

HIPI Environmental Report

March 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.

Our Latest Updates

HIPI (Hutchinson Island Preservation Initiative) will have our Annual Meeting at the Elliot Museum on March 25th. Meet and Greet starts at 6pm with complimentary refreshments. We hope to see you there!

Lake Okechobee Lake Level

Data Ending 2400 hours 11 March 2026 Current Lake level is: 12.22 (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.

Latest Developments (February – March 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.**
- **New Deadlines:** The project developer was granted an extension until **February 27, 2026**, to submit updated, more complete plans and designs to the **South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD)**.

Project Status & Next Steps

The project is not yet fully 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 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.

Friends of the Everglades – Florida Legislation Update.

[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.

Florida lawmakers remove Big Sugar food libel wording from Farm Bill

[Senate Bill 354](#) and [House Bill 299](#) The bill tasks the Florida Department of Commerce with certifying the so-called “blue ribbon plans,” and once it approves a plan, local governments have little room to intervene.

Riverwatch Dredging Project.

The dredging project is completed. Waiting for further developments.



Florida DOT A1A Upgrade for 2026 – Update??

The Florida DOT has begun upgrading the US Route A1A. Significant improvements to storm water drainage is taking place. Existing lighting at the Jensen Beach Causeway is also being upgraded. HIPI has been engaged from the beginning of the planning for this construction project and was in attendance for the meeting on March 18th.

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

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Environmental Report Disclaimer

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All information posted is merely for educational and informational purposes. It is not intended as a substitute for professional advice.

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

(HIPI The Hutchinson Island Preservation Initiative), July 2025