

# HIPI Environmental Report

## December 2025

**Comment:** This is an end of year report which will highlight 2025 activities/initiatives.

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

### **Indian River Lagoon Economic Value:**

The Federal EPA and NOAA retained the Balmoral Group to conduct an economic evaluation of the Indian River Lagoon. The local economic impact of the Indian River Lagoon (IRL) generates \$28.3 Billion annually. An executive summary breakdown of the Lagoon's valuation is attached to this report

**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 22 Dec 2025** Lake Okechobee Stage = 13.50 (Feet-NGVD29)

### **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.

This project is part of the Central Everglades Planning Project aimed at restoring the Everglades ecosystem. It is an essential component to reduce the Lake Okeechobee discharges into our C44 canal and St Lucie River. Currently, Lake O water release has caused great harm to our local waterways; including green algae growth, released harmful fresh water diluting our saltwater endangering marine life and muck accumulation.

**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. This reservoir and additional one planned further north for Martin County/St. Lucie County watershed will significantly reduce pollution into the Indian River Lagoon. (See the next discussion point).

**Proposed Rock Quarry:** (Possible Negative Issue to Track)

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!

Sugar industry has been given an extension to February 2026 to respond. They will need to significantly improve on the environmental part of their proposed Rock Mining Request

## **South Florida Water Management:**

Plans for specifically controlling polluted runoff from C24&C25 canals into the IRL.

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.

The new South Florida Water Management Representative for Martin County is Tom Hurley who replaces Jackie Thurlow Lippisch.

## **Martin County Board of Commissioners**

A ship was sunk off the Jupiter outlet to develop a new reef.

Martin County stopped a development which would have extended the urban services boundary and changing the Rural Lifestyle area.

## **Friends of the Everglades**

This group monitors the Florida State Governments' actions. They are indicating concerns with several bills which, again, would limit the ability of local government to govern their districts. This requires constant vigilance by the local communities vs Florida State Government initiatives threatening local governing. The Friends of the Everglades is a key watchdog for our community.

## **Riverwatch Dredging Project.**

At the time of this writing, The Riverwatch dredging project is in progress. The project had been delayed for weeks. The reason for the delay has not been confirmed but it appears that the Florida Department of Environmental Protection has been monitoring their activity due to HIPI members and other environmental groups being on the scene to witness the dredging company violating the strict permit rules. Letters were sent by Patty Mockus to the FDEP reporting the violations which prompted officials to visit the site twice. As a result, the dredging company is aware they are being watched and we are hopeful that they will take extra care to not harm this beautiful conservation easement anymore than they already have.

## **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**

**The annual Harbor Branch Indian River (IRL) Symposium announcement. This year's theme is "Emerging Technology".**



## **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 (like over 20,000 nests near Juno Beach by December), and experiencing significant conservation efforts, including rescue operations and data collection on hatch success, with key findings shared through local groups like Loggerhead Marinelifelife Center and Discover Martin County. The season ended in late fall, but monitoring continued, emphasizing the need for beach-friendly practices year-round.

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

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. We have submitted adjustments to the planning and HIPI has been successful to get changes to the plan.

## **Hutchinson Island Presidential Council**

During various events occurring affecting Hutchinson Island, the Hutchinson Island Presidential Council has been formed representing our interests to maintain a lower new development profile. One HIPI achievement example is to protect Turtle Nesting keeping lighting at a minimum. HIPI and the Hutchinson Island Presidential Council are two (2) groups monitoring any threat to changes that affect our traditional way of life on

the island. A planned two-Hundred (200) light posts on A1A was canceled due to our efforts which would have significantly affected our Turtle Nesting.

We are further supported by our local Martin County, Commissioner, Eileen Vargas who is aligned with us.

Paul Laura

HIPi Environmental Director,

End of Year Environmental Report 2025

## **Environmental Report Disclaimer**

Please read this disclaimer carefully before reading our (HIPi) Hutchinson Island Preservation Initiative Environmental Monthly Report .

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

While the information herein has been verified to the best of our abilities, we cannot guarantee that there are no mistakes or errors or, that additional information superseding this report may have occurred after this publication.

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

(HIPi The Hutchinson Island Preservation Initiative), July 2025