

HIPI Environmental Report

June 2026

Objective: To provide our HIPI membership with information on environmental issues that affect our Hutchinson Island Community and its environs.

Indian River Lagoon Economic Value:

The local economic impact of the Indian River Lagoon (IRL) generates \$28.3 Billion annually.

Future Vision for the St. Lucie River and Indian River Lagoon: Looking into the next decade, we can hope for a significant change in the local water quality due to the current initiatives underway. These programs include:

- Sending more water South instead of East into our community.
- A return to water quality that one might have seen in the 1940's and 1950's where oysters and marine life thrived.

What are the initiatives that bring us to a brighter environmental future?

Below is a summary of major projects that are in progress that will reduce Nitrogen, Phosphorus, Pharmaceuticals, Heavy Metals and general Muck.

Latest Updates - IRL/ St Lucie River

Significant attention is being brought on a dredging project occurring off Sailfish Point Inlet. Videos have been provided on-line that show what appears to be damage done to the reefs and habitats around the dredge. Dead fish and black muck are being reported.

HIPI is reviewing the effort being coordinated by the Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) and the Florida Inland Navigation District (FIND). Martin County Commissioners advised that they are monitoring the project and will review the project on June 9, 2026. The USACE and FIND will provide latest info on the project progress at this meeting. HIPI plan to attend the MC Commissioners' meeting and look for answers to the above environmental concerns.

There will be a review planned with the HIPI Board at our June 10 Board Meeting.

Lake Okeechobee Lake Level

Data Ending 2400 hours 9 June 2026 Current Lake level is: 11.18 (ft-ngvd), which is a lower level vs. 3 weeks ago @ 11.37 (ft-ngvd). The USACE is concerned that at this time of year, the level is too low!! They continue to monitor.

Florida Environmental Budget Update

Florida lawmakers approved an **\$114.5 billion** state budget that includes \$8.9 billion for the agriculture and environment sectors. The spending plan directs major investments toward Everglades restoration and land easements, while significantly reducing traditional state environmental programming.

Key Environmental Funding Allocations

- **Everglades Restoration:** \$645 million total, which includes full funding for the Everglades Agricultural Area and (EAA) Reservoir.
- **Rural and Family Lands:** \$425 million dedicated to conservation easements to prevent the urban development of working farms and ranches.
- **Targeted Water Quality:** \$50 million for alternative water supply projects, \$25 million for the Indian River Lagoon, and \$20 million for Biscayne Bay.
- **Coastal Protection:** \$14.1 million for localized beach projects.

Shifts and Reductions

While Agricultural and Everglades preservation received large injections of capital, traditional state conservation programs saw major pullbacks:

- **Florida Forever:** The state's premier land conservation program received no new funding in the finalized budget, and legacy funds were swept into agricultural easements. **The Legislature's Land Conservation Budget is a Broken Promise to Floridians**
- **General DEP Budget:** **Overall spending for the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEPA) experienced significant cuts compared to previous years.**

US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) Update:

Everglades Agriculture Area including the EAA Reservoir Project:

The USACE is constructing a reservoir, which will be 10,500-acres with 240,000 acre-feet of storage. The EAA Reservoir Project is a joint Everglades restoration project between the USACE and the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD). The project is scheduled for completion in 2028.

As of this writing (9 June, 2026), Full Funding for the Everglades Agricultural Area which includes the (EAA) Reservoir: \$645 million total.

C44 Reservoir: To contain and remove Nitrogen and Phosphorus in *local runoff* . The USACE continues to work on the C44 Reservoir in order to have it fully capable of holding its designed water levels. It is currently operating at 50-60% of its capacity. It was expected to be fully operational sometime in 2026. A recent report from WPTV News indicated it may not be fully operational until 2027. Waiting for latest update from USACE.

Proposed Rock Quarry: Update

Southland Water Resource Project is a controversial, privately proposed 8,600-acre rock mine in the Everglades Agricultural Area (EAA) south of Lake Okeechobee.

Latest Developments:

- **Restricted Scope:** A settlement reached between environmental groups and the Developers (U.S. Sugar, Florida Crystals, and Phillips & Jordan) significantly narrowed the project's current approval. It clarifies that **additional regulatory reviews**—including full water quality and hydrologic impact analyses—are required before any water pumping, discharging, or system connections can occur.
- **South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD)** will continue to monitor the planning for the mine to insure quality control on any water discharged from the mining operation. Further comment can be found in the “Project Status & Next Steps Section.

Project Status & Next Steps - Proposed Rock Quarry:

The project is not yet operational, as it still faces several regulatory hurdles:

- **SFWMD Review:** The **South Florida Water Management District** has yet to complete its full evaluation or weigh in on the final connection of the project to the Everglades.
- **Federal Permits:** The **U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE)** has not yet issued required permits.

St. Lucie Muck Cleanup – This is NOT the dredging project discussed in the “Latest Update Section”.

There is continuing discussions being reviewed at the Rivers Coalition Meetings addressing the muck in the St. Lucie River. The USACE continues to update their approach and testing of different methods to be considered for the cleanup. More on this project in the next months as a method for cleanup is finalized.

South Florida Water Management: (SFWMD)

More focus on lowering Nitrogen and Phosphorus entering the Lake Okeechobee region continues to be discussed. This is one of the main causes for algae buildup.

There was recently review of the status on meeting projected Phosphorus and Nitrogen Levels in Lake Okeechobee and its environs. Friends of the Everglades and the Miccosukee Tribe went to court in 2024 to enforce pollution limits in water from Lake Okeechobee that flows into the Everglades. Now they say those deadlines hit this month, and the state is still far from meeting them.

To summarize, the actual Phosphorus and Nitrogen levels continue to be much higher than stated objectives. Politics play a key role in not meeting the planned objectives.

Plans for specifically controlling polluted runoff from C24 & C25 canals into the IRL. The project is part of the Indian River Lagoon South Plan. Crews are constructing a canal linking the C-23 Canal to the C-44 Reservoir and its associated Stormwater Treatment Area (STA's), where the water will be cleaned. The water management district says the project will improve water quality in the St. Lucie estuary and help restore a more natural water flow. **The latest report from the USACE is that C23 canal to the C-44 Reservoir is now operational.**

The work is part of the Indian River Lagoon/St Lucie River–South Restoration Project, led by the South Florida Water Management District in partnership with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

According to SFWMD project documents, the goal is to capture and treat polluted runoff before it reaches the Indian River Lagoon and St. Lucie River, using new canals, reservoirs, and stormwater treatment areas (STA's) designed to clean water upstream rather than allowing it to flow directly into sensitive waterways.

Martin County

Martin County Forever Land Acquisition Progress:

Key Progress Updates & Focus Areas

- **Bar-B Ranch Easement:** Martin County partnered with the state to permanently protect more than 1,700 acres through a \$17 million conservation easement, safeguarding wildlife habitats and water quality.
- **Potential Acquisitions:** The Environmental Lands Oversight Committee (ELOC) has evaluated and advanced a slate of 16 highly ranked proposed properties for future acquisition, including Whitworth Farms.
- **Hutchinson Island:** The county has targeted and moved toward securing an oceanfront parcel on Hutchinson Island aimed at expanding the existing Clifton S. Perry Beach Preserve.

Primary Target Zones

Funding is restricted to four specific priority areas critical to Martin County's ecology:

1. **Indian River Lagoon South (IRL-S):** Focusing on protecting wetlands and improving water quality.
2. **Pal Mar:** Preserving wetlands and greenways that connect directly to the Loxahatchee River.
3. **Loxa-Lucie:** Creating a continuous green corridor between Atlantic Ridge and Jonathan Dickinson State Parks.
4. **Blueways Program:** Protecting natural waterways and expanding recreational access along the St. Lucie River and the Indian River Lagoon.

For a closer look at the specific properties or to follow the Environmental Lands Oversight Committee (ELOC) recommendations, visit the official [Martin County Forever](#) hub.

Stuart

Stuart is fighting the construction of a Railway Station in Stuart due to high cost and environmental concerns. Brightline further exacerbates the controversy on the possible railway station construction as it is on the edge of bankruptcy according to TC Palm. Who will pay??.....Surprise, the taxpayer!!

Friends of the Everglades Report – Update.

[the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia ruled](#) that permits to build in wetlands should remain in the hands of federal regulators, rather than being transferred to the state of Florida. **(opinion: That is a good thing)**

Other Actions of Interest

The Ocean Conservancy is circulating a sign-on letter supporting robust NOAA funding and is inviting Florida organizations to participate. The letter will be sent to the full Florida congressional delegation. NOAA funding is critical to restoration in the Indian River Lagoon and St. Lucie estuaries, as well as HAB forecasting, weather, tides, fisheries, and Sea Grant. The proposed FY27 budget includes a 32% cut to NOAA

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(HIPI The Hutchinson Island Preservation Initiative), July 2025