

Governor DeSantis Awards Governor's Medal of Freedom to Everglades Champions

One of highest honors in Florida presented to The Everglades Foundation board members Paul Tudor Jones II, Mary L. Barley, George M. Barley & Nathaniel P. Reed

PALM BEACH, FL, UNITED STATES, April 29, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- On Tuesday, April 28, 2026, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis awarded the Governor's Medal of Freedom to Everglades restoration leaders Paul Tudor Jones II, Mary L. Barley, the late George M. Barley, and the late Nathaniel P. Reed, recognizing their decades of work to restore and protect America's Everglades.

The Governor's Medal of Freedom was established in 2020 and is one of the highest honors in the state of Florida, recognizing individuals who have made significant contributions to the state and its citizens.

"The Everglades Foundation is deeply proud to celebrate the vision and dedication of Paul Tudor Jones II, Mary Barley, George Barley, and Nathaniel Reed," said The Everglades Foundation CEO Eric Eikenberg. "Their courage

shaped not only the growth of our organization, but also the impact we continue to make every day in the effort to restore America's Everglades. We are profoundly grateful for their perseverance and belief in what was needed to restore this vital watershed from the very



Governor DeSantis presents Medal of Freedom to Mary Barley & her late husband George Barley



Governor DeSantis presents Medal of Freedom to Paul Tudor Jones II

beginning. Today's honor is a testament to their lasting legacy and the powerful example they set for all who carry this work forward."

In the early 1990s, Paul Tudor Jones II and the late George Barley observed the rapidly declining health of Florida Bay, their favorite place to fish. Together, they consulted scientists to understand the cause of this once-pristine ecosystem's collapse — a lack of freshwater inflow. Having honed their talents in business, not scientific pursuits, they understood that Florida Bay was not only something to be

enjoyed but also integral to the Florida Keys' economy. It soon became clear that South Florida's water infrastructure, designed in the 1940s to advance agriculture and dispose of freshwater, was the cause of Florida Bay's demise — and the source of environmental devastation across the region. Their attention, commitment, and recognition that a comprehensive solution was needed gave the Everglades restoration effort a giant leap forward, leading them to establish The Everglades Foundation in 1993.

For more than 30 years, Paul Tudor Jones II's unwavering commitment to the Everglades and Florida Bay has resulted in unprecedented progress in the restoration of this vital ecosystem. As co-founder of The Everglades Foundation, Paul has been the driving force behind the organization's growth into one of the most effective environmental advocacy organizations in the country. Beyond his Everglades work, Paul is a dedicated philanthropist, serving as co-founder of the Robin Hood Foundation and the JUST Capital Foundation, and as a board member of the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. He is also the founder, co-chairman, and chief investment officer of Tudor Investment Corporation, which he formed in 1980.

As a founding director of The Everglades Foundation, Mary L. Barley has also spent more than three decades leading efforts to restore the Everglades. Throughout this time, she worked side by side with her husband, George Barley, whose shared passion for Florida Bay inspired the Foundation's creation. Mary has played a pivotal role in advancing environmental policies, including the passage of the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) and a constitutional amendment that established accountability for environmental damage caused by nutrient pollution. Through her leadership, she has secured important legislative victories that continue to benefit the Everglades today. She has contributed to numerous environmental organizations across the nation and the state of Florida. Mary is an avid fly fisherman and is one of only 100 who has been named "Hero of the Planet" by TIME magazine. Honored by both the U.S. House of Representatives and the Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida for her



Governor DeSantis presents Medal of Freedom to Nathaniel Reed's daughter Lia Reed

stewardship, Mary was inducted into the Everglades Coalition Hall of Fame in 2025— making her and George the only couple ever inducted.

George M. Barley was a seventh-generation Floridian and a devoted advocate for the Everglades and Florida Bay. As a co-founder of The Everglades Foundation, George played an instrumental role in raising national awareness about the need for Everglades restoration and led the charge to hold polluters accountable. His leadership in The Everglades Foundation's early years helped lay the groundwork for the large-scale restoration efforts in progress to this day. Tragically, George passed away in a plane crash in 1995 en route to a briefing on Everglades restoration with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. His vision and legacy continue to drive The Everglades Foundation's ongoing work.

Nathaniel P. Reed was a lifelong advocate for Florida's natural and wild spaces and a founding director of The Everglades Foundation. Prior to his leadership with The Everglades Foundation, Nathaniel served as Florida Governor Claude Kirk's environmental advisor and as the United States Department of the Interior's assistant secretary of fish, wildlife and parks from 1971 to 1977. During his tenure at the Department of the Interior, Nathaniel co-authored the Endangered Species Act of 1973 and played a key role in ending the use of DDT and advancing the Clean Water Act and the Marine Mammal Protection Act — landmark achievements that transformed environmental policy in the United States. His passion for protecting Florida's wild places and his decades of service to Everglades restoration left an indelible mark on the movement.

ABOUT THE EVERGLADES FOUNDATION

The Everglades Foundation is committed to the restoration and protection of America's Everglades through science, advocacy, and education. Founded in 1993 by two outdoor enthusiasts—Paul Tudor Jones II and the late George Barley—The Everglades Foundation works to bring people together and provide a powerful bipartisan voice for Everglades restoration. Its team includes renowned scientists, experienced educators, policy experts, and communications professionals. By coupling this expertise with a passion for restoration, The Everglades Foundation leads the effort to restore and protect the flow of clean freshwater to the Everglades through the world's largest ecosystem restoration project. Learn more at EvergladesFoundation.org.

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