



2025 FLORIDA LEGISLATIVE SESSION SUMMARY

WATER AND ENVIRONMENTAL PRIORITIES

CITY OF SANIBEL

JULY 3, 2025

OVERVIEW

The 2025 Florida legislative session convened on Tuesday March 4, 2025, was extended well beyond the scheduled 60 days, finally adjourning *sine die* after several extensions on Monday June 16th. The 2025 Session shaped up to be one of the most unique in recent memory. Throughout the Session the two chambers of the legislature and the Governor's office were unable to agree on tax proposals and spending allocations from which to formulate the FY25-26 Budget. The Regular Session ended on May 2nd with no agreement and was then extended into June. With the end of the regular Session, policy bills that had not yet passed did not move forward. Once budget allocations were established the typical process was condensed and a budget passed on June 16th.

Water and environmental policy and funding legislation was limited this session and represented a retreat from prior year commitments by the State for environmental funding. While Everglades funding remained a priority and the legislature continued to put significant resources into water quality projects, the prior year commitment of dedicating Seminole Gaming Compact revenue for future environmental spending was rescinded. Additionally, the manner in which appropriations for the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) were allocated changed in a very meaningful way. For the past 20+ years, the legislature, with a few very minor exceptions, allocated money for CERP in one lump sum, allowing the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) to move money between projects so that if one project faced delays the entire program could keep moving. However, this Session the legislature had a specific line item for every project, constraining how the SFWMD will need to project future needs and allocations moving forward.

Leading into Legislative Session, the City of Sanibel identified specific local and regional policy and funding priorities:

Regional Priorities

1. **Everglades Restoration – SUPPORT** Governor DeSantis' proposal to allocate \$805 million for everglades restoration for FY25-26, including \$670 million to support the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) and \$130 million for additional restoration and water quality improvements.
2. **Water Quality and Quantity – SUPPORT** Legislation and budget appropriations that support:
 - The Central Everglades Planning Project (CEPP) and the Everglades Agricultural Area (EAA) Reservoir.

- Continued funding and construction for regional water quality and storage projects in the Caloosahatchee Watershed to implement the Caloosahatchee Watershed Protection Plan and the Basin Management Action Plan.
- The ongoing work of the Blue-Green Algae Task Force and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) Red Tide Harmful Algal Bloom Task Force.
- The Water Quality Improvements Grant Program, and a continued allocation specifically for projects in the Caloosahatchee Watershed to assist local governments in constructing critical stormwater and nutrient removal projects to meet the State's Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs) Program.

POLICY BILLS

Through the Legislative Session, we monitored policy and funding bills as they were proposed and moved through the process. During the 2025 Session there were few environmental bills of direct significance to Sanibel relative to prior years. Of particular significance was a bill that created additional limitations on the SFWMD in CERP planning (did not pass) and a bill that rescinded recurring funding for water quality projects (did pass). Below is an overview of environmental bills of significance for the City of Sanibel.

SB 2506/HB 5011 – Last year HB 1417/SB 1638 was passed by the legislature, which committed 96% of all revenues collected from the Seminole Gaming Compact for land acquisition, resiliency projects and water projects. This created a large sum of recurring revenues to implement the State's environmental restoration goals. This Session, through discussions on balancing the budget and future tax cuts, the House filed HB 5011, a budget conforming bill to rescind last year's dedication of Seminole Gaming Compact revenues. SB 2506/HB 5011 was considered during the extended Session in June, passed through the legislature as part of the budget compromise and signed by the Governor. While the dedicated source of revenue for water quality projects and land acquisition has been rescinded with minimal allocations in the budget this year, the total allocation for earmarked individual local water quality projects was significant.

SB 180 – Early in the legislative session a separate bill was filed in the Senate, SB 810, which would have required every political subdivision to inspect stormwater management systems under their control by June 1 and report to the Division of Emergency Management (DEM) annually. This bill faced significant opposition from both counties and municipalities over cost and necessity. After multiple changes, language was incorporated into SB 180, a bill regarding emergency preparedness. The final bill language requires the FDEP to work with water management districts, counties, cities and flood control districts to produce a report by September 1, 2026 and every two years after, for the Department of Emergency Management on priority needs for flood control infrastructure, vulnerable areas and an inspection schedule for infrastructure in vulnerable areas.

SB 492/HB 1175 – Updated rules for mitigation banking and how credits are released. The bill also allows for and specifies a manner by which credits can be applied outside of the service area.

SB 7002/HB 1169 – Water Management Districts. This bill did not pass. The stated intent of SB 7002 was to add criteria for all water management districts regarding transparency. The initial bill also added language to allow for the water management districts to levy as separate ad-valorem tax for the construction of projects (which the WMDs already can do) with a majority vote of the electors, and proposed restrictions on how the South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force can project future funding in the development of the Integrated Delivery Schedule.

Through the legislative session several amendments were filed, most notably to loosen the initial restrictions on the State appointed members of the South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force. In the final days of the Regular Legislative Session, slightly different versions of the bill were passed by each Chamber. The bill however, died in messages when time expired on the Regular Session.

One of the primary goals of the bill from the outset was to itemize all CERP expenditures, ending the ability of the SFWMD to move monies from one project to another. In prior years the allocation for CERP funding has generally been in one single appropriation allowing the SFWMD the flexibility to put money where needed to expedite the entire program. Budget requests to the legislature are typically created by the SFWMD over a year in advance. By the time the appropriation occurs the amount actually needed will often change, going up or down based on project delays, costs or other variables. The itemization of appropriations for each CERP project was reflected in the final budget bill. Language that allows the SFWMD to request shifting of the appropriations outside of Session through the Legislative Budget Commission, was also carried over in proviso language in the budget.

2025 APPROPRIATIONS

The 2025 budget includes appropriations for most of Sanibel's regional environmental funding priorities. The budget also specifically includes the remaining funding requested for the C-43 Reservoir, and sufficient funding in the Northern Everglades line item for regional water storage a quality projects in the Caloosahatchee watershed. The total CERP funding is the same as last year, \$614 million, with \$148 million allocated for CEPP/EAA Reservoir and \$90 million for the C-43 Reservoir. Additional Sanibel priorities that were funded include \$10.8 million for the Blue Green Algae Task Force, \$10 million for "innovative technologies" for the removal of algae and an additional \$5 million for emergency response/cleanup of harmful algal blooms.

Regional/State Appropriations

Appropriation 1531: "Northern Everglades" \$76.5+ million: This money goes to the South Florida Water Management District for projects in the Northern Everglades area. The allocation matched the Governor's Legislative Budget Request. While the proviso does not require funding for any specific project, the intent of the appropriation will cover the funding needed for:

- Boma FEB
- C-43 Water Quality treatment testing
- Lake Hicpochee Phase II
- Various dispersed water management projects, most of which are in the Caloosahatchee or Lake Okeechobee BMAPs

Appropriation 1531B-K: Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) \$614 million. This includes the following specific appropriations:

- \$148,075,852 for the EAA Reservoir
- \$90,000,000 for the C-43 Reservoir
- \$54,346,161 for C-111 South Dade
- \$102,151,698 for Indian River Lagoon South reservoirs
- \$7,000,000 for Biscayne Bay Coastal Wetlands
- \$15,000,000 for CEPP South
- \$152,380,000 for CEPP North
- \$19,290,000 for the Loxahatchee River Restoration project
- \$25,756,289 for Western Everglades

Appropriation 1535: Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) Lake Okeechobee Watershed Restoration Project (LOWRP) Implementation \$50 million. This money is specifically allocated for the design, engineering and construction of features north of Lake Okeechobee and the construction and operation of the Aquifer Storage and Recovery (ASR) wells. It is important to note that this money is potentially cost-share creditable towards CERP.

Appropriation 1525: "Dispersed Water Storage" \$5 million – This is a recurring appropriation, which is being used to fund the operation of all the initial Dispersed Water Management projects. These projects have both water quality and water storage benefits. All of these projects are in either the Caloosahatchee or Lake Okeechobee watersheds.

Appropriation 1553A: “Caloosahatchee Basin Water Storage and Treatment - Turkey Branch” \$10 million – This is an appropriation for another large scale disperse water storage project in the Caloosahatchee watershed. The project is 17,000 acres and is anticipated to provide both significant water quality and water storage benefits.

Appropriation 1883: “Everglades Restoration” up to \$6.1+ million (up to, depending on toll revenue) – This money comes from Alligator Alley Toll Revenue and is for ongoing mitigation for the construction of I-75. The money is restricted to expenditures in the southern part of the Everglades ecosystem. Historically, this money has been used to maintain and monitor projects that send water south into the Everglades.

Algae Research/Removal

Appropriation 1522: Blue Green Algae Task Force - \$10.8 million – This money will be used for the continued administration of the Blue Green Algae Task Force, water quality monitoring, the administration of a public informational web portal, and administrative costs.

Appropriation 1532: \$5 million to assist Counties in response to emergency conditions associated with Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs).

Appropriation 1529: \$10 million specifically for grants to local governments for innovative technologies to find short term solutions for harmful algae blooms, including Blue Green Algae.

Other Appropriations of Interest

Appropriation 1576: Total Maximum Daily Loads - \$25 million – This money is allocated to DEP to implement Basin Management Action Plans (BMAPs) State-wide.

Appropriation 1658: Resilient Florida Grants - \$150 million – This money is allocated to DEP for projects to implement the Statewide Flooding and Sea Level Rise Resilience Plan years one and two. As projects are completed and fall off the list additional monies will be allocated each year.

Appropriation 1659: Resilient Florida Planning Grants - \$20 million – for local governments to complete planning of resiliency projects in order to become eligible for Resilient Florida grants.

Appropriation 1551: Alternative Water Supply \$50 million – This allocation funds the DEP/WMD state-wide program for local alternative water supply initiatives and projects.

Appropriation 1555: \$3.5 million to the Angler Action Foundation for the planting of seagrass in the Caloosahatchee River Estuary (CRE).

Appropriation 1569: \$8 million for FGCU’s Water School to conduct a comprehensive water quality study to identify and analyze impaired rivers, including upstream nutrient sources, to determine the root cause of such impairments.

Appropriation 1501: Land Acquisition - \$18 million – This money is allocated for land acquisition through the Florida Forever program.

Appropriation 1367: Conservation Easement - \$250 million – This money is allocated to the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services Rural and Family Land program for the acquisition of conservation easements.

Total Everglades Funding

While there are many appropriations that the governor and legislature may consider “Everglades related”, the following are an aggregate of the line items that are directly associated with restoration of the Everglades Ecosystem. The line items that are cost-share creditable and are required to maintain the State’s legal obligation to remain ahead of Federal government spending have been noted.

Line #	Program	Amount
1715	Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan, includes EAA Reservoir, C-43, and other CERP projects (eligible for the federal cost share under CERP)	\$614,000,000
1719	Lake Okeechobee Watershed Restoration Project (eligible for the Federal cost share under CERP)	\$50,000,000
2082	Alligator Alley Mitigation	\$6,132,690
1716	Northern Everglades	\$76,528,059
1636	Dispersed Water Management	\$5,000,000
Total Everglades Funding		\$751,660,749