

HIPI Environmental Report

January 2026

Comment: There is a lack of updates in this report due to the holidays. More info to follow in February's report.

Objective: To provide our HIPI members 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 when 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 Okeechobee Lake Level

Data Ending 2400 hours 12 January 2026 Lake Okeechobee Stage = 13.19(Feet-NGVD29)

US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) Update:

EAA Reservoir Project: *Further Update in February 2026*

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* – Further Update in February 2026

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) – Further update in February 2026

The USACE is evaluating a proposed rock mining application in the EAA (Everglades Agricultural Area). There are concerns 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.

South Florida Water Management: Further update expected in February 2026

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 of algae buildup.

Here is a recent CBS News January 2026 report - MARTIN COUNTY, Fla. (CBS12) — A major, long-term cleanup effort is underway on the Treasure Coast aimed at reducing polluted runoff flowing into the Indian River Lagoon and the St. Lucie River, according to state and federal water managers.

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 designed to clean water upstream rather than allowing it to flow directly into sensitive waterways.

Friends of the Everglades

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 had again started. The project is being closely monitored by many environmental groups. The dredging was approaching its finish and there will be a survey done by the Florida DEP after it is completed to ensure the rules of the permit were followed. Drone and camera coverage has also been used to monitor the project.

Florida Oceanographic Society – Update in February 2026

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.

The Harbor Branch Indian River (IRL) Symposium Announcement

Anyone interested in attending this year’s IRL Symposium please click the link below for more information and registration.

[Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institute IRL Symposium | Florida Atlantic University](#)

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.

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.

Last month, 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.

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(HIPI The Hutchinson Island Preservation Initiative), July 2025