



## 2026 FLORIDA LEGISLATIVE SESSION SUMMARY

### WATER AND ENVIRONMENTAL PRIORITIES

CITY OF SANIBEL

JUNE 3, 2026

#### OVERVIEW

The 2026 Florida legislative session convened on Tuesday January 13, 2026, and adjourned *sine die* on Friday March 13<sup>th</sup>. The 2026 Session shaped up to be similar to last Session with a slow start to policy discussion during Committee weeks, dominated by property tax debates in the House and concern over future year budget projections. During the Committee weeks leading into the Legislative Session budget forecasts showed a slowing of revenues in future years.

It became clear early in Session that the Legislature would aim to constrain spending in the FY 26-27 budget in an attempt to lessen future year shortfalls. But similar to last year the two chambers of the legislature were again unable to agree on tax proposals and spending allocations from which to formulate the Budget during the Regular Session. More surprising were the limited policy committee meetings and as a result the limited number of bills that moved through the process. The Regular Session ended on March 13<sup>th</sup> with no budget agreement and, similar to last year, a Special Session was required to finish budget drafting. The Special Session for budget ran from May 12<sup>th</sup> to May 29<sup>th</sup>. The number of policy bills that were passed overall was significantly less than prior years.

Similar to last session, water and environmental policy legislation was minimal. Overall funding for Everglades restoration was reduced due to the legislature's decision to pull back funding for the Indian River Lagoon South projects. I anticipate the overall reduction in Everglades funding to be the start of a gradual ratcheting back moving forward. While Everglades funding still remains a priority and the legislature continued to put significant resources into water quality projects, once again the legislature decided to allocate the entirety of the monies for water quality projects to specific local governmental requests rather than fund the State Water Quality grant program through the Department of Environmental Protection. In a break from prior years, but similar to last year, appropriations for the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) were once again allocated as a line item for each specific project, maintaining stricter control over the South Florida Water Management district.

Leading into Legislative Session, the City of Sanibel identified specific environmental priorities:

#### General Policy

*Local Land Use Planning – SUPPORT legislation and collaborative efforts to revise Section 18 and Section 28 of Senate Bill 180 (2025) to ensure that Sanibel maintains its Home Rule authority to complete comprehensive land use planning and to approve local ordinances that will improve community resilience to natural disasters. Sections 18 and 28 of Senate Bill 180 severely limit Sanibel's ability to put forward needed amendments to its comprehensive plan and land development code after experiencing the*

*catastrophic impacts of Hurricane Ian in 2022 and Helene and Milton in 2024. As a community that was severely impacted by recent storms, and as a community that is working to meet the objectives of the Resilient Florida Program (Senate Bill 1954 - 2021), Sanibel sees a great need to amend the resulting laws from Sections 18 and 28 of Senate Bill 180 so local communities can effectively plan and implement codes to improve resiliency.*

***Environmental Stewardship:*** *Lead by example in environmental stewardship to restore, preserve, and enhance our island sanctuary, lead on issues to positively impact local water quality, and support land conservation, waste minimization, renewable energy, and provide recurring education on the Sanibel Plan.*

## **Budget**

***Water Quality and Quantity - SUPPORT*** *legislation and budget appropriations that support: 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, including research, water and air quality monitoring, prediction, notification, and mitigation efforts pertaining to red tide and blue-green algae.*
- *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.*

***Everglades Restoration - SUPPORT*** *funding to meet Governor DeSantis' goal detailed in Executive Order 23-06 to invest \$3.5 billion over 4 years and maintain funding for the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) consistent with prior year funding of over \$650 million in order to complete critical infrastructure projects.*

- ***SUPPORT*** *expedited progress on the Central Everglades Planning Project (CEPP) and the Everglades Agricultural Area (EAA) Reservoir, to ensure that these critical projects move forward in accordance with the Integrated Delivery Schedule (IDS).*

## **POLICY BILLS**

Through the Legislative Session, we monitored policy and funding bills as they were proposed and moved through the process. Few environmental bills of direct significance to Sanibel were proposed and even fewer were adopted. Below is an overview of environmental bills that were of significance to the City of Sanibel's environmental priorities.

## **Bills that Passed**

SB 302/HB 1035 – Requires the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) to adopt a rule regarding green and gray infrastructure for shoreline hardening. This includes mangrove planting, dune restoration, beach renourishment, etc., incentives to implement such projects, and streamlined permitting. This bill was passed during the Regular Session and was signed into law by the Governor.

SB 1510/HB 1417 – Allows public private partnerships for coastal resiliency projects and notably repeals the Environmental Regulatory Commission, which in years past was a State advisory body to the DEP for environmental rule making. The bill was signed into law by the Governor.

HB 1457/SB 848 – Establishes and directs DEP to initiate rule making for Water Quality Enhancement Areas, a form of water quality credit trading or mitigation banking for water quality projects. This bill was signed into law by the Governor.

## **Bills that Did Not Pass**

SB 840/HB 1465 – This was a Sanibel priority – to amend the relevant portions of SB 180 adopted in the last legislative session that prohibited local governments from adopting any more restrictive regulation if they were located within 100 miles of a landfalling storm. The bill passed through all Senate Committees and a floor vote with no dissenting votes. However, the bill did not have a single committee meeting in the House and therefore died from lack of action.

HB 701/SB 1120 – Among other provisions of the bill, SB 1120 would have added criteria for all water management districts regarding transparency and ethics and an allowance for a water management district to levy as separate ad-valorem tax for the construction of projects with a majority vote of the electors. This was nearly identical to a bill filed last year. Although it made it through the Senate process, there were no House Committee hearings, and the bill did not pass.

HB 239/SB 558 – This bill would have required inspection standards for County and municipal stormwater systems. The bill did not move forward.

HB 479/SB 718 – This bill was originally filed as a broad preemption of any local government regulation of wetlands or water quality. It was replaced by a Committee Substitute to limit the preemption only to local government from regulating the upland buffer areas around wetlands. After one hearing in the House the bill did not move forward.

HB 669/SB 1042 – Among other provisions, this bill would have required local governments to issue health advisories if water sampling shows a failure to meet Department of Health standards and issue a beach closure if deemed necessary. This bill received one committee hearing in the House and did not move forward after.

## 2026 APPROPRIATIONS

The 2026 budget includes appropriations for most of Sanibel’s regional environmental funding priorities, including continued sufficient funding for the Northern Everglades program to continue regional water storage and quality projects, most of which are in the Caloosahatchee and Okeechobee watersheds. The total CERP funding dropped from last year as a result of removal of projects in the Indian River Lagoon. CEPP and EAA Reservoir maintained full funding. Additional Sanibel priorities that were funded include \$10 million for “innovative technologies” for the removal/prevention of harmful algae blooms and an additional \$5 million for emergency response/cleanup of harmful algal blooms. Funding for the Blue Green Algae Task Force was eliminated and funding for the States Water Quality Grant program was zeroed out in the budget through direct appropriations for local government water project requests.

### Regional/State Appropriations

*Appropriation 1744: “Northern Everglades” \$74.5+ 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 projects such as the Boma FEB, Lake Hicpochee Phase II and various dispersed water management projects, most of which are in the Caloosahatchee or Lake Okeechobee watersheds.

*Appropriation 1744B-F: Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) \$475.4+ million.* This includes the following specific appropriations:

- \$15,000,000 for CEPP South
- \$10,713,427 for CEPP North
- \$424,694,375 for the EAA Reservoir
- \$20,000,000 for the Western Everglades Plan
- \$5,000,000 for easements and land

*Appropriation 1744B-F: \$38.5 million* for the Lower Kissimmee STA, which will have significant water quality benefit for Lake Okeechobee.

*Appropriation 1751: 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 1738: “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 2110: “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 expenditure 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 1745: \$5 million* to assist Counties in response to emergency conditions associated with Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs).

*Appropriation 1742: \$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 1797: Total Maximum Daily Loads - \$20 million* – This money is allocated to DEP to implement Basin Management Action Plans (BMAPs) State-wide.

*Appropriation 1880: Resilient Florida Grants - \$160 million* – This money is allocated to DEP for projects to implement the Statewide Flooding and Sea Level Rise Resilience Plan.

*Appropriation 1881: Resilient Florida Planning Grants - \$10 million* – for local governments to complete planning of resiliency projects in order to become eligible for Resilient Florida grants.

*Appropriation 1771: Alternative Water Supply \$50 million* – This allocation funds the DEP/WMD state-wide program for local alternative water supply initiatives and projects.

*Appropriation 1555: \$2.5 million* to the Angler Action Foundation for the planting of seagrass in the Caloosahatchee River Estuary (CRE).

*Appropriation 1559: Conservation Easement - \$200 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 to funding State agencies to implement restoration activities in the Everglades Ecosystem. The line items that are cost-share creditable and are required to maintain the State’s legal obligation under the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan to remain ahead of Federal government spending have been noted.

Line #	Program	Amount
1738	Dispersed Water Management	\$5,000,000
1744	Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan, including: EAA Reservoir, CEPP and other CERP projects (eligible for the federal cost share)	\$475,407,802
1744	Lower Kissimmee STA	\$38,592,198
1744	Northern Everglades	\$74,576,213
1751	Lake Okeechobee Watershed Restoration Project (eligible for the Federal cost share)	\$50,000,000
2110	Alligator Alley Mitigation	\$6,132,690
<b>Total Everglades Funding</b>		<b>\$649,708,903</b>