

# HIPI Environmental Report

## April 2026

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

### **HIPI Latest Updates**

HIPI (Hutchinson Island Initiative) had the Annual Meeting at the Elliot Museum, 25 March, 2026. The initial reaction from the meeting is that Martin County and the City of Stuart, are working toward a time when in coordination with the SFWMD (South Florida Water Management District) and the ACOE (Army Corps of Engineers), will see significant improvement in the water quality of our local rivers and tributaries. This result promises to see a return of oysters and other marine species which are limited today due to pollution.

### **Lake Okechobee Lake Level**

Data Ending 2400 hours April 6 2026 Current Lake level is: 12.19 (ft-ngvd), which is the same level as one month ago. The USACE is concerned that at this time of year, the level is too low!! They continue to monitor.

## US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) Update:

### 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. The construction is on schedule.

**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 is expected to be fully operational sometime in 2026.

**Proposed Rock Quarry:** (Possible Negative Issue to Track) – Sugar industry had been given an extension to February 2026. Below is the current update.

### Latest Developments ( March-April 2026)

- **Permit Reissued:** On **February 20, 2026**, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) reissued a permit for the project. This followed a settlement reached on February 19 between the project's contractor, **Phillips & Jordan Inc.**, and the **Tropical Audubon Society**, which had previously challenged the permit in court.
- **Approval for First Phase:** The state has now approved the digging of the mine for the project's first phase, which covers **2,242 acres** of the total 8,632-acre proposal.
- **Restricted Scope:** The settlement terms 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

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** has not yet issued the required **408** (modification of federal works) and **404** (dredge and fill) permits.

## **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.

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 work is part of the Indian River Lagoon–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, 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 Board of Commissioners**

### **Martin County Forever Land Acquisition Progress:**

Over the past few months, the county has closed on three properties through the program: Bar-B Ranch, Pal-Mar, and the Perry Beach Addition. Together, they represent thousands of acres of land that will now remain protected for generations to come.

### **New Additions:**

The Martin County Board of County Commissioners will accept a donation and approve the purchase of more than 4-1/2 acres of land in Hobe Sound.

Martin County Foard of Commissioners are reviewing a recommendation of the Environmental Lands Oversight Committee to approve a donation by Louise C. Yeiser of a 1.28-acre parcel along SE Dixie Highway adjacent to the Hobe Sound Scrub Preserve.

## **Stuart**

Nothing to report

## **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.

**We expect further update at the next Rivers Coalition Meeting in April on the Status of Florida State laws updated this session.**

## **Riverwatch Dredging Project.**

The dredging project is completed. Waiting for further developments at the time of this writing.



## **Florida DOT A1A Upgrade for 2026 – Update**

The Florida DOT will begin upgrading the US Route A1A at the end of the 1st Qtr 2026. HIPI has been engaged from the beginning of the planning for this construction project.

## **Other Actions of Interest**

The HSMC (Historical Society of Martin), Catherine Larsen the "Keeper" of the House of Refuge has been lobbying the County Commissioners on this public safety issue for to review the the safety for House of Refuge on MacArthur Blvd. It is actually a State road which is governed and controlled by FDOT. The State is to be contacted.

## **Roundup – This confirms our own findings that glyphosate is a health hazard.**

In 2000, a landmark study claimed to set the record straight on glyphosate, a contentious weedkiller used on hundreds of millions of acres of farmland. The paper found that the chemical, the active ingredient in Roundup, wasn't a human health risk despite evidence of a cancer link.

In December, the study was retracted by the scientific journal that published it a quarter century ago, setting off a crisis of confidence in the science behind a weedkiller that has become the backbone of American food production. It is used on soybeans, corn and wheat, on specialty crops like almonds, and on cotton and in home gardens. **(Source: NY Times)**

Paul Laura

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We reserve the right to change this policy at any given time.

(HIPI The Hutchinson Island Preservation Initiative), July 2025