

Environmental advocate Maggy Hurchalla dies at 81

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STUART – Margaret “Maggy” Hurchalla, a doyenne of slow-growth environmentalism and former five-term Martin County commissioner, died Saturday, her family said. She was 81.

Hurchalla was a lifelong, fearless advocate for Everglades restoration and an emphatic voice for protecting Florida’s natural beauty. She was an Everglades

Coalition Hall of Fame member and won countless local, state and national environmental awards for her conservation work.

“She was a creature of nature, and she took us all along for the voyage: Her family, friends, children, so many members of the county and complete strangers who just wanted to go on nature walks,” her daughter, Jane Hurchalla, said in an interview with TCPalm.

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Former Martin County Commissioner Maggy Hurchalla kayaks on the Indian River Lagoon south of the St. Lucie Inlet on March 14, 2013. CHRISTOPHER ARNOLD/TCPALM

Hurchalla

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“She worked to make natural resources available to everyone.”

During her 20-year career as a commissioner, Hurchalla spearheaded Martin County’s first Comprehensive Land-Use Plan in 1990, the current framework for growth-management programs. It was her “proudest achievement,” said her son, George Hurchalla.

“Maggy’s impact on Florida’s conservation movement cannot be overstated,” said Eve Samples, executive director of Stuart-based Friends of the Everglades.

“She’s the reason developers can’t fill in wetlands in Martin County, and the

reason I-95 bends away from Stuart. ... She helped craft development rules that made our community a leader in the state for environmental preservation,” Samples said.

“She was inspiringly irreverent, and she left a mark on our community that will not be forgotten,” she said.

Hurchalla was a member of several Governor’s Commissions on the Everglades and served on the Commission of Sustainable South Florida. She “remained involved in the battle for Everglades restoration right up to her death,” George Hurchalla said.

“Maggy was a devoted and fierce warrior for Florida’s wild natural spaces, especially America’s Everglades,” said Eric Eikenberg, CEO of the Everglades Foundation. “Her unrelenting and passionate voice impacted countless Flo-

ridians. Her legacy lives on, and those of us who remain behind will stand on her shoulders.”

“Just last month, we saw Maggy at the Everglades Coalition conference. Her parting words to us were: ‘Keep fighting the good fight.’ Maggy, we will,” Eikenberg said.

Hurchalla was the sister of the late, Clinton-era U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno.

The U.S. Supreme Court in 2021 denied hearing an appeal filed by Hurchalla related to a \$4 million civil judgment against her by Lake Point Restoration, a rock mining company in western Martin County.

Then 79, she was backed in her legal efforts by a range of environmental and free speech advocates.

“We kept the faith. We fought the

good fight. We finished the race,” Hurchalla told TCPalm in January 2021.

Hurchalla was recovering Saturday from a second hip surgery when she suffered cardiac arrest at home, George Hurchalla said.

She is survived by her husband Jim, her four children James, Robert, Jane and George, and grandchildren Jimmy and Kym Hurchalla, and Hunter and Ava Weaver.

“Her legacy will live on in the people that she’s touched with her passion and diligence for preserving and protecting the environment. She’s passed that on,” said Mark Perry, executive director of the Florida Oceanographic Society. “People who watched her and knew her are inspired by her actions.”