Florida's surface waters.

And Lake Okeechobee remains a festering sore on the Florida landscape, so polluted that water released from its boundaries damages every river, bay or estuary it flows into.