Lift Up the Lowly Mullet, Bring Down the Marsh Marxists

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Wakulla County is a coastal county in the Florida Panhandle rapidly transitioning from rural to suburban. In a 2014 public referendum, citizens voted against reinstating the county's wetlands buffer, the most protective in Florida. In this talk, I examine the grassroots Facebook campaign to "Save Wakulla's Wetlands," and the opposing campaign to "Save Wakulla's Sanity," which vilified white middle-class environmentalists as outsider "Marsh Marxists" threatening U.S. national identity and Southern cultural heritage. One Tea Party activist popularized this epithet while simultaneously planning a Mullet Summit to valorize mullet, a species reliant on wetlands that was central to the county's economy until the 1995 ban on gill nets.

Attention to the "lowly mullet," a "trash fish" associated with poverty and the settler culture of "Old Florida," reveals an alternative Evangelical vision of ecological stewardship emphasizing neoliberal morality, male labor, and the Christian virtue of humility. Elite real estate developers, who control the County Commission, have exploited this ecological vision to promote their own economic interest in deregulation by simplifying Wakulla County's uniquely Floridian and working-class heritage into a homogenized identity politics of white, rural identity imported from other Southern states.

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Building 50, 51A

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