HIPI Environmental Report

November 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 intiatives underway. These programs include:

> Sending more water South instead of East into our community from Lake Okeechobee..
> Creating Reservoirs and STA's for the local Martin County/St.Lucie County watershed that empties into the Indian River Lagoon and the St. Lucie River.
> A return to water quality that one might have seen in the 1940's and 1950's where oysters and marine life thrived.

Latest Updates - IRL/ St Lucie River and Treasure Coast

Lake Okecchobee Lake Level

> **Data Ending 2400 hours 24 November 2026 Current Lake level is: 14.95 to 14.99 ft-NGVD** as of November 24, 2026. **feet (ft-ngvd), Historical Average for this day (1965–2007): 15.07 ft**
> **Total Inflows:** Inflows: 9,663 cfs cfs (cubic feet per second)
> **Outflows: Total structure/creek inflows are around 9,663 cfs, with structure outflows around 1,065 cfs cfs**

Super El Nino Regional Impact

We have seen the impact of the Super El Niño in a recent rain event where 15 to 20 inches of rain fell over several days. Severe flooding was seen in Martin County. The Jensen Beach area experienced severe flooding. Reports that as many as 20 homes were completely destroyed and others will have to be rebuilt starting with only a frame. Martin County commissioners have a approved local funding and are now waiting for President Trump to declare a disaster area so FEMA funds can be released.

In a recent meeting, the Rivers Coalition Organization reviewed the effects on our environment due to the “Super El Nino”. They showed data that in 1998, the last El Nino predicted to be very strong, there was a significant amount of rain during the usual “dry” season (December to April). The rainfall amounted to 1.0MM acre/ft vs. a more traditional season of 200 acre/ft. The Lake Okeechobee reservoir was overwhelmed contributing to a significant release of water to St. Lucie River. NOAA is forecasting a higher level of precipitation from December to April for 2026-2027. NOAA is predicting the range for this upcoming dry season will be 15-38 inches of rain or a mean of 25 inches over the 5 month period.vs a normal rainfall of approx 10-15 inches. Army Corps of Engineers will be need to scrutinize the level of the lake very carefully; probably keeping on the low side in anticipation of more rainfall. The worst scenario could mean a Lake O level of over 18 feet. Discharges to the St. Lucie River would be mandatory over 17 feet.

Florida Amendment 3 Discussion and Environmental Impact

Summary: The proposed Amendment 3 passed. We await the implications of the passage of this admendment. On the surface, the reduction in property tax would be a positive; especially for low and middle income families. But, in fact the amendment has many hidden elements that would hit these families harder than the savings per year if the amendment passed. It is noted here that our State Representative, Toby Overdorf is one of the sponsors for this legislation. **NOTE:** The future vision of clean water discussed above could be significantly affected with the passage of this amendment. There is no State Reserve to draw from in order to fill local funding gaps due to lower revenue from Amendment 3. The loss of funding by local governments will force them to go back to the State for funds or raise local fees. The State of Florida would have greater leverage vis-a-vis control of the “purse strings” undermining “local home rule”.

Concerns: Regional State and County Wide Impact from Amendment 3

1. South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) which has the authority for our South Florida water control has 30% of its funding coming directly from our Tax Dollars. A significant reduction would occur if this Amendment 3 passed.
2. The SFWMD is not commenting on what cutbacks do they see due to State Politics!! Some possible options could be:
    a. Projects would have to be extended or canceled in order to cover costs e.g. the EAA Reservoir.
    b. Possible redundancies of personnel.
    c. Funding of Projects would provide the State with more control and political influence over local government.

Concerns: Martin County Impact

1. Martin County will see a reduction in tax revenue over a 3 year period. In the 3rd year, it is projected that the county would have to find replacement of revenue of $170MM. How would that be accomplished?? Possible solutions:
    a. Beaches would require an annual payment for parking
    b. Libraries would no longer be free
    c. Parks would have higher fees or would require some type of payment for use.
    d. Parking in many parts of the county would have to be metered.
    e. Possible fees for Athletic Fields and Youth Sports
    f. Senior Programs would have to be privately funded individually or eliminated.
    g. New funding would be required for "After-school Activities".
    h. Some Firehouses might need to be closed, according to a recent assessment by our Fire Marshal and the reason they oppose it.
    i. Police funding would be affected. Would our community safety suffer from lower services?? That is why the State Police have opposed the amendment!!
    j. Road improvement and concurrent services would be affected.

Question:

Would we be safer under Amendment 3?? Would the savings from Amendment 3 actually cost us more due to lack of funding from traditional revenue sources??

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 2029.

NOTE: The bigger question is whether the State of Florida will have the funds to continue its support of key environmental projects if money has to be re-positioned to support local cities loss of income due to Amendment 3??

NOTE: Historically, the State of Florida reduces its support of environmental projects when there is a loss of revenue.

St. Lucie River Muck Cleanup

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. There are multiple approaches being considered.

Stuart:

The City of Stuart is looking for a grant to begin testing muck cleanup of the St. Lucie River. They are considering using a "nano-bubbling" technique. This would reduce the need to remove the muck and dispose of it.

The City of Stuart has introduced a new program, SALT (Sustainable Acquisitions of Lands for Tomorrow). This program is similar to the County program, ELOC (Environmental Land Oversight Committee) to identify and buy land to preserve it.

Martin County:

The County reports a new invasive species of seagrass, Haolphila Stipulacea, has been observed in our local waterways. The County is looking at treating areas of infestation. Little is known about this seagrass in terms of advantages or disadvantages to allow this seagrass to gain traction in the County waterways. It is not native to our region.

The Guardians of Martin County have hired a consultant to study the pollution cause in the St. Lucie River, South Fork which shows worst pollution within the whole River system. This is pertinent due to the large amount of spawning of Saw Fish.

Riverwatch Conservation Easement Update

Recently, they applied to allow for power boats to enter the channel via FLDEP. Waiting for an update. Now, six months after the dredge, the clarity of the Conservation Easement channel, the once flourishing seagrass has been greatly diminished. There are clear violations of power boats accessing the Riverwatch Channel. Enforcement would entail more documentation of violations. A plan is required showing proof of violations.

Other Interest: Oculina Habitat (being endangered)

The Oculina Habitat of Particular Concern (OHAPC) is under threat again. The current administration's Executive Order 14276 "Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness" reinforced earlier measures to expand domestic fishing opportunities and reduce regulatory friction, and it was the impetus for the bottom-trawling rock shrimpers to request access to a portion of this first-of-its-kind Marine Protected Area, where this unique deepwater Oculina coral has resided for centuries.

Comments can be made to https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2026/09/18/2026-19182/coral-coral-reefs-and-livehardbottom-habitats-of-the-south-atlantic-and-the-shrimp-fishery-of-the#open-comment

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(HIPI The Hutchinson Island Preservation Initiative), July 2025