

HIPI Environmental Report

September 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 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 Okeechobee Lake Level

Data Ending 2400 hours 23 Sept 2026 Current Lake level is: 11.72 (ft-ngvd), The average level this time of year is 12-15(ft-ngvd). The USACE is concerned that the level is still too low!! They continue to monitor.

Super El Nino Regional Impact

Rivers Coalition Organization reviewed the effects on our environment due to the "Super El Nino" which is now occurring. 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.

Florida Amendment 3 Discussion and Environmental Impact

Summary: The proposed Amendment 3 that will appear on our November ballots would provide a reduction in the property tax of homesteaded home owners. 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 of several hundred dollars per year if the amendment passed. It is noted here that our State Representative, Toby Overdorf is one of the sponsors for this legislation. The future vision of clean water discussed above could be significantly affected if this amendment passes

NOTE: There is no State Reserve to draw from in order to fill local funding gaps. The loss of funding by local governments, if the Amendment 3 Homestead Exemption passess would force them to go back to the State for funds. 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

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 is passed.
2. The SFWMD is not commenting on what would happen if the Amendment passes and 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 would 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 the relatively modest savings from the higher Homestead Exemption really be a savings when you consider the additional costs that the individual would now need to pay as you go?? Currently, there is some limit to the annual increase under the Homestead Exemption. But if services were needed to be covered via alternate payment methods, they most likely would have no annual ceiling to higher prices to the resident, once alternate income producing methods were in place.

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??

For more info, please see the attachments which provide more details.

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.

UPDATE: SEPT' 2026, The South Florida Water Management District and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers signed a first-of-a-kind agreement to advance construction of key Everglades restoration projects in South Florida. This agreement ensures federal funding will go to the State of Florida for key projects that will line up with the completion of the Everglades Agricultural Area (EAA) Reservoir by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in 2029. Unlike the State Amendment 3 issues, the Federal contribution to these projects would not be affected.

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.

Ruth Holmes – The Stuart City Attorney has applied for a grant to test one of the proposed methods. They are looking to test the Nano-bubble technique. The concept uses nano (extremely small) bubbles where the bubbles react with the muck and change the structure, making it more manageable to handle.

Florida Fish and Wildlife Authority Proposed Regulation Change

Shark Fishing

Martin County and Fish and Wildlife Commission have come to an agreement on how the the new proposed regulation will be followed in Martin County.

NOTE: State law does not prevent local governments from banning activities on beaches which threaten public health, safety or welfare. The law allows local governments to prohibit saltwater fishing from government-owned property for those reasons.

Paul Laura

HIP Environmental Director,

September' 2026

Environmental Report Disclaimer

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(HIPI The Hutchinson Island Preservation Initiative), July 2025