

HIPI Environmental Report

February 2026

Objective: To provide our HIPI membership with information on environmental issues that affect our community.

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.

Lake Okechobee Lake Level

Data Ending 2400 hours 12 February 2026 Lake Okechobee Stage = 12.64 (ft-ngvd)

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.

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 has been given an extension to **February 2026** to respond to the questions/concerns, below.

The USACE is evaluating a proposed rock mining application in the EAA (Everglades Agricultural Area). There is concern with 2 areas:

- Rock Mining requires large amounts of water. What is the proposal for understanding how much water will be required.
- With the amount of water discharged that would be required from the mines, what is the plan to clean the water e.g. STA (storm water treatment area) requirements? The proposal does not address this vital issue!

South Florida Water Management:

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, 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 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

Nothing to report in February, 2026

Stuart

Stuart will get about \$2.6 million in a settlement of a claim against chemical giant DuPont de Nemours Inc. over contamination of the city's drinking water system with PFAS, city officials announced Feb. 9.

The problem stems from the contamination of drinking water systems with "forever chemicals," technically known as per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, also known as PFAS. Those substances have been linked to negative health effects in humans. The money should be used for testing and filters to remove PFAS so taxpayers can avoid having to pay for those things, Doug Collins, the city mayor, said.” (Source: Treasure Coast Newspapers)

Friends of the Everglades – No Update yet announced as of Feb 12, 2026 on the bills discussed below. Please visit their website www.everglades.org

There are a number of bills being introduced for review by the Florida Legislature. More info will be updated in February 2026. Here is an area of concern:

Big Sugar could get a potent new weapon to go after its critics, courtesy of the Florida Legislature.

[Senate Bill 290](#) and [House Bill 433](#), similar measures collectively dubbed the “Florida Farm Bill,” would broaden Florida’s existing “food libel law,” a measure passed decades ago which allows producers of perishable agricultural products to sue for damages if someone knowingly spreads false information claiming the products aren't safe for consumption.

Now, SB 290/HB 433, if passed, would allow agricultural producers to sue for disparagement of *non*-perishable products — like sugar.

Riverwatch Dredging Project.

At the time of this writing, The Riverwatch dredging project has almost been completed. The project is being closely monitored. Several discussions among environmental groups wonder if the net effect of the dredging will provide significant improvement for the community than originally envisioned?? The rather detailed, allowed, maintenance dredging permit, limits the boat size and the depth of the canal. It is meant to only be maintenance dredging and avoiding any seagrass. Wondering if the end result will justify the cost?? Riverwatch residents footed the bill through it’s HOA after many years of controversy. They gave up their rights to this easement over 30 years ago when they

violated laws for development by destroying mangroves. The easement is now protected by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection.



Presently, there are also threats to the deeded CE gas engine restriction that was recently guaranteed by the FDEP.

FFWC stated that the Riverwatch CE is no longer listed on the SLC and FWC maps. Riverwatch BOD has revealed the plan to take down the FDEP deed-required sign below.



Florida Oceanographic Society

The Oceanographic Group has been experimenting on some new strains of seagrass which has greater resistance to contaminants. The research is very promising. The work is based on modifications in the seagrass genetic profile.

Harbor Branch Symposium 2026 – Ongoing this month (February)

The Harbor Branch Indian River (IRL) Symposium Announcement.



2025 Turtle Nesting Season:

Martin County's 2025 Sea Turtle Season was busy, starting early with a potential record-early leatherback nest in February, seeing high nest counts (e.g. over 20,000 nests near Juno Beach by December)

Florida DOT A1A Upgrade for 2026 – U

The Florida DOT will begin upgrading the US Route A1A in the 1st Qtr 2026. HIPI has been engaged from the beginning of the planning for this construction project. At this time there are some markers being placed on the road in anticipation of beginning.

Other Actions of Interest

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

HIPI Environmental Director,

February 2026

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(HIPI The Hutchinson Island Preservation Initiative), July 2025