



EVERGLADES COALITION

2023 Legislative Priorities

The Everglades Coalition is an alliance of nearly 60 local, state and national conservation and environmental organizations dedicated to full restoration of the greater Everglades ecosystem, from the Kissimmee Chain of Lakes into Lake Okeechobee, through the “River of Grass,” out to Florida Bay and the Florida Keys. The Everglades is widely recognized as one of the world’s most unique and spectacular natural wonders, and Florida has a compelling interest in protecting and restoring the ecosystem due to its tremendous economic and ecological value.

Everglades and the Economy: Florida’s Most Valuable Resource

- Tens of thousands of jobs are supported by a healthy Everglades in Florida’s multi-billion-dollar tourism, boating, real estate, recreational and commercial fishing industries.
- Nearly eight million people – more than one-third of Florida’s population – depend on the Everglades for their daily water supply.
- More than 1.6 million Florida jobs depend on tourism.¹
- South Florida’s national parks – Everglades and Biscayne National Parks and Big Cypress National Preserve – supported over 5,000 jobs and generated \$378M in visitor spending to Florida’s economy in 2021.²
- The Sanibel and Captiva Chamber of Commerce and Fort Myers Beach Chamber of Commerce reported combined losses of \$87 million between July-December 2018 and 4.4 million pounds of dead marine life removed from Lee County beaches between June-September due to algal blooms and red tide.
- In August 2018, algae discharged into the St. Lucie River from Lake Okeechobee tested positive for microcystins at a level of 495.06 parts per billion, which is nearly 50 times more toxic than the level considered safe for human contact.³
- Florida’s waterways have been impacted by recurrent harmful algal blooms and seagrass die-offs that have damaged local economies and business, harmed wildlife, and threatened human health and safety.
- The iconic West Indian Manatee has suffered catastrophic starvation fatalities linked to seagrass die-offs from impaired water quality, generating national media coverage of this environmental crisis and impacting Florida’s ecotourism economy.⁴
- Proposed urban sprawl outside Miami-Dade’s Urban Development Boundary threatens Everglades restoration efforts, further jeopardizing the ecological and economic benefits of a functional Everglades ecosystem.

¹ <https://www.visitflorida.com/en-us/about-us.html>

² <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/socialscience/vse.htm>

³ <https://www.tcpalm.com/story/news/local/indian-river-lagoon/health/2018/08/29/dep-highly-toxic-blue-green-algae-dam-leading-st-lucie-river/1131439002/>

⁴ <https://myfwc.com/media/25428/preliminary.pdf>

The Everglades Coalition is a 501(c)3 alliance of local, state, and national conservation organizations dedicated to the full protection and restoration of America’s Everglades.

evergladescoalition.org

In 2023 the Everglades Coalition urges the Florida Legislature to:



Fully fund Everglades restoration:

Support Governor DeSantis' Executive Order 23-06 by ensuring that the Florida Legislature reaffirm the state's commitment to protecting our Everglades and estuarine communities by supporting sufficient funding to ensure the accelerated rate of Everglades restoration continues.



Implement the recommendations of the Blue-Green Algae Task Force to address harmful algae blooms that plague the Greater Everglades ecosystem:

Governor DeSantis created the Blue-Green Algae Task Force upon taking office and in the wake of one of the worst algae outbreaks in the state. The Task Force produced legislative recommendations which should be prioritized in the 2023 session. These include supporting enforcement mechanisms for agricultural best management practices (BMP) rather than relying on presumption of compliance principles. Second, we recommend that, to augment existing FDEP regulations, the state adopt EPA guidelines for blue-green algae toxins as new water quality standards in Florida to better control the impacts of algae blooms in critical components of the Greater Everglades ecosystem, including Lake Okeechobee, the Caloosahatchee estuary, and the St. Lucie estuary.



Restore Citizens' Planning Rights to protect our investment in Everglades restoration from sprawl and over-development:

In the 2019 legislative session, the Legislature limited the ability of citizens to challenge development orders by amending Fla. Stat. 163.3215 with HB 7103 which provides for prevailing party attorney fees for development order challenges, even if they are meritorious. In the three years since the bill was signed into law, there have been only two challenges to development orders, at a time when growth and development in the state was reaching all time records. In order to restore meaningful citizen engagement to protect Everglades restoration lands from sprawl and over-development, HB 843/SB 816 Challenges to Development Orders, should be signed into law. The bill prohibits parties that voluntarily subject themselves to the risk of litigation from recovering prevailing party attorney fees.

The Everglades Coalition is a 501(c)3 alliance of local, state, and national conservation organizations dedicated to the full protection and restoration of America's Everglades.

evergladescoalition.org



Strengthen protection for all waters — Everglades, estuaries, wetlands, springs, lakes, rivers, coastal waters and beaches:

The Florida Legislature must engage in an overhaul of Florida's water policy to stop pollution at its source and reduce the likelihood of recurring toxic algal blooms that plague the Greater Everglades ecosystem, coastal communities, and Florida's wildlife. Legislative efforts must focus on strictly regulating the use of biosolids; supporting the implementation and enforcement of restorative BMAPs; as well as to store and clean water; and mandate that all regional water plans account for and prioritize water for the environment. The Legislature must prioritize land acquisition to protect wildlife corridors and increase ecosystem connectivity.



Reinstate strong statewide and regional land use planning to guide sustainable growth that is protective of Florida's remaining natural areas and resources, including the taxpayer investment in Everglades restoration and Florida Forever:

The Florida Legislature must reinstate the necessary authority, funding, and resources for an independent state land planning agency to meaningfully oversee comprehensive land use planning. This is particularly important with the recent increase in state resiliency funding and the need for local and regional involvement in resiliency planning. The ability of Regional Planning Councils to evaluate and challenge developments exhibiting significant regional and intergovernmental impacts must be restored.



Protect Everglades restoration investments from the impacts of climate change through expansion of renewable energy, increased demand and supply-side energy efficiency, safeguarding the water, and by ensuring oil exploration and drilling projects do not undermine Everglades restoration efforts:

The Florida Legislature must prioritize climate change mitigation and adaptation to ensure the long-term resiliency of the infrastructure in the C&SF system upon which Everglades restoration relies. The Legislature must also prioritize actions that will promote water conservation, and protect against saltwater intrusion to ensure enough water is available to advance Everglades restoration while safeguarding our drinking water supplies and guarding against storm surge and sea level rise. The legislature should invest in renewable energy and energy efficiency efforts and should implement a statewide ban on all forms of unconventional oil well stimulation, while safeguarding the home rule authorities of local governments. These actions will help reduce pressure on our natural resources and will support the restoration of our Everglades.



Provide support to communities impacted by Hurricane Ian by calling for sustainable rebuilding of southwest Florida and continued investment in ecosystem restoration to protect our coastal communities from future storm events:

The Florida Legislature must address issues of climate resiliency, including shoreline migration, while supporting the rebuilding of southwest Florida following the devastating impacts of Hurricane Ian. The legislature must prioritize actions to support and stabilize this important pillar of the Everglades community while also investing in climate resilience by:

- Restoring coastal habitats that can capture and store carbon dioxide emissions and help buffer shorelines;
- Reducing the effects of flooding by absorbing and slowing the flow of water;
- Prioritizing investments in nature-based solutions such as mangroves, oyster reefs and wetlands, that are known to reduce storm impacts in coastal and inland communities;
- Updating building codes, relocating communities, and providing financial incentives and support to move from vulnerable areas;
- Spending Land Acquisition Trust Fund dollars for the acquisition of conservation land that is essential to the restoration of the Everglades by providing such benefits as wetland protection; water storage, treatment, and conveyance; aquifer recharge; and flood abatement.

These actions will ensure that our state continues climate readiness preparations and is equipped for the impacts of the next major storm event.