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### Water Management Newsletter

March 26, 2025

# Recent discharges have benefited Caloosahatchee



The Caloosahatchee River is shown on Jan. 23, 2022, during a plane ride provided by the Calusa Waterkeeper. ANDREW WEST/THE NEWS-PRESS

### But releases might slow down as Lake O water level drops

Chad Cillia

#### Chad Gillis

Fort Myers News-Press USA TODAY NETWORK – FLORIDA

#### March 21, 2025

Spring is the time of year when the Caloosahatchee River needs water most from Lake Okeechobee, and pulse releases are ongoing to feed the river's delicate estuary. But Okeechobee releases may slow soon as surface levels are about 13 feet above sea level, the lower end of the management threshold for the liquid heart of the Everglades.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers controls lake levels, and the agency has been making discharges to both coasts for months in an effort to lower levels for the health of the lake.

Okeechobee has been higher than it should be for the past four or five years, and the submerged aquatic vegetation there has shrunk to a few thousand acres, perhaps 10% of its range in recent years.

See LAKE O, Page 4A

### Lake O

Continued from Page 1A

"I think (the Army Corps) is more than willing to help the lake at this point," said Barry Rosen, a water quality professor at Florida Gulf Coast University.

"They're trying to mimic rainfall and that's good enough for water flow in the river. But the lake has been too high for the (submerged aquatic vegetation) and the emerged grasses, and the turbidity is high."

The concern is that the lake will drop below 13 feet above sea level, to 12 feet or lower.

"What if we're at 12 feet in a month from now and then you get down into water supply management," Rosen said. "They're 1.3 feet above the management zone, and if they get there you will have complaining from agriculture." Army Corps spokesman John Rebello could not be reached for comment prior to press time.

Lake Okeechobee was artificially connected to the Caloosahatchee and St. Lucie rivers as a way to drain Lake Okeechobee and the Everglades for farming and development.

Over the decades, lake water has been polluted by farm and urban runoff, and water from the lake is filled with pollution like excess nutrients, which can cause a myriad of water quality issues.

Still, the Caloosahatchee needs that dirty water to sustain the brackish balance in the coastal estuary.

Water in the upper watershed once sat on the landscape for most of the year, slowly feeding the Caloosahatchee.

The upper watershed has been "ditched and drained" in the past 100 years, and rain that falls there (mostly during the rainy season) now flows to the Gulf as fast as gravity will allow.

The lower levels have already helped the lake ecologically as wading birds and dabbling ducks are able to feed again in the marshes.

"They can dabble," said Paul Gray, a bird expert with Audubon Florida. "When we're at 13 feet there's about 38,000 of acres of marsh that's dried out. And at 13 feet, there's 12,000 of submerged aquatic vegetation that is in 6inch or less of water. And it's really good for wading birds, especially the little blue herons and tri-colored herons."

Gray said the lake has seen as much as 50,000 acres of submerged aquatic vegetation as recently as 2008.

#### How's the fishing?

Fishing is an indicator of the overall health of a system like the Caloosa-hatchee and its estuary.

Mike Westra is the owner of Lehr's Economy Tackle in North Fort Myers,

and his shop caters to fishermen who target the river.

"They're pulsing the lake is to keep the water flowing from time to time, so it doesn't get stagnant," Westra said of Army Corps actions. "It's just the time of year when everything is drawing down, but the fishing in the river if turning on really good. Tarpon have turned up here in the last couple of weeks and it seems like the switch has been turned on."

Rosen said the altered lake is a figment of its former glory, and that anything that helps the marshes will help what's left of the wading bird population.

"The lake is so artificial at this point that your marsh is confined within dike, and it used to stretch out well beyond the dike, Rosen said. "And the lake would swell to 21 feet. Wetlands need that fluctuation. For a lake that's been high for four to five years, we want to lake level to get down for the health of the lake."

### Officials seek millions for Anna Maria pier repairs

### Jesse Mendoza

Sarasota Herald-Tribune USA TODAY NETWORK March 19, 2025

The city of Anna Maria has largely returned to normal following heavy impacts from hurricanes Helene and Milton last year, but repairs to the city pier could still be a long way off. Mayor Mark Short told the Herald-Tribune that preliminary inspection work for repairs to the Anna Maria city pier were completed over the past two months, and that the city will soon advertise the job of demolishing and removing debris and pilings from the destroyed pier walkway that remain in the water. However, Short said funding is the biggest obstacle for repair work to the city's famed pier, and a timeline for that work cannot be established until the city lines up financial support for the project.

"We do not, at this time, have a firm

### See PIER, Page 9A

### Pier

Continued from Page 1A

timeline on the rebuild of the pier," Short said. "Mission critical, quite honestly, is going to be how this all gets paid for... It's going to be millions of dollars. I don't have an exact number, but it's going to be several million dollars to rebuild this."

### Anna Maria seeks funding for city pier rebuild

ing assist us with to address the actual construction," Short said.

"We want to build this thing back with bigger and stronger pilings, with cement," he said. "We want to build the walkway like the 'T' end was built, but that costs more money. That's why we're in the middle of talking with FEMA, the state, the county. We are talking with all of them about any assistance that they may be able to provide with the reconstruction work."

### City of Anna Maria tourism heats up despite two missing piers

Anna Maria is looking to federal, state and local partners to split the cost of hurricane Helene and Milton damage repairs.

Short said city officials aim to rebuild the pier walkway to the same standard as construction used for the "T" section of the pier. The two hurricanes destroyed the pier walkway, but the "T" section which supports a building occupied by the Mote Marine Laboratory for public education of local marine life — survived despite some damage.

City officials are waiting to learn if the Federal Emergency Management Agency will offer funding for repairs, and will seek additional contributions from other potential funding partners such as the state and Manatee County.

"As a city we need to get some commitments from other agencies in terms of what they are willThe damaged city pier has not stopped tourists from flocking back to Anna Maria Island this year.

Short said that overall the city has been "back in business" since around the Thanksgiving holiday, but tourism to Anna Maria beaches has steadily heated up since early February. He expects the trend to continue with spring break now drawing crowds to local beaches.

"We are now in the middle of spring break, and this is the big spring break week here because the public school systems in Manatee County, Hillsborough County, Pinellas County, and Sarasota County" are off this week, Short said. "We anticipate that trend is going to continue because the schools up north tend to have their spring break closer to Easter. The outlook, as I understand from our vacation rental companies, is that every week it gets better."

## **COASTAL CONCERN**

### Help sea turtles have nesting success this year special to the citizen March 20, 2025

Nesting season has begun for sea turtles along Florida's beaches, and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission reminds residents and visitors ways to help protect vulnerable nesting and hatchling sea turtles while visiting Florida's coastal areas.

Sea turtles typically return to nest in March along Florida's southeast Atlantic coast, while nesting begins on the Gulf Coast or



More TURTLES | A7

Sea turtle nesting season has begun along Florida's beaches, and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission reminds beachgoers to help protect the vulnerable creatures.





Beachgoers, and nearby residents and visitors, should be alert to sea turtle nests.

This green turtle prepares to make the long trek back to the ocean from her nest.



PHOTO PROVIDED BY FLORIDA FISH AND WILDLIFE CONSERVATION COMMISSION

Loggerhead hatchlings are seen along a Florida beach.

### **Turtles**/from A1

North Florida beaches in April or May. Because our state's shorelines provide important nesting habitat for several species of threatened and endangered sea turtles, beachgoers can have a significant impact on the success of this year's nesting season.

There are a variety of steps to help nesting sea turtles in order to protect them, including giving them space, minimizing disturbances and keeping beaches clean and dark.

Any lighting can misdirect and disturb nesting sea turtles and their hatchlings, leading them away from the ocean and toward potential danger. To prevent this, beachgoers should use natural starlight to see while on the beach at night and avoid using flashlights or cellphones.

Anyone living along or eggs. visiting Florida beaches Trash, holes in the sand can do their part by putting and other obstacles can porch, parking or deck also prevent sea turtle lights out when not in use (3922). hatchlings from reaching and closing curtains after

dark to avoid disorienting nesting and hatchling sea turtles on the beach. If lighting is still visible from the beach, be sure it is long, low and shielded.

While it can be exciting to witness sea turtles on the beach, getting too close (50 feet or less) to nesting sea turtles can cause them to leave the beach before they complete the nesting process. If an animal changes its behavior, you're likely too close. It is illegal to harm or disturb nesting sea turtles, their nests and eggs, or to pick up hatchlings.

Female sea turtles expend large amounts of energy crawling out of the surf and far enough up the sand in order to dig and lay nests in spots that are less vulnerable to the tides. Obstacles on the beach can entrap and prevent them from nesting as they crawl across the sand to lay their

the water once they emerge from their nests. Food scraps attract predators, such as raccoons and crows, that prey on sea turtle hatchlings.

Litter on beaches can entangle sea turtles, birds and other wildlife. Properly stash or recycle all trash, fill in man-made holes in the sand, and remove all beach toys, gear and furniture from the sand before sunset.

Fishing line can be deadly to sea turtles, waterbirds and other wildlife, and should be disposed of properly. To find a nearby monofilament recycling station, visit mrrp.myfwc. com.

For information about nesting sea turtles and how to help, visit MyFWC. com/SeaTurtle or see the FWC's "Be a Beach Hero" brochure. Other ways to help sea turtles include reporting those sick, injured, entangled or dead to the FWC's Wildlife Alert Hotline at 888-404-FWCC

### Florida's Water Crisis: Red Tide, Nitrogen Pollution, and Ecological Restoration in Tampa Bay

Introduction: The Alarming State of Tampa Bay's Water Quality and the University of Florida's Response

### Forwardpathway.us

#### March 23, 2025

Alright, everyone, the editor is back! And let me tell you, the situation in Tampa Bay is getting real. We've laid the groundwork, now it's time to dive deep (pun intended!) into what's actually happening with that water.

Picture this: You're chilling on a pictureperfect beach in Southwest Florida. Sun's out, sky's blue... and then you start coughing. Your eyes are watering. Turns out, that "fresh ocean breeze" is actually a lungful of toxins. According to a recent report from February 2025, a massive red tide bloom, stretching over 200 miles from Tampa Bay all the way down to Key West, turned the water a grotesque burnt orange. And it wasn't just a visual blight; the bloom brought with it respiratory irritation, fish kills, and beach closures galore. The concentration of Karenia brevis, the culprit behind these toxic blooms, was reaching a staggering 22 million cells per liter in some areas - way past the "high concentration" threshold. Seriously, not the beach day vibes we were hoping for.

Tampa Bay isn't just some pretty postcard backdrop, though. This estuary is a vibrant ecosystem, teeming with life. It's also a massive economic engine, fueling tourism, fisheries, and countless other industries. Think of the recreational opportunities: boating, fishing, kayaking... the list goes on! People flock here from all over the world to experience its natural beauty.

But this paradise is under siege. We're talking about a triple threat of water quality woes: persistent red tide blooms rampant nutrient pollution, and the heartbreaking loss of crucial seagrass habitats. These problems aren't isolated incidents; they're interconnected and escalating.

That's where the University of Florida (2025 USNews Ranking: 30) steps in. Researchers at UF are on a mission to tackle these issues head-on, and one name keeps popping up: Amanda Muni-Morgan. This rockstar scientist is dedicating her Ph.D. research to understanding and mitigating the impact of nutrients, especially nitrogen, that are fueling those nasty algal blooms. She's not just crunching numbers in a lab; she's collaborating with the Mote Marine Laboratory & Aquarium to get real-world insights and develop practical solutions.



Tampa Bay.

Unraveling the Nitrogen Puzzle: UF's Innovative Research on Dissolved Organic Nitrogen in Stormwater

Okay, buckle up, because we're about to get into the nitty-gritty science!

Let's talk about nitrogen. It's not inherently evil; in fact, it's essential for all life. However, in the context of red tide blooms, nitrogen is like giving Karenia brevis a super-sized energy drink. These little algae absolutely thrive on it, and an overabundance of nitrogen leads to explosive growth, resulting in those massive, toxic blooms we all dread. When these blooms occur, Karenia brevis cells multiply exponentially, depleting oxygen in the water and releasing brevetoxins, nasty neurotoxins that wreak havoc on marine life. Fish, marine mammals, seabirds - all are vulnerable. The toxins can also become aerosolized, causing respiratory irritation in humans. So, while nitrogen is a building block of life, too much of it becomes a deadly weapon in the hands (or, rather, flagella) of Karenia brevis. Understanding how nitrogen fuels these blooms is the first crucial step in finding ways to control them. It's like figuring out the villain's weakness in a superhero movie

ecosystem is key to developing effective ent mitigation. It's like having a superstrategies for starving the red tide.

So, how is Amanda Muni-Morgan tackling this complex problem? Her research methodology is multi-pronged and pretty impressive. First, she's collecting stormwater runoff samples from various locations around Tampa Bay. This involves setting up sampling stations at different points in the watershed and gathering water during rain events. Then comes the lab work. Muni-Morgan and her team are conducting experiments where they add these stormwater samples to cultures of Karenia brevis. By carefully monitoring the growth of the algae in response to different types of stormwater, they can determine which sources of nitrogen are most readily utilized. This is where the collaboration with Mote Marine Laboratory & Aquarium comes in. Mote provides expertise in Karenia brevis physiology and bloom dynamics, allowing Muni-Morgan to connect her findings to real-world bloom events. This synergistic approach ensures that the research is both scientifically rigorous and practically relevant. It's a true partnership, combining academic expertise with on-the-ground knowledge.

A key weapon in Muni-Morgan's arsenal is a high-resolution mass spectrometer located at the National High Magnetic Field Laboratory in Tallahassee. This isn't your average lab equipment, folks. This baby can analyze the molecular structures of DON with incredible precision. High-resolution mass spectrometry works by separating molecules based on their mass-to-charge ratio. The "highresolution" aspect means it can distinguish between molecules with incredibly similar masses, allowing scientists to identify tens of thousands of different chemical formulas in a single stormwater sample. Why is this important? Because DON isn't just one thing; it's a complex soup of different organic molecules, each with its own unique properties and potential to fuel red tide. By identifying the specific molecular structures of DON, Muni-Morgan can trace these compounds back to their sources, whether it's pet waste, leaf litter, or something else entirely. This level of detail is unprecedented and allows for a much more targeted approach to nutripowered microscope that can see the individual ingredients in the red tide's recipe!

Okay, so what kind of stuff are we talking about when we say "sources of DON"? Well, picture this: Fluffy goes potty on the lawn, the rain comes, and those pet waste byproducts get washed into the stormwater system. Decaying leaves and grass clippings are other big culprits. Even seemingly innocent things like car exhaust and atmospheric deposition can contribute DON to stormwater runoff. Basically, anything that contains organic matter and nitrogen can potentially end up in Tampa Bay as DON. Identifying the relative contribution of each of these sources is crucial for developing effective management strategies. If pet waste is a major source, then promoting responsible pet ownership and providing pet waste disposal stations could make a significant difference. If leaf litter is the problem, then improved street sweeping and leaf collection programs could be the answer. It's all about figuring out where the nitrogen is coming from and targeting those specific pathways.

Muni-Morgan's work isn't happening in a vacuum. Other researchers are also tackling the issue of stormwater runoff and nutrient pollution, but her approach is pretty unique. While some studies focus on inorganic nitrogen or broad categories of pollutants, Muni-Morgan is diving deep into the molecular composition of DON. This allows her to identify specific sources and develop targeted mitigation strategies. For example, she might discover that a particular type of DON is disproportionately fueling red tide blooms. This would allow policymakers to focus their efforts on reducing that specific type of pollution, rather than implementing broad, less effective measures. This level of specificity is what sets Muni-Morgan's research apart and makes it so promising. It's like moving from a general understanding of "pollution is bad" to a precise diagnosis of "this specific molecule from this specific source is the biggest problem." This precision is essential for creating effective and efficient solutions.

So, where is all this excess nitrogen coming from? Well, it's a cocktail of culprits. We're talking about urban runoff washing pollutants off our streets, agricultural practices leaching fertilizers into our waterways, and aging wastewater infrastructure leaking... well, you get the picture. It's a complex problem with no single, easy fix.

The burning question is: can we turn the tide (another pun, sorry!)? This article will focus on the groundbreaking research being conducted at the University of Florida, particularly Amanda Muni-Morgan's work. We'll dissect her methodologies, explore the advanced technologies she's employing, and, most importantly, evaluate the potential impact of her findings on mitigating red tide blooms and restoring the health of

– knowledge is power!

Now, let's zoom in on dissolved organic nitrogen, or DON. Unlike inorganic forms of nitrogen, which are readily available, DON is a bit more complex. It's essentially nitrogen tied up in organic molecules, like the decaying bits of plants and animals. DON represents a significant portion of the total nitrogen in many aquatic ecosystems, including Tampa Bay. While it was previously thought that Karenia brevis preferred inorganic nitrogen, recent research has shown that they can indeed utilize DON as a food source. This changes the game because it means we need to understand not just the *amount* of nitrogen entering Tampa Bay, but also the *types* of nitrogen and how readily available they are to Karenia brevis. Think of it like this: DON is like a slowrelease fertilizer for red tide, providing a sustained source of fuel that can prolong and intensify blooms. Knowing how DON cycles through the Tampa Bay

The Broader Context: Urban Runoff, Sewage Spills, and the Intensification of Red Tide

Alright, let's zoom out a bit, because Tampa Bay isn't the only place dealing with these issues. The editor is about to drop some knowledge on the wider context!

Urban runoff, as we've discussed, is a major contributor. Think of it as the grime and gunk of city life getting flushed into our waterways. But it's not just the everyday stuff; major weather events can exacerbate the problem. Take Tropical Storm Debby, for example. A report highlighted how Debby's heavy flooding led to significant wastewater overflows and urban stormwater runoff into the Sarasota-Bradenton area. Dave Tomasko, director of the Sarasota Bay Estuary Program, pointed out the "detrimental effects on water quality" caused by these overflows. And it's not just stormwater; sewage spills are a HUGE problem. Suncoast Waterkeeper monitored spills across the region and found that municipalities reported at least 6.6 million gallons of sewage spilled thanks to Debby! Justin Bloom, the founder of Suncoast Waterkeeper, called out Manatee County and the City of Sarasota for not even providing estimates of sewage spilled. That's... not great, folks. These spills introduce massive amounts of nutrients and bacteria into the water, creating a breeding ground for harmful algal blooms and other nasty stuff. The good news? Tomasko expressed relief that red tide didn't appear to be a major problem immediately after Debby. But let's be real, that was probably just luck.

Florida's water crisis goes way beyond just red tide. We're talking a full-blown emergency, with toxic algal blooms and even flesh-eating bacteria making headlines. A recent article in the Daily Kos painted a pretty bleak picture, highlighting the "consequences of neglect" and the prioritization of "corporate interests over public health and safety." The article points out that red tide is getting worse because of nutrient runoff from agriculture and urban development, with hurricanes stirring up nutrient-rich sediments and making the problem even more intense. And it's not just the marine life that's suffering; the air quality gets degraded, and local economies dependent on tourism and fishing take a major hit. The article also mentioned Vibrio vulnificus, the flesh-eating bacteria that's thriving in warm, polluted waters, especially after hurricanes. Infections can be deadly, and the author points out that cases surged in 2023. Decades of unchecked development, agricultural pollution, and weak environmental regulations have created this mess. The author, Danika Fornear, who is running for the Florida State House, calls for stricter regulations and a commitment to clean water initiatives. It's a stark reminder that our water crisis is a multifaceted problem with serious consequences.

dence. The research, focusing on the Caloosahatchee River, showed a clear correlation between increased nitrogen levels from sources like agricultural fertilizers, septic tank leaks, and urban stormwater runoff and the intensity of red tide along the coast. While red tides are natural events, the study confirmed that human activities are significantly amplifying their impact. Christine Angelini, director of UF's Center for Coastal Solutions, emphasized that this research clarifies the human link to red tide, which was previously uncertain. The study also highlighted the importance of improved water-quality monitoring and nutrient pollution reduction. Nonpoint sources of pollution, which aren't regulated by the Clean Water Act, were identified as major contributors. The bottom line? We're not just innocent bystanders; our actions are directly fueling these toxic blooms. It's a harsh truth, but acknowledging it is the first step towards finding solutions.

Politically and regulatorily, managing Florida's water quality is a tangled web. There's a constant tug-of-war between environmental protection and economic development. The state's dependence on tourism and agriculture often clashes with the need for stricter regulations on nutrient pollution. Lobbying from powerful industries can weaken environmental protections, and funding for water quality monitoring and restoration projects is often insufficient. Navigating this political landscape requires strong leadership, bipartisan cooperation, and a commitment to long-term sustainability. It's not just about passing laws; it's about enforcing them effectively and ensuring that polluters are held accountable. Finding a balance between economic interests and environmental responsibility is a crucial challenge that Florida must address to protect its water resources.

The economic consequences of red tide are staggering. When the blooms hit, tourism plummets as beaches close and visitors stay away. Fisheries are decimated as massive fish kills wipe out populations. The cost of cleanup and monitoring adds further strain to the economy. Businesses along the coast suffer as customers disappear, and the overall impact can be felt throughout the state. Red tide isn't just an environmental problem; it's an economic crisis that threatens the livelihoods of countless Floridians. It's like a slow-motion hurricane, gradually eroding the economic foundations of coastal communities.

To sum it all up, the intensification of red tide blooms in Tampa Bay and Florida is driven by a combination of factors: urban runoff, sewage spills, agricultural runoff, inadequate wastewater treatment, and weak environmental regulations. Human pollution is exacerbating a natural phenomenon, creating a toxic cycle that threatens our environment, our economy, and our health.

This means a multi-pronged approach. Improved stormwater management is paramount, and that could look like more green infrastructure, like rain gardens and bioswales, to naturally filter pollutants before they reach our waterways. Upgrading our wastewater treatment infrastructure is also nonnegotiable. We're talking about modernizing aging plants to reduce nutrient discharge and prevent those awful sewage spills. Regulations are key here; we need to make sure that developers and agricultural operations are following best practices to minimize their impact. And, honestly, we need to hold polluters accountable. Stronger enforcement of existing regulations and hefty fines for violations could go a long way. It's about creating a system where it's cheaper to be clean than to pollute. Think of it as preventative medicine for Tampa Bay – addressing the root causes before they lead to a full-blown crisis.

Luckily, it's not all doom and gloom! There are initiatives working to improve Tampa Bay's water quality. The Tampa Bay Times, in partnership with Tampa Electric, hosted a community conversation to discuss the future of Tampa Bay's water resources. That's a great start, bringing together experts and community members to hash out solutions. Ed Sherwood from the Tampa Bay Estuary Program, Peter Clark from Tampa Bay Watch, and Margaret Mars Brisbin from USF's College of Marine Science were all involved, showing a collaborative effort across different organizations. The Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) is also actively monitoring water quality in Tampa Bay, particularly around Port Manatee. They're collecting data and making it publicly available, which is fantastic for transparency and accountability. This allows researchers and the public to track progress and identify areas of concern. The DEP's website provides an interactive map where you can click on specific sampling sites and view the data. These monitoring efforts are essential for understanding the effectiveness of different mitigation strategies and for adapting our approach as needed. It's like having a vital signs monitor for Tampa Bay, allowing us to track its health and respond to any warning signs.

But let's not sugarcoat it; implementing these solutions is going to be tough. Funding is always a major hurdle. Upgrading wastewater treatment plants and implementing large-scale stormwater management projects requires billions of dollars. Securing that funding, especially in a political climate where environmental protection is sometimes viewed as a luxury, is a constant struggle. Political obstacles are another challenge. Powerful industries often resist regulations that could impact their bottom line, and navigating the complex web of competing interests requires skillful negotiation and unwavering com mitment. And, let's not forget the complexity of the ecosystem itself. Tampa Bay is a vast and diverse environment, and understanding how different factors interact is crucial for developing effective solutions. It's like trying to solve a giant jigsaw puzzle with missing pieces; it requires patience, persistence, and a will-

ingness to adapt our approach as we learn more.

Community engagement and public awareness are critical components of protecting Tampa Bay's water resources. When people understand the issues and feel empowered to take action, they become powerful advocates for change. This could involve volunteering for cleanup efforts, participating in citizen science monitoring programs, or simply making more sustainable choices in their daily lives. Educational campaigns can raise awareness about the sources of pollution and the steps individuals can take to reduce their impact. It's about fostering a sense of collective responsibility and empowering people to become stewards of their environment. Think of it as building a team of citizen scientists and environmental advocates, all working together to protect Tampa Bay.

UF's research, particularly Muni-Morgan's work on DON, plays a crucial role in informing effective mitigation strategies. By identifying the specific sources of nitrogen fueling red tide blooms, her research can help policymakers target their efforts and allocate resources more efficiently. The highresolution mass spectrometry provides a level of detail that was previously unavailable, allowing for a much more nuanced understanding of the problem. This research is not just about generating data; it's about translating that data into actionable solutions that can protect Tampa Bay's water quality. It's like providing a GPS for policymakers, guiding them towards the most effective routes for restoring the health of the bay.

Ultimately, ensuring a sustainable future for Tampa Bay requires collaboration and commitment from all stakeholders. Policymakers, researchers, and citizens must work together to address the challenges of nutrient pollution and red tide. This means investing in infrastructure, implementing effective regulations, promoting public awareness, and supporting ongoing research. It's about recognizing that the health of Tampa Bay is inextricably linked to the health of our economy and our communities. It's a shared responsibility, and by working together, we can create a brighter future for this vital ecosystem.

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#### UF Research Aims to Help Reduce Nitrogen Flow into Tampa Bay

Debby's Impact on Sarasota-Bradenton Water Quality: Flooding and Sewage Spills

Florida's Water Crisis: Red Tide, Flesh-Eating Bacteria, and the Consequences of Neglect

The Connection Between Human Pollution and Florida's Worsening Red Tide

So, how are human activities directly linked to these worsening red tide outbreaks? A study by University of Florida scientists, discussed in a WUSF article, provides some pretty compelling evi**3** /

Looking Ahead: Solutions, Challenges, and the Future of Tampa Bay's Water Quality

Okay, team, let's brainstorm some solutions! The editor is ready to put on her thinking cap. First off, we need to seriously clamp down on nutrient runoff. <u>Outbreaks</u>

Swath of Red Tide Forms Along Southwest Florida Coast

Tampa Bay Sampling Response and Results

How Can We Improve Tampa Bay's Water Quality? We're About to Find Out.

### How Trump rollbacks could increase pollution in Florida

The EPA announced it would ax rules curbing pollution from power plants, cars and more.

#### BY EMILY L. MAHONEY AND MAX CHESNES March 23 2025

Times Staff Writer March 23, 2025

In a sweeping announcement, Environmental Protection Agency Secretary Lee Zeldin last week proclaimed that the federal government would roll back 31 bedrock environmental regulations. The agency called it the "biggest deregulatory action in U.S. history" and said it would lower costs for American families.

If the agency follows through on this pledge, it could alter protections for fragile Florida wetlands and scale back rules that keep the state's air and water clean. The administration is also targeting multiple regulations designed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, which contribute to the climate change that Floridians have already begun to experience.

Environmental advocates said it amounted to nothing less than an unprecedented abandonment of the agency's mission to protect the natural world — and the public from pollution.

"Florida is just bound to get hit the hardest, with the climate emergency we're having," said Raul Garcia, vice president of policy and legislation at the environmental law firm Earthjustice. He pointed to last year's catastrophic hurricane season in which storms **See EPA, 4B** 



An aerial view of the Tampa Electric Big Bend Power Station. Trump is targeting emissions regulations. (LUIS SANTANA | Times, 2017)

### EPA continued from 1B

were supercharged by an unusually hot Gulf of Mexico, plus the state's property insurance crisis.

"People are still thinking (climate change) is happening 10 years from now," Garcia said. "This is happening today, and I think few people know this as well as Floridians."

Zeldin's announcement does not automatically rescind the rules. Rather, it's a signal that the administration will start the process of clawing back regulations, which requires the government to prove that they were based on either flawed science or legal reasoning. That won't be easy, environmentalists said, as some of these rules have established records of benefitting public health through reducing asthma attacks, cancer and more. Lawsuits are virtually guaranteed.

And it's unclear whether Florida voters, who overwhelmingly supported Donald Trump in last year's election, will back this move. Across the political spectrum, polling has found that Floridians are environmentally conscious. Last vear's bipartisan backlash to plans to put golf courses and hotels in state parks added more evidence. "I am a Trump supporter – but only to a point," said Don Brugman, a St. Petersburg resident disappointed by the rollbacks. "Why go backwards? We've gained so much - so why lose it now?"

Now, with the nation's foundational clean water law targeted by the new federal leadership, some Florida environmental experts worry the state's wetlands could be increasingly at risk.

The Trump administration this month signaled it aims to implement a 2023 Supreme Court ruling to further limit protections by determining where a wetland begins and ends. It comes down, in part, to how the Trump administration defines a "discrete feature," like a pipe, ditch or culvert that connects federally managed waters to a nearby wetland.

A core argument at stake is whether wetlands are a part of not separate from — federal waters.

Thomas Mullin, who represents homebuilders and developers for the South Florida law firm Bilzin Sumberg, said the presence of a pipe or a culvert on a property could define the area as a wetland and warrant a lengthy oversight process.

But with the new guidance from Environmental Protection the Agency, what Mullin considers a "major hang-up" in the permitting process could now be cleared up. "This is much-needed clarification," Mullin said. "It brings certainty to the federal permitting process." Other lawyers argue that if a wetland isn't considered connected to a federal waterbody and thus not eligible for protections, developers would be able to bypass guardrails designed to save endangered species and curb pollution. "I think this has the potential to remove a large number of wetlands from federal jurisdictions, which places a lot of water bodies and endangered species and tribal resources in jeopardy," said Jaclyn Lopez, director of the Jacobs Public Interest Law Clinic for Democracy and the Environment at Stetson's College of Law.

a larger conversation among top Florida government officials has grown in recent months about further limiting federal reach in state ecosystem restoration. Gov. Ron DeSantis, for example, has launched a push to take over Everglades restoration from the feds.

Last year, a judge said federal agencies, including the Environmental Protection Agency, violated the law in 2020 when they allowed the Florida Department of Environmental Protection to assume control of wetlands permitting.

On Monday, however, U.S. Sens. Rick Scott and Ashley Moody introduced a bill to reverse the judge's ruling by putting permitting power back in state hands.

Federal estimates show that before rampant development swept across the marshy state, wetlands spread more than 20 million acres across Florida. While that number has been reduced by roughly half in the modern era, Florida still has more wetlands than any of the nation's other 47 contiguous states.

### **Power plants**

Earlier this year, in a letter first

attractive. Utilities previously said carbon-capture technology was impossible to implement by the deadline, and observers expected the rules to hasten the retirement of coal plants throughout the country.

In their letter to Zeldin, utility companies wrote that if left in place, the greenhouse gas rule would have "grave consequences for the reliability of the nation's power system and the cost of electricity."

Duke Energy burns coal at its power plant in Crystal River. In Hillsborough County, Tampa Electric's Big Bend power plant also burns coal some of the time.

When asked whether rollbacks would change their plant operations, neither Duke nor Tampa Electric provided specifics. Both emphasized steps they're already taking to burn less coal and build solar farms.

"We will continue maintaining our high standards," said Tampa Electric spokesperson Jennifer Hall. "We are already exceeding emission reduction targets."

In addition to greenhouse gas emissions, the rules targeted by the rollbacks also curb mercury and other toxic air pollutants from power plants, especially those that burn coal.

Here's how some of the rollbacks could impact Florida:

### Wetlands

For years, the legal definition of a wetland has sparked disputes over who has authority over Florida's network of marshes and swamps — and who decides whether they can be filled in for development.

This latest rollback comes as

reported by the Tampa Bay Times, Duke Energy and other utilities asked Zeldin to rescind rules requiring power plants to reduce planet-warming greenhouse gas emissions and better clean up coal ash that can leach dangerous chemicals into groundwater.

This latest announcement grants those wishes.

One set of rules likely to be rolled back essentially requires coal-fired plants to capture smokestack emissions or shut down by 2032, while many new natural gas-fired power plants must eliminate 90% of their carbon dioxide emissions.

To do this, utilities would have to use expensive carbon-capture technology, likely making renewable options like solar more Garcia, the Earthjustice lawyer, said the mercury rule has been in place for at least a decade.

"It's hard to find another rule that does more to save lives and it's so easy to comply with than mercury," he said. "Why? Because everybody understands mercury is toxic — you don't even want to touch it — and these plants are emitting it into the air."

Susannah Randolph, director of Sierra Club Florida, said axing the mercury rule would amount to a "five-alarm fire." When the Biden administration strengthened the rule last year, officials estimated it would prevent 1,000 pounds



Great egrets mix with wood storks and white ibis while hunting in a cypress swamp on Feb 7, 2022, in Land O' Lakes in Pasco County. Wading birds are important ecological indicators because their health reflects the health of Florida's wetlands, according to the National Audubon Society. (DOUGLAS R. CLIFFORD | Times, 2022)

over four years.

Hillsborough resident Paul C. Prose, Jr. read about all the potential changes to power plant rules with concern. He lives afraid that I'll have the same prob-

of mercury from entering the air about 5 miles from the Big Bend plant, he said.

> "I used to get a lot of black soot on my lanai from the coal," he said. "Finally it got better. Now I'm

lem again with the change in the laws."

### Car emissions and electric vehicles

Florida drivers were initially slower to adopt EVs than those in other states, but in recent years have embraced electric vehicles at a rapid pace – registering a greater share of EVs last year than most of the country.

Some of the rules now on the chopping block, though, could impact that momentum. Zeldin wants to slash car tailpipe emission standards implemented by the Biden Administration designed to target the nation's largest source of greenhouse gases and hasten the development of EVs.

Kenneth Hernandez, chairperson of the pro-EV nonprofit Drive Electric Florida whose members include utility companies, said that so far, much of Florida's progress on EVs has been driven by consumer demand rather than by any government support. Florida's state government has been cooler to EVs than others and has lagged behind implementing a federally funded program to build more chargers near highways.

That means that a scaling back of government EV support might not hit Florida as hard as other places, Hernandez said. But if the rollbacks start causing car-makers to hesitate before launching new models, that could be a different story.

"If consumers have fewer choices, that's going to have an impact," he said. "Consumers are still wanting to buy electric vehicles - the market in Florida is saying that. ... As long as when they choose to buy them they actually can, I would think the consumer sentiment would remain the same."

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### Class-action lawsuit says sugar maker misleading

Hannah Phillips

Palm Beach Post USA TODAY NETWORK March 19, 2025

WEST PALM BEACH — A federal class-action lawsuit has accused one of the nation's largest sugar producers of misleading customers into believing that its farming practices in Florida help combat climate change.

The lawsuit, filed on behalf of California resident Macy Merrell, said the West Palm Beach-based Florida Crystals promotes its sugar as environmentally friendly — a practice known

### See SUGAR, Page 4A

### Sugar

Continued from Page 1A

as "greenwashing" — while contributing to climate change, air pollution and soil degradation.

Florida Crystals, which did not respond to multiple requests for comment, maintains that its sugar is the result of "Farming to Help Save the Planet." Its organic sugar packages and social media campaigns are stamped with promises to "fight climate change & build healthy soil."

Merrell, represented by the Malibubased Clarkson Law Firm, said Florida Crystals's continued use of preharvest sugarcane burning contradicts these promises, releasing fine particulate matter, greenhouse gases and other pollutants into the atmosphere, as well as "poisoning local residents, who are disproportionately poor and people of color."

"The drifting plumes of pre-harvest burns are so engrained in the everyday life of the Glades that locals have a name for the ash that falls on them, their homes, and their children," the lawsuit said. "Black snow."

According to studies cited in the complaint, preharvest burns generate more emissions than green harvesting methods, which involve cutting the cane without burning away the outer leaves. Merrell argued that by burning sugarcane while touting its environmental commitment, Florida Crystals intentionally misleads consumers who are willing to pay a premium for sustainable products.

The Federal Trade Commission warns against vague or unqualified claims of sustainability. The lawsuit against Florida Crystals and its parent company, the Fanjul Corp., says its packaging and promotional materials violate these standards by failing to disclose the full environmental impact of its practices.

Beyond emissions concerns, the plaintiffs argue that Florida Crystals' farming methods degrade soil quality rather than "building healthy soil," as the company claims. Scientific studies cited in the lawsuit indicate that



In this March 2020 photo, sugarcane burns in preparation for harvesting along State Road 80 near 20-mile bend.

ALLEN EYESTONE/PALM BEACH POST

burned sugarcane fields release significantly more soil-bound carbon dioxide than fields where green harvesting is practiced.

While other major sugar-producing countries like Brazil, India and Thailand have restricted or outright banned the practice, Florida allows the burns to continue largely unabated. The complaint points to the company's lobbying efforts as a means of maintaining the status quo, accusing Florida Crystals of prioritizing profit over environmental responsibility..

Merrell seeks monetary damages "on behalf of herself and those similarly situated consumers who purchased the product" and an injunction barring Florida Crystals from continuing to market its products as environmentally friendly. The plaintiffs argue that without court intervention, the company will continue to profit from misleading claims, while consumers remain unaware of the true impact of its farming practices.

In a statement to the British newspaper The Guardian, the company said it is the only grower of sugarcane in the U.S. that is Regenerative Organic Certified, an independent certification that represents the highest standard for organic agriculture in the world with stringent requirements for soil health.

"Florida Crystals' regenerative agriculture program improves soil health, increases biodiversity and conserves water, among other benefits," the statement read.



Manatee County is seeking the state's help to conserve 550 acres of land in Myakka that could form a key link in the Florida Wildlife Corridor. Part of the land they are looking at is past the tree line midway in this photo taken March 13, 2025. Betts Road is seen on the left and part of Anson Road, a private road, is on the right.

### Manatee County looks to protect Myakka land with purchase

BY RYAN BALLOGG rballogg@bradenton.com Bradenton Herald March 23, 2025

#### BRADENTON

Manatee County officials hope to partner with the state to add a key link to the Florida Wildlife Corridor near Myakka City.

That potential link is a 550acre stretch of land in East Manatee County — space that county staff say could help endangered Florida panthers traverse the state and allow threatened Florida scrub jays to nest while also giving residents a new place to enjoy nature.

The property surrounds Anson Road, a private country road just east of Betts Road and south of State Road 70, near Dakin Dairy Farms. The land, which is roughly the same size as Rye Preserve in Parrish, is about 24 miles east of downtown Bradenton.

Staff and volunteers with the county's Environmental Lands Program say buying the property, which they call the Myakka Corridor Addition, would also help form a crucial connection between conservation lands to the north and south. The land is valued at around \$9.5 million dollars, according to property records, and the owner is willing to sell. Staff say they're looking to split the cost between Manatee County's voter-approved conservation fund and funding from the state's Florida Forever program.

"Without the partnership of Florida Forever, we'd be paying 100% of the purchase price. With their partnership we have an opportunity for significant funds," said Manatee County Environmental Lands Program Manager Debra Woithe during

### NEW PRESERVE COULD LINK MYAKKA TO DUETTE, HELP FLORIDA PANTHER

a recent Land Use Meeting. Woithe asked board members to sign off on a letter of support for the project to help secure the state funds.

### COUNTY EYES MYAKKA LAND FOR CONSERVATION

The property contains a mix of farmland, wilderness and a few structures. Several qualities, including its location, make it a very appealing choice for conservation, staff say.

"It's immediately adjacent to the 105-acre Triple Oak Pre-

around the state are in a race against development

### LAND

serve that we closed on in September," Woithe told county commissioners.

Combined with Triple Oak, the Myakka Corridor property could become a wilderness bridge that helps link Myakka River State Park to the south with Duette Preserve and other conservation lands to the north.

Woithe said as the Triple Oak property neared closing, she reached out to the landowners of the Anson Road properties and found out they were In September, the project gained the full backing of the Environmental Lands Management and Acquisition Committee (ELMAC), the all-volunteer group that helps prioritize county conservation efforts.

willing to sell.

"This property is awesome because it started off with the desire of the family that owns it to work with the county and protect where their home is," said Mason Gravley, EL-MAC's chairman. "It's blossomed into this really cool relationship, and potentially the ability to connect these lands to the north and south."

In addition to creating a mini wildlife corridor in Manatee County, the new preserve would contribute to the Florida Wildlife Corridor - a statewide conservation project that aims to conserve nearly 18 million acres of land and protect 200 imperiled plant and animal species. Of that goal, about 9.6 million acres, or 54%, have been conserved, according to the Florida Wildlife Corridor Foundation.

Conservationists, nonprofits and governments to save the remaining pieces.

"Even though there's not a ton of our county in the Florida Wildlife Corridor, the part that is there is a really essential piece," said Gravley, who also works for the Florida Wildlife Corridor Foundation. "We're homing in on this area for panthers that use the Myakka River Valley to get up to Duette."

Florida panthers have recently been sighted in East Manatee County, and conservationists are hoping that protecting more land in the area could aid in a longstanding goal to help the cats move north. Around 200 panthers are estimated to remain in the wild, and they are mostly concentrated in South Florida, where they face increasing threats from development, pollution and record deaths on Florida roads. But wildlife biologists believe there is still hope for the species if they can establish healthy populations in other parts of the state.

Gravley said Manatee County residents should be proud of the conservation efforts that they voted to support with tax dollars in 2020. The tax that funds the county's Environmental Lands Program costs the average homeowner about \$45 per year.

"I think we can be a really good example of how to slow down and manage our growth and prioritize the places that need to be protected," Gravley said. "It's doing our part to make sure that vision comes to be."

### COMMISSION SUPPORTS MYAKKA LAND BUY: 'GREAT OPPORTUNITY'

"This is something that really excites me," said Commissioner Carol Ann Felts, whose district includes Myakka. "A few years ago, we voted to increase our property taxes, which is a phenomenon to get anybody to do. But with that increase, we've added on so many green spaces."

"This is something that's going to give us almost our own mini corridor," Felts said. "These are large parcels of property."

"This is an incredible opportunity," said Commissioner George Kruse. "Not just for the county, but the fact that with this letter we can potentially leverage our ELMAC funds, which are slowly dwindling in terms of availability. This is a great opportunity to get a lot of money from Florida Forever to help facilitate creation of more green space and environmental protection that these taxpayers wanted here in Manatee County."

Commissioners voted 6-0 to send the letter of support, with Commissioner Tal Siddique absent.

### WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

Woithe said state conservation officials gave initial approval for adding the Myakka corridor to the Florida Forever Priority List in December, which would make the project eligible for state funding. A final vote will be held in April, Woithe said. State officials asked Manatee County leaders for a letter of support before moving forward.

County staff hope to close on the property this year.

Before buying conservation lands, staff negotiate a selling price with the landowner. If an agreement on the sale price is reached, the deal comes back to the Board of County Commissioners for final approval.

### WHAT TO KNOW ABOUT PROPOSED MYAKKA CORRIDOR NATURE PRESERVE

Here are some more details about the land that Manatee County is considering for its next nature preserve:

- The 551-acre group of properties contains several habitats, including scrub, wet prairie, marshes, wetlands and hardwood forest.
- A large chunk of the property is pasture land that can be restored into wildlife habitat, county staff say.
- There are gopher tortoises on the property, and staff say it could be another future location for the county's gopher tortoise relocation program.
- Staff say the Myakka Corridor land would be

a prime place to expand recovery efforts for the Florida scrub jay, the only bird species unique to the state. Duette Preserve and other nearby conservation lands are home to an estimated 50 to 60 scrub jay families. County staff and their partners, including state agencies and Mosaic, have set a goal of at least 100 families in Manatee County to ensure the population's genetic health and survival.

- Recreation opportunities at the preserve could include hiking, biking, horseback riding, birding, stargazing, camping and hunting, a staff report said.
- County officials have so far made three land purchases with the conservation fund approved by voters in 2020: \$15.5 million for a 98-acre expansion of Emerson Point Preserve in Palmetto, \$11.2 million for the purchase of the 68-acre Crooked River Ranch in Parrish and \$3.6 million for the 105-acre Triple Oak Preserve in Myakka.

Ryan Ballogg: 941-745-7024, rballogg



A pair of Florida panthers were captured by a camera trap set up on the north end of Corkscrew swamp in the CREW Land Trust lands. According to Darrell Land, the Florida Panther Team Leader for the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, they could be a mating pair, but he couldn't say for sure because the photos don't show their gender. The FWC website says that mating pairs stay together for about a week. Births can occur at any time of year but are most common between March and July. The gestation period for kittens is 92-96 days. Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission panther biologists estimate there are 120-230 adults and yearlings in Florida.

# Room to roam

17-parcel land deal in Collier a 'no-brainer' for endangered panthers; result of developer's corner-cutting decades ago

Amy Bennett Williams

Fort Myers News-Press USA TODAY NETWORK – FLORIDA March 20, 2025

How did once-upon-a-time illegal dredging in Cape Coral lead to a heartstopping encounter with a Florida panther 50 years later? It's a long story, with a happy ending for Florida's state animal. The recently announced buy of 17 parcels of primary panther habitat in Collier County's Fakahatchee Strand State Park wouldn't have happened if the Gulf American Land Corp. hadn't been so eager to develop Cape Coral in the 1970s that it cut a few corners. That corner-cutting got the developer in hot water. Its dredge-and-fill violations led to a big lawsuit, which led to some legal horse-trading, which led to some of its Collier County holdings (we also have Gulf American to thank for Golden Gate Estates) becoming preserved land. To settle the suit, the



See PANTHERS, Page 7A

A Florida panther strides through recently preserved land within the Fakahatchee Strand State Park.

PROVIDED BY CONSERVATION FLORIDA/COURTESY OF BRANDON A GUELL

### **Panthers**

Continued from Page 3A

company gave up 9,523 acres south of the Tamiami Trail in 1972 and the park has grown ever since, most recently by another 60-some acres.

The seller of the 17 parcels making up that Fakahatchee acreage? None other than the several-times-removed descendant of Gulf American: Avatar Properties, which managed to hold on to some lots inside the preserve.

### A 'phenomenal deal' on primary panther habitat

Wait – private lots within a state park? Yes, indeed. Known as inholdings, they're properties within public preserves that remain privately held, what the Harvard Environmental Law Review calls "a legal and cartographic oddity."

Often multigenerational family retreats, they can't be bought any longer, but they can be sold, as the 17 were recently to Conservation Florida, the Orlando-based nonprofit that put the years-in-the-making buy together.

Such parcels are "extra critical when we're trying to complete a landscape to fully conserve," said Conservation Florida's CEO Traci Deen. "**So** grabbing those inholdings and further conserving the greater landscape is really important."

And they came at a great price, notes Deen: "less than \$60,000,"

"We got a phenomenal deal because the landowners were willing to sell (and) they really recognized the critical nature of that habitat," she said. network of statewide public and private lands (that) gives the panther hope for rebounding its population and recovering some of its historic range."

Unanimously approved by Florida's Legislature in 2021, the Wildlife Corridor Act is intended to protect some 18 million acres of habitat ranging from working ranches with conservation easements to traditionally preserved land like the Fakahatchee.

Beyond panthers, the park shelters an array of rare and protected animals and plants, including ghost orchids and Everglades mink.

But it was a panther that brought Deen to tears. Though most Floridians live their whole lives without seeing a panther in the wild, when a Conservation Florida group made a recent field trip to photograph the parcels, staffers "almost immediately came up on a Florida panther," Deen said. "It took my breath away. It honestly brought me to tears. ... Moments like that really underscore the importance of protecting small parcels too, because they're really important in the grand scheme of things."

### Harnessing the power of partnership to preserve habitat

The donor-funded, data-based group has been in the business of conservation for 25 years, so far protecting more than 40,000 acres, "everything from ranchlands to wildlands to timberlands" Deen said, with an emphasis on connectivity.

"Science-supported land conservation is really the name of our game," she said, "For example, for this acquisition, we pulled all of the panther telemetry data before making the decision about whether or not to move forward, and I can say there wasn't a single spot on any of those 17 parcels that hadn't been covered in panther telemetry data. It was a no-brainer for us." As well as for the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, which bought the land from the nonprofit to add to the park. "So you know," said Deen, "this is not only about the Florida panther, but about the power of partnership and the many Floridians who support land conservation."

This has been a month of good news for the beleaguered big cats, four of which have already been hit and killed on Florida roads this year. Last year's official death count was 36; the Florida Wildlife Federation estimates fewer than 200 are left in the wild. On March 5, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis and his Cabinet approved \$26.75 million for 3,818 acres of primary panther habitat in Southwest Florida within the Florida Wildlife Corridor.

The corridor is what National Geographic photographer and conservation ambassador Carlton Ward calls "a

### Column

## Saving sea turtles takes money. Congress has a chance to help

This month, sea turtles will begin laying their eggs on Florida's sandy beaches. But these ancient mariners, who have graced our oceans for over 100 million years, now face unprecedented challenges. All six species of sea turtles found in



U.S. waters are fighting for survival, with concerningly low population levels that have landed them on the endangered species list.

ROBIN GANZERT

But more needs to be done beyond put-

ting the animals under federal government protections. Our elected leaders in Washington need to ramp-up support for programs that help to proactively rescue, care for, protect and rehabilitate these majestic creatures of the deep.

The work being done by The Florida Aquarium in Tampa is a prime example. The facility's state-of-theart 19,000-square-foot rehabilitation facility is a beacon of hope for sick and injured sea turtles, equipped with advanced pools and veterinary suites to maximize rescue efforts. Earlier this year, the aquarium even acquired new Mobile Aquatic Sea Turtle Holding units to expand capacity.

And the facility growth comes in the nick of time. The recent wave of cold-stunned sea turtles flooding Florida's rehabilitation centers underscores why these conservation programs are so important. Sea turtles are cold-blooded rep-



A young green sea turtle released with a satellite tag swims in sargassum seaweed offshore of Venice, La. (Associated Press, 2015)

tiles that become severely compromised when water temperatures drop below 50 degrees Fahrenheit. It can cause them to become lethargic, unable to swim and vulnerable to hypothermia, which can lead to shock, pneumonia and potentially fatal health complications.

As the crisis unfolded, the aquarium's Turtle Rehabilitation Center and its dedicated staff recently reached maximum capacity — taking in more than a dozen animals just during the last week of February, bringing the facility's total to more than 40. Sick and injured turtles being cared for have come from as far as Massachusetts.

Focusing on turtles with the most severe ailments, The Florida Aquarium treats each sea turtle for approximately 12 months before releasing them back into the wild. But these heroic efforts come with a big price tag. On top of overhead costs to maintain the facility and have top-notch marine biologists and other specialists on staff, medical tests are expensive. As Debborah Luke, the aquarium's senior vice president of conservation, recently shared, one blood work test costs about \$90 and multiple blood tests are performed on each turtle throughout their time at the facility.

Legislation introduced in Congress would help responsibly run aquariums and other organizations pay for this important conservation work. Proposed in January, the Sea Turtle Rescue Assistance and Rehabilitation Act (H.R. 347) would establish a federal grant program to support institutions that rescue and rehabilitate sea turtles.

Saving even a single sea turtle is a victory for biodiversity. These gentle creatures play a vital role in maintaining the health of our oceans, from supporting coral reefs to balancing marine food webs. An investment in their rehabilitation is an investment in the future of our planet.

The Sea Turtle Rescue Assistance and Rehabilitation Act would be a lifeline for these endangered species — helping to arm dedicated professionals with the necessary tools to save animal lives. Together, we can ensure that sea turtles continue to swim in our oceans for generations to come.

Robin Ganzert, Ph.D. is the president and CEO of the American Humane Society, which certifies zoos and aquariums for the humane treatment of animals.

Tampa Bay Times March 22, 2025



In this March 2020 photo, sugarcane burns in preparation for harvesting along State Road 80 near 20-mile bend. ALLEN EYESTONE/PALM BEACH POST

# Lawsuit: Sugar company in Florida misleads customers

Doubts Florida Crystals' claim as friendly to environment

### **Hannah Phillips**

Palm Beach Post USA TODAY NETWORK March 18, 2025

WEST PALM BEACH — A federal class-action lawsuit has accused one of the nation's largest sugar producers of misleading customers into believing that its farming practices in Florida help combat climate change.

The lawsuit, filed on behalf of California resident Macy Merrell, said the West Palm Beach-based Florida Crystals promotes its sugar as environmentally friendly — a practice known as "greenwashing" — while contributing to climate change, air pollution and soil degradation.

Florida Crystals, which did not respond to multiple requests for comment, maintains that its sugar is the result of "Farming to Help Save the Planet." Its organic sugar packages and social media campaigns are stamped with promises to "fight climate change & build healthy soil." Merrell, represented by the Malibu-based Clarkson Law Firm, said Florida Crystals' continued use of preharvest sugarcane burning contradicts these promises, releasing fine particulate matter, greenhouse gases and other pollutants into the atmosphere, as well as "poisoning local residents, who are disproportionately poor and people of color." "The drifting plumes of pre-harvest burns are so engrained in the everyday life of the Glades that locals have a name for the ash that falls on them, their homes, and their children," the lawsuit said. "Black snow." According to studies cited in the "The drifting plumes of pre-harvest burns are so engrained in the everyday life of the Glades that locals have a name for the ash that falls on them, their homes, and their children. Black snow." Class action lawsuit

complaint, preharvest burns generate more emissions than green harvesting methods, which involve cutting the cane without burning away the outer leaves. Merrell argued that by burning sugarcane while touting its environmental commitment, Florida Crystals intentionally misleads consumers who are willing to pay a premium for sustainable products. The Federal Trade Commission warns against vague or unqualified claims of sustainability. The lawsuit against Florida Crystals and its parent company, the Fanjul Corp., says its packaging and promotional materials violate these standards by failing to disclose the full environmental impact of its practices. Beyond emissions concerns, the plaintiffs argue that Florida Crystals' farming methods degrade soil quality rather than "building healthy soil," as the company claims. Scientific studies cited in the lawsuit indicate that burned sugarcane fields release significantly more soil-bound carbon dioxide than fields where green harvesting is practiced.

The lawsuit further accuses Florida Crystals of benefitting from Florida's regulatory leniency regarding preharvest burns.

While other major sugar-producing countries like Brazil, India and Thailand have restricted or outright banned the practice, Florida allows the burns to continue largely unabated. The complaint points to the company's lobbying efforts as a means of maintaining the status quo, accusing Florida Crystals of prioritizing profit over environmental responsibility.

The lawsuit says consumers rely on front-label representations when making purchasing decisions, and that Florida Crystals' messaging de ceives them into believing they are making an environmentally responsible choice. Merrell seeks monetary damages "on behalf of herself and those similarly situated consumers who purchased the product" and an injunction barring Florida Crystals from continuing to market its products as environmentally friendly. The plaintiffs argue that without court intervention, the company will continue to profit from misleading claims, while consumers remain unaware of the true impact of its farming practices. In a statement to the The Guardian, the company said it is the only grower of sugarcane in the U.S. that is Regenerative Organic Certified, an independent certification that represents the highest standard for organic agriculture in the world with stringent requirements for soil health.



The Suwannee River Water Management District is considering a land swap that would trade 700 acres of this Twin Rivers State Forest land to a peanut farming operation. Wildlife advocates say the land is a key habitat for gopher tortoises and other species. (Courtesy of Katherine Sayler)

## This land swap would give 700 acres of North Florida state forest to a peanut farm

Wildlife groups say the Twin Rivers State Forest parcel is home to gopher tortoises and other imperiled species.

BY MAX CHESNES Times Staff Writer Tampa Bay Times March 21, 2025

In a move that has alarmed wildlife advocacy groups, state water managers are considering a land swap that would give nearly 700 acres of North Florida state forest land to a neighboring peanut farming company. The proposal comes more than a decade after a separate peanut operation sought the same swath of Madison County land within the Twin Rivers State Forest – dubbed the Ellaville Tract - in a similar trade offer. But that deal never went through: Citing the risk to endangered species on the property, and a bustling gopher tortoise population, federal wildlife biologists urged state leaders at the time to keep the land for conservation. "If the land being swapped is developed or unmanaged in the future, it will erode protection of several imperiled species," the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service wrote in a December 2012 email. Today, the land's owners, the Suwannee River Water Management District, say the Ellaville Tract was hit hard by Hurricane Idalia and, if it weren't for a packaged land deal nearly four decades ago, it's not the type of land the group would typically acquire.



In exchange for the state forest land, the district would receive roughly 550 acres of Lee Peanut Farms LLC's farmland along the Withlacoochee River, a waterway that officials say gives the property "significantly higher" value than the high-and-dry state forest uplands being traded away.

The district's land committee voted March 11 to formally put the swap up for consideration, and its governing board will vote on it at a future meeting. See SWAP, 2A A gopher tortoise emerges from a bush to feed on vegetation at the Moccasin Lake Environmental Education Center in Clearwater.

(Times, 2016)



Katherine Sayler, a biologist and Southeast representative with the nonprofit Defenders of Wildlife, hiked the Ellaville Tract of the Twin Rivers State Forest on March 7 and documented this gopher tortoise burrow on the property. State wildlife officials led a gopher tortoise population count in April 2017 and found as many as 440 tortoises on this state forest land. (*Courtesy of Katherine Sayler*)

### SWAP continued from 1A

Four days before the committee's decision, Katherine Sayler hiked the state forest that could soon be traded.

Sayler, a biologist and Southeast representative with the nonprofit Defenders of Wildlife, said she and Florida Forest Service staff saw "really clear evidence" of a flourishing habitat: active gopher tortoise burrows a few dozen feet apart, deer tracks, woodpeckers and more.

Even in parts of the property where harvested slash pines were reduced to stumps, Sayler found burrows with signs that tannish-brown tortoises lived inside. Large longleaf pines, remnants of a habitat that once dominated America's southeastern coastal plains, stretch across 300 acres of the Ellaville Tract.

"This is a very unique ecosystem with tall, beautiful trees," Sayler said in an interview.

After her hike, Sayler took her observations to the land committee on March 11. As the officials gathered to discuss the land swap, she outlined what she saw on the state forest property: healthy wiregrass beds, longleaf pines and markings in front of burrows where the underside of tortoise shells rubbed against the sandy ground.

"The district has not demonstrated that this parcel no longer has conservation value," she told them.



Tom St. Clair, a Hernando Audubon Society Committee chairperson, gives a tour of a Withlacoochee State Forest parcel on Sept. 10 in Brooksville. There was public outcry about a land swap proposal on this land back in August. (JEFFEREE WOO | Times, 2024)

deal, as part of the swap, the state would have to determine the forest land is "no longer needed for conservation purposes." Progress with the Withlacoochee deal appears to have stalled.

"It is very important that the district follows the letter of the law on these types of actions," Sayler said. "As such, Defenders of Wildlife recommends that you deny this proposal to convert imperiled gopher tortoise habitat into a peanut field."

A spokesperson for the district, Troy Roberts, said the land owned by Lee Peanut Farms has more than 400 acres within the floodplain and stretches for more than a mile alongside the Withlacoochee River – all important features for water managers. The property also has a spring, called Stuart Spring, that discharges more than 650,000 gallons of water daily, Roberts said. The land has mature longleaf pine trees and healthy wiregrass. It also would connect to other lands owned by the district. The Suwannee River water managers bought the land it wants to trade in 1988 using land management trust funds, and the

parcel was part of a large transaction spanning several counties, Roberts said. Staff have been working with the Florida Forest Service to restore longleaf pine habitat within Twin Rivers State Forest since then.

In a letter dated March 10, a top official with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission outlined to the head of the Suwannee River water management board how the state forest land is important for Florida wildlife species.

"The Ellaville Tract is ecologically significant" because it's habitat for species like swallow-tailed kites, kestrels, eastern indigo snakes, gopher frogs, fox squirrels and the Florida black bear, wrote Jennifer Goff, head of the state's species conservation division. "Also of note, previous (wildlife staff) observations on the Ellaville Tract indicate that the tract supports a large, viable population of gopher tortoises," Goff wrote. The state led a gopher tortoise population count in April 2017, when they found as many as 440 tortoises on the state forest land, according to Goff.

Still, if the land swap were approved, Goff said the wildlife agency would "work closely with the new landowner to ensure the continued health of the tortoises in this population." Tortoises and their burrows are protected under state law, and any construction on the state forest land would require permits from the wildlife agency to relocate them.

Goff also noted that the proposed exchange would affect hunting opportunities for deer, turkey and other small species.

Elizabeth Fleming, a senior Florida representative with Defenders of Wildlife, said advocacy groups see the value in the roughly 550 acres of land the state would be acquiring along the banks of the Withlacoochee River – but not at the expense of a state forest. "The things in public ownership we assume are safe like this forest - may not be safe, and we have to keep an eye on these things," Fleming said. "In this case, they want to trade gopher tortoises for peanuts."

She cited the public outcry over a similar land swap proposal, revealed by the Tampa Bay Times in August, that would trade more than 300 acres of the Withlacoochee State Forest to a luxury golf course developer.

The DeSantis administration added that land swap to a Cabinet meeting agenda at the last minute in June. Discussion of the deal during that meeting lasted less than 30 seconds before state officials greenlit it. Like the Ellaville

Contact Max Chesnes at mchesnes@tampabay.com. Follow @MaxChesnes.

### A headache for humans, stubborn fire is actually good for Everglades wetlands

BY ALEX HARRIS AND DAVID GOODHUE aharris@miamiherald.com dgoodhue@miamiherald.com

### Miami Herald March 23, 2025

An unusually large wildfire rampaged through southeast Miami-Dade this week. It took down power lines and trees, blocked roads in and out of the Florida Keys for days and sent noxious smoke drifting into adjacent neighborhoods.

By Friday afternoon, the 344 fire, as it was dubbed by Florida's Forest Service, had ravaged more than 26,000 acres, but state and local firefighters had managed to contain it to unoccupied wetlands.

While blazes like this one can be a major headache for people, fire is also a critical part of South Florida's ecosystem — particularly the Everglades. At Everglades National Park, the first national park in the nation to have a fire management plan, firefighters regularly set controlled fires to help clear out dry brush, leaving charred material that renews the soil for fresh growth.

"Here, the landscape is really amenable to fire. These systems really rely on it," said John Kominoski, a professor in the Department of Biological Sciences at Florida International University.

Emerging research has found that historically, high and dry parts of the Everglades — like tree islands or pine rocklands — are in fact designed to burn every other year. In deeper areas, they need to burn every five to 15 years, Kominoski

**SEE WILDFIRE, 18A** 

This map shows the extent of the 344 wildfire, which had burned more than 26,000 acres as of Friday.



DAVID GOODHUE Miami Herald

A large brush fire on Card Sound Road in south Miami-Dade near Florida City on Tuesday closed the road and led to intermittent closures of U.S. 1 connecting to the Florida Keys. By Friday afternoon, firefighters had managed to contain it to unoccupied wetlands.



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**Florida Forest Service** 

### FROM PAGE 17A WILDFIRE

said.

Without fire, the Everglades would be even more overrun with invasive species. It would be too thick in some spots for animals like wading birds to nest and hunt for food. Some seeds won't even sprout unless they're burned in a fire.

That's why forestry managers for public lands, like Everglades National Park, do so many controlled burns throughout the park. It keeps the system healthy and also avoids a buildup of brush that could spark a bigger, hotter blaze — like the 344 fire.

Compared to a controlled burn, "wildfires can be hotter, they often can burn deeper. When you're not able to control where the fire is going, the fire can take on a life of its own," Kominoski said.

### A GROWING CONCERN

The threat of a bad fire had been building for weeks, even before this one began. By the leading drought metric, Miami-Dade was about as dry as it can get this month. The only drier county in Florida is Broward, where officials have been warning of the potential for wildfires for days.

"It's extremely dry this time of year, but Florida also had harsher winter conditions that are making this year even drier — hard frosts, freezes and even snow," said Ludie Bond, spokesperson for the Florida Forest Service.

It's unclear what sparked this particular blaze, but Bond noted that about 80% of all wildfires are started by people. While smoke from the 344 fire has been a big problem and periodically closed roads to the Keys, firefighters say the blaze has not posed a threat to any surrounding communities

Bond said the rainy season is still about eight weeks away, so the chances of more fires could remain high until then.

For now, the fire appears to be running through shallow wetlands. A map of the blaze released by the Forest Service shows it may have burned through both of Florida Power & Light's wetland mitigation banks, where developers can buy space to offset mangroves and wetlands they remove through new development elsewhere in the state.

A spokesperson for FPL said the fire is not affecting operations at the Turkey Point power plant, also on the edge of the fire. The South Florida Water Management District, which also owns tracts of land in the area, said it will have more information on the toll of the fire next week.

"The District is monitoring the situation closely," said district spokesman Randy Smith.

### ROLE

Hurricanes are a far more destructive force in Florida than wildfires, which destroy many more properties in western states than in the Sunshine State. However, as climate change cranks up the world's thermostat, fires could become more common in Florida.

A 2022 study from the First Street Foundation showed South Florida as a dark red patch on a national map of increasing wildfire risk. Research suggests that around 6% of Florida homes are vulnerable to wildfire risk, and that could jump to about 12% by 2052. The eastern edge of the Everglades is the top spot in the state for increased risk of wildfire, the study found.

"When we have warmer, drier conditions, we are more likely to see a fire that's able to ignite and spread and burn at a higher rate," said Victoria Donovan, an assistant professor of forest management at the University of Florida.

Donovan's research found that large wildfires - like this one - are becoming more common in the Southeast compared to a few decades ago. Although her study did not specifically include the Everglades, she said she found "significant" increases in Florida, as well as a shift toward more fires in the spring and early summer, as opposed to the fall, when wildfires were historically more common. But unlike places in the

west, Florida is "a leader" in the controlled burns that help keep those massive fires in check, she said.

"Our ecosystems are adapted to burn. When we remove fire, that causes this big fuel accumulation, and when they go ignite, those fires can be a lot bigger and more difficult to control," she said.

However, because Floridians often consider wildfires a problem for other parts of the country, they may be less prepared to evacuate if a blaze catches near their home.

"Particularly as we start to see predictions to shift to climate conditions that are more conducive to fire, there are things we should be prepared for the same way that we prepare for a hurricane or flood," she said.

Alex Harris: 305-376-5005, @harrisalexc

CLIMATE CHANGE'S

# County eyes 2028 completion of Alligator Creek restoration

### Designers hope to reduce erosion, expand wetlands, improve habitat

Christian Casale March 25, 2025 Sarasota Herald-Tribune USA TODAY NETWORK

Sarasota County officials are wrapping up designs for a major habitat restoration project on Alligator Creek in the Venice area.

The endeavor, its designers hope, will reduce erosion along the creek bank, improve the water quality of

### Restoration

Continued from Page 1C

Recreation, Public Works, Capital Projects, and Stormwater Utilities representing how multipurpose officials envision the improved Alligator Creek stream.

A jargon-heavy presentation from Project Manager Nabil Bawany, who oversaw the design process for the engineering firm WSP, emphasized an effort to return to creek to its natural designs, before decades of encroachment by suburban sprawl.

Designers also partnered with Mote Marine Laboratory & Aquarium to create a "fish friendly design," with features such as step pools that help natural species like Snook and Tarpon move up and down the stream.

"This is the first project of this kind in this region," Bawany said.

The county will also build a multiuse trail that will go along the stream from U.S. 41 to Venice East Boulevard.

The presentation also said the county will contact any property owners who may be affected by the construction.

Design and permitting is expected to be completed by the end of the year. With construction slated to begin in early 2026, officials estimate the project will be completed by the end of 2028.

County officials said at the meeting they see no reason why the funds

Lemon Bay, restore and expand the wetlands, and improve the wildlife habitat.

The construction costs are expected to be about \$22 million; \$14.5 million of that is supposed to come from the "Transformational Habitat Restoration and Coastal Resilience" grant provided by the federal government. The rest of the funding will come from the county's sales tax and stormwater funds.

A myriad of county departments were represented at a recent public meeting on the project: Parks and

### See RESTORATION, Page 5C

would be rescinded or cancelled by the Trump Administration. However, fears of a federal reexamination of those funds aren't unfounded.

The grant comes courtesy of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), which also oversees the National Hurricane Center. Widespread layoffs and buyout offers by the Trump Administration have cut NOAA's workforce by about one-fifth.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, which oversees NOAA, recently announced its intention to take back money awarded by the Biden Administration to green energy and climate change projects.

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## **Beach renourishment costing taxpayers less**



Col. Brandon Bowman, commander of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Jacksonville District, discusses the federally funded beach renourishment projects along the Space Coast. With him is U.S. Rep. Mike Haridopolos, R-Indian Harbour Beach. Behind them, a booster pump sits offshore from Jetty Park; it's used to pump sand to other areas of the beach MALCOLM DENEMARK/FLORIDA TODAY

### \$20M saved by combining projects, more efficient methods

Dave Berman Florida Today

million on what initially had been Corps is forecasted to save federal tax-

USA TODAY NETWORK - FLORIDA

#### March 24, 2025

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers says Brevard County is getting its money's worth from ongoing federally funded beach renourishment projects that stretch from Port Canaveral to the Melbourne Beach area.

By using more efficient procedures and combining previously separate projects, taxpayers are saving about \$20 pegged as \$150 million in work.

"These efforts have helped protect the economy, homes, businesses and critical infrastructure that sustains the livelihoods of Americans living on and investing in these beaches," said Col. Brandon Bowman, commander of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Jacksonville District. "In the last three years, the federal government has invested over \$150 million between these projects. And through creative strategies, the payers over \$20 million by combining and optimizing projects in a way that makes sense, in the name of efficiency."

The projects help reduce the impacts of storm surge and wave-generated erosion.

With the reduction in total costs from \$150 million to \$130 million, the savings will be used to help pay for

### See BEACH, Page 6A

### Beach

Continued from Page 1A

future Corps of Engineers shore protection and dredging projects along the Space Coast.

Bowman and other Army Corps officials discussed the agency's local projects, in a briefing along the edge of Port Canaveral's Jetty Park Beach, joined by U.S. Rep Mike Haridopolos and Canaveral Port Authority Chairman Wayne Justice.

Haridopolos, meanwhile, says he is hoping to preserve federal funding for these projects in the future, in light of efforts to cut the federal budget.

#### **Breakdown of renourishment projects**

The Army Corps, through its Jacksonville District, is funding three projects locally:

**Canaveral Harbor Sand Bypass Project:** In September 2024, it awarded a \$40.6 million contract to Great Lakes Dredge & Dock of Houston for the sixth iteration of the Canaveral Harbor Sand Bypass Project. Previous sand bypass projects there occurred starting in 1995.

This project is moving about 1.5 million cubic yards of sand from the shoreline immediately north of Port Canaveral to two segments of critically eroded shoreline in the Cape Canaveral and Cocoa Beach areas.

The first segment runs along about 3.3 miles of shoreline beginning just south of Jetty Park to Shepard Park in Cocoa Beach. The second segment runs along about 3.7 miles of shoreline from just south of Lori Wilson Park in Cocoa Beach to the northern border of Patrick Space Force Base.

The Canaveral Harbor Sand Bypass Project is scheduled to end by April 30, in advance of the main turtle-nesting season. Leftover sand will be saved offshore, and will be used for future projects, Bowman said.

Justice, a retired Coast Guard rear admiral, said another benefit of the Canaveral Harbor Sand Bypass Project is helping reduce the impacts of shoaling along Port Canaveral's channel, keeping it in good shape for navigation by cruise and cargo ships.

The Army Corps also has been overseeing about \$34 million worth of dreging projects in the Port Canaveral area.

**Mid Reach and South Reach Projects:** Following damages caused by Hurricanes Ian and Nicole in 2022, the Army Corp in September 2023 awarded a \$47.6 million contract to The Dutra Group of San Rafael, California, to execute a flood control and coastal emergencies rehabilitation of the Mid Reach and South Reach segments of the Brevard County federal shore protection project.

The contract is placing about 1 million cubic yards of sand on critically eroded beaches extending about 11.5 miles from the southern border of Patrick Space Force Base through shorelines of Satellite Beach, Indian Har-



A booster pump sits offshore from Jetty Park. It is used to pump sand to other areas of the beach. MALCOLM DENEMARK/FLORIDA TODAY

bour Beach, Indialantic and ending at Spessard Holland Beach Park in the Melbourne Beach area.

Sand was obtained from a combination of offshore dredging and a sand mine in Fort Pierce.

The Mid Reach sand-placement ended last week. Work on the South Reach section is forecast to start in November, after turtle-nesting season ends. Army Corps officials say the South Reach is in better shape than the Canaveral and Mid Reach areas had been before their projects began.

Combined with previous beach renourishment projects dating back decades, the Army Corps said its projects have placed 17.6 million cubic yards of sand on the beaches over the years.

#### Federal funding outlook

The initial sand bypass project in the Port Canaveral area was agreed to in October 1999, after a decade of legal wrangling in a class-action lawsuit brought by beachside property owners.

The complaint alleged that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers illegally took land from hundreds of property owners because the jetties the Corps built at the port in the 1950s led to beach erosion south of the port.

The federal government eventually offered to restore 13 miles of coastline south of the port for 50 years.

Haridopolos, R-Indian Harbour Beach, said, although "nothing is ever guaranteed in the government" and "there are going to be a lot of challenges" related to the federal budget, he is hopeful that federal funding for future beach renourishment projects continues to come to Brevard County.

"This is a project that preserves our way of life on the Space Coast and really promotes, not only tourism, but just the everyday enjoyment that is being a citizen of Florida," Haridopolos said. "And it's the reason why we have record-breaking tourism numbers in the state of Florida — because of incredible beaches like this."

Haridopolos said the improvements to Brevard's beaches resulting from beach renourishment helps attract tourists to the area — bringing in more sales tax revenue to the Space Coast — and boosts property values and property tax revenue.

"This is an investment in our beaches," Haridopolos said. "When you preserve these beaches, you're preserving the tax base. You're making sure that tourists want to come over. When we make these investments, we keep that quality of life. The Canaveral Sand Bypass Project is a prime example of how we can protect our coastline, while strengthening our economy."

Army Corps officials said they hope to keep the commitment to continue Brevard beach renourishment projects into the 2050s and beyond.

Haridopolos said: "I'm confident, when I talk to other members of Congress, the U.S. Senate, our president, if this is on the chopping block for whatever reason, we can walk them through and show: Here is the return on investment that we can get back by making these investments, and keeping the way of life that we enjoy right now in Florida."

On these projects, Haridopolos said, "we have maximized, not only the way of life, but maximized tax dollars."

#### **Defending against Mid Reach criticism**

Christopher Ren, the Army Corps' Jacksonville District senior project manager for the Brevard County shore protection projects and the Canaveral Sand Bypass Project, defended the Mid Reach project from criticism of some environmental advocates, who say that adding too much sand will bury and destroy a rare reef the federal government deems "essential fish habitat."

After a decade of studies and permitting, the federal government allowed the Mid Reach dredging project, which offsets about 3 acres of the reef that the project buries with a \$10.6 million, 4.8-acre man-made reef.

Ren said the sections of artificial reef that were built offshore for mitigation are doing what they were intended to do.

"All the agencies that review those monitoring reports have said they are performing as expected, and performing within the requirements of our permitting, the county's permits and the environmental assessments," Ren said.

In summing up the projects, Bowman said: "We look forward to a bright future and beautiful beaches, a more efficient harbor and a more resilient shoreline for Brevard County."

FLORIDA TODAY environmental reporter Jim Waymer contributed to this story.

Dave Berman is business editor at FLORIDA TODAY. Contact Berman at dberman@floridatoday.com, on X at @bydaveberman and on Facebook at www.face book.com/dave.berman.54.



A flock of flamingos sit on a mud flat in Florida Bay on the edge of the Florida Everglades.

## Florida Everglades restoration doesn't need DOGE

#### **BY ALAN FARAGO**

The promise of the first months of the second Donald Trump presidency appears to be that if it doesn't have huge dollar signs attached to it, Trump cares not at all.

Maybe this can get his attention: Taxpayer commitments to restore the Everglades are more than \$20 billion.

Protecting the Everglades and those investments has been supported through bipartisan consensus by generations of elected officials.

.....

DOGE's actions will strangle the ability of the federal government to complete the restoration work taxpayers and voters demanded and Congress and the state Legislature agreed to.

Trump delegated the day-to-day execution of his big picture to appointees who are, one way or another, connected to Project 2025, DOGE or the Federalist Society.

Over the past month, in the Everglades, great disruption has been triggered in pursuit of so-called "government efficiency."

Only a stone's throw from Mar-a-Lago, Trump can witness the fallout as his appointees aim a wrecking ball at the nation's capacity to respond to environmental crises, modeled by the Everglades. responded to the need to protect the fabled River of Grass.

Public demand helped create Everglades National Park in 1947, a great triumph for Americans.

As the decades passed, the state of Florida, through the South Florida Water Management District, and the federal government, through the Army Corps of Engineers and Department of Interior, began massive engineering and construction projects to restore the Everglades.

Apparently, Trump appears to be ignoring the glades has resulted from litigation forcing the state of Florida to comply with federal laws.

Yes, the state of Florida has made billions of dollars of investment in the Everglades. No, the state of Florida cannot be trusted by itself to ensure that science is the polestar of restoration.

Tallahassee and the state Legislature have been overrun by lobbyists, lawyers and billionaires who view the environment as expendable.

Instead of imposing layoffs and lease terminations, Trump should double down on Everglades restoration.

There is an urgent need to acquire and restore about 100,000 acres south of Lake Okeechobee before destructive devel-

Now, with DOGE and President Trump's demands for across-theboard cuts affecting staff, real estate and science, Florida Everglades' restoration is falling off the map. Billions of dollars aimed at restoration will go up in smoke unless Trump alters course.

Dozens of jobs have been cut at understaffed national parks and wildlife refuges across the greater Everglades. DOGE operatives are incinerating lease agreements for properties used by hundreds of U.S. Army Corps of Engineers employees. The Everglades has always been an enormous canvas on which the conflicting interests of commerce and environmental protection are written in broad strokes.

A century ago, Friends of the Everglades founder Marjory Stoneman Douglas and Ernest Coe, an aspiring developer turned Everglades champion, sacrifice, investment and struggle to restore the Everglades — some 2 million acres reaching across the southern half of Florida's peninsula.

Now come the DOGE measures without any understanding of the resources and talent required to guide Everglades restoration to a safe landing. Their end game is clear as a philosophical matter and ridiculous as a matter of fact: Let the state of Florida control the destiny of the Everglades.

Environmentalists know that progress made to date on restoring the Everopment takes root on sugarcane fields in the Everglades Agricultural Area.

If safeguarding taxpayer dollars is the goal, there's no better deal for Trump to broker.

In the meantime, call off the DOGE attack. It's unwarranted, inefficient and a dishonor to the nation's commitments to our national parks, treasured by all Americans.

Alan Farago serves as conservation chair for Friends of the Everglades, which was founded by Marjory Stoneman Douglas in 1969.

Miami Herald March 20, 2025

### OPINION



Brevard County hopes the federal government will fund a \$700,000 study to examine whether removing parts of the State Road 528 Causeway would improve water quality in the Indian River Lagoon. MALCOLM DENEMARK/FLORIDA TODAY

### Week's question: Indian River Lagoon health



John A. Torres Columnist Florida Today

USA TODAY NETWORK - FLA. March 23, 2025

Since I moved to Brevard County 24 years ago, the number one issue I've heard discussed, debated, written about and even voted on had to do with the health of the Indian River Lagoon. We here on the Space Coast hold the important waterway - considered to be one of the most biologically diverse estuaries on the continent – near and dear to our hearts.

This month, the Cocoa City Council voted to go ahead with a plan forcing 88 homes along Indian River Drive to con**nect to** the city's sewer system. Right now those homes use septic tanks something that many believe is harmful to the health of the lagoon.

Earlier this year, the Brevard County Commission said it was seeking \$700,000 in funding for a study to determine whether the causeways connecting mainland to the barrier islands are detrimental to the lagoon. The study will look to see if removing the earthen strips of land that stretch out into the lagoon before reaching the elevated bridges are harming the lagoon and Florida's other coastal waters. My colleague, environmental reporter writer Jim Wavmer recently wrote: "In Brevard, the hubs where causeways meet the mainland have become the foul 'armpits' of our estuaries, where stagnant water and algae build up, lofting that seasonal rotten-egg hydrogen sulfide stench of outgassing, dying algae that residents know well.' So, how would removing the land portions of the causeways work? In a nutshell, FDOT would elevate sections of the roadway with low-span bridges in order to then remove the earthen dam underneath.

and a solution. We'd like to hear yours. This week's Question of the Week is:

#### Which do you believe should be the greatest priority in efforts to save the Indian River Lagoon?

Septic to sewer conversion Removing the causeways Improving municipal sewer systems Tighter fertilizer restrictions

Muck dredging

Preventing storm water runoff

Planting more sea grass You can scan the QR code

that is hopefully on the print edition page. Please leave a comment telling us why you voted the way you did. In order for your comment or email to be published on our website and in next week's print edition, you must include your first and last name.

You can also shoot me an email with "Lagoon" in the subject line. I look forward to reading your responses.

Last Sunday I asked you if

Firm to prepare an engineering and cost estimate of the condition of the building and what improvements would be be required to update the facility, medically and for safety. I would assume that a selling price from Orlando Health has already surfaced. This is not my firsr rodeo, I was involved with the construction of the Dewitt Army hospital at Fort Belvoir in 1954. (Oh, How cheap con-

struction was then!) I also initiated the upgrade up-date of the Landstuhl Army Medical Center in Germany in 1973-1974. The Medical community must be involved in any design of a new Hospital. I would love to see a philanthropist, get involved with the purchase and re-make of Rockledge. St Jude's, Shriners, and the like would be a great addition to our community. Obviously, Orlando must have already done such an estimate and in their opinion, a new Hospital is their preference. It seems to me, that an up-grade of the Rockledge hospital would be more economical solution, and could be done sooner.

Maintaining accreditation and meeting standards of care must also be considered. It's not just about keeping doors open. It's about ensuring a safe and healthy environment.

– Terry Heagy Retired, Health Care worker

The real question is how to persuade Orlando Health to keep the hospital open. What can Cocoa, Rockledge, Brevard, or the state offer in exchange to keeping the hospital open?

- Gregory Pierce

The facility is proven to be unsafe and unhealthy for medical use. Why would anyone want to force continued use of a facility like that? A better solution would be a fast transition of an existing space to provide emergency services and a deadline for submitting plans and timelines for replacement facilities. HealthFirst and Parrish should have an opportunity to step into the area and provide services as well.

- Kim Brown

The hospital is filthy — I was admitted there with a head injury and ended up with MRSA – a hospital acquired infection. The doctors taking care of me had NO idea how to manage my case, I stayed in a coma for two weeks thanks to their ineptitude. As a Rockledge resident if I call an ambulance I am stuck going there for any emergency. I can't wait for it to close so I won't end up there again should I have an emergency. As an MD myself, I can see all the many failings of that hospital. It NEEDS to go.



### Online

Scan the QR code to cast your vote in this week's Question of the Week. Be sure to leave a comment after you vote with your first and last name and

we may use

with next

The study will take two years to complete once it is fully funded.

When it comes to the health of the lagoon, it seems everyone has an opinion the state should step in and force Rockledge Hospital to remain open for the next two years.

### The results of the poll are:

Yes. 68 percent

No. 30 percent

I don't care. It doesn't matter to me. 2 percent

#### Here is what you had to say:

The building is full of "bat guano." Do you really want to deliver a baby there?

– Donna Kearns

I do not think that the State should get involved, except to encourage a new buyer to step up and buy Rockledge Hospital. I would recommend that one of the other Hospitals, see what the "Bones" of Rockledge look like. It will be necessary to hire an Architect/Engineer

#### – Thomas C. Loper

your comment People who want health care for profit yet don't like how week's results. that's operated need to work to end health care for profit. It's a private business. Buy it from Orlando Health or shut up.

- Jake Jakoubek

How does a corporation spend \$439 million dollars on an ongoing enterprise just to close it up and tear it down? No property to sell. No announced effort to void the deal. No "heads rolling" for failure to do due diligence in determining viability of the hospital. There's got to be more to this story.

David C. Coffman

While I have no firsthand knowledge of the state of the facility, I believe ORHS would not take this approach lightly. Risk management, clinical services, medical staff and others were no doubt involved. Health and welfare of both patients and staff must be the priority.

- Lynda Prince MD

The closure of the hospital in Rockledge will cause additional strain on our already crowded healthcare facilities. I understand the facility is in bad shape. Why wasn't Steward Hospital forced to make the necessary repairs years ago? Aren't hospitals required to pass inspections? At the very least, Orlando Health should provide some type of Emergency care for the residents of Cocoa and Rockledge.

#### – Susan Riggins

Contact Torres at jtorres@floridatoday.com. You can follow him on X, the platform formerly known as Twitter @johnalbertorres.

# ECOLOGICAL ESPIONAGE

### Florida Tech students build robotic manatee to study species in wild

Jim Waymer Florida Today USA TODAY NETWORK – FLORIDA

Philip K. Dick's famous 1968 sci-fi novel, "Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?," explored blurred lines between what's real, what's fake, and dystopian cyberpunk notions about robot consciousness.



Fast forward five decades to Florida Institute of Technology, and one might ask: 'Do android manatees dream of other cybernetic sea cows?'

Deeper techno philosophizing aside, three Florida Tech students are developing a "Mechanatee," a robot sea cow they hope will one day allow scientists

### See MANATEE, Page 18A

Florida Tech grad students Haylie Garman and AJ Saad in the Edwin A. Link Ocean Instrumentation Lab at Florida Institute of Technology in Melbourne. They are working on several prototypes of a robotic manatee in partnership with Delta Robotics, Inc. that they plan to use underwater for a variety of research possibilities.

TIM SHORTT/FLORIDA TODAY GETTY IMAGES

Florida Today March 23, 2025

### Manatee

Continued from Page 1A

to better study the gentle marine mammals.

They hope in a few years to activate this sleeper sea cow agent under deep cover, on missions that thus far have been impossible. And the hope that when the cyber sea-cow spy "comes in from the cold," it will yield insights into how to better protect the species.

"So basically, what we want our Mechanetee to do is look like a manatee, act like a manatee, but really it's a research database platform that's completely silent," said Haylie Garman, a graduate student in Florida Tech's Department of Ocean Engineering and Marine Sciences. "It doesn't spook other animals. It doesn't have propellers."

Call it ecological espionage.

When complete in a few years, Mechanatee will propel through the water with its tail, just like a real sea cow, on covert missions of its handler's choosing.

Led by Garman, the project also includes graduate student AJ Saad and undergrad Wyatt Amarosa, all supervised by Florida Tech ocean engineering professor Stephen Wood and in partnership with Delta Robotics, Inc.

#### **Deciphering sea cow enigmas**

One of their main goals is to teach this "spy" how to crack the code of mysterious sea cow ciphers: what their various chirps, clicks and clucks mean.

Turns out, manatees can be quite the chatty Cathys. "They squeak," Garman said. "They're super chatty."

The students will use machine learning to teach Mechanatee the basics of sea-cow lingo. Then one day, an AIdriven robo-manatee might just learn how to chat up real sea cows.

What do they talk about: Where to find the best grass? All those boats buzzing over? What can and can't they hear? Nobody knows.

The prospect of a mechanical manatee could bring unheard of new insights into manatee behavior, said Beth Brady, a senior science and conservation associate with Save the Manatee Club, who studies manatee communication.

"All manatee species use vocalizations to communicate, but we know



Florida Tech grad students Haylie Garman, AJ Saad, and student Wyatt Amarosa in the Edwin A. Link Ocean Instrumentation Lab at Florida Institute of Technology in Melbourne. They are working on several prototypes of a robotic manatee in partnership with Delta Robotics, Inc. that they eventually plan to use underwater for a variety of research possibilities. They have nicknamed it the Mechanatee. PHOTOS BY TIM SHORTT / FLORIDA TODAY



Several prototypes of a robotic manatee. A main goal is to teach a "spy" how to crack the code of mysterious sea cow ciphers: what their various chirps, clicks and clucks mean.

very little about how individual manatees vocally interact with each other and what call types they use," Brady said via email. "This can provide more insight into the function/use of vocalizations. Vocalizations are primarily used by cow/calves to stay in contact with each other, but are also used by adults when playing, resting, and feeding."

Brady said scientists also could potentially add sensors to Mechanatee to measure any environmental stressors in real time. That could include testing water quality and assessing fish stocks and other wildlife populations.

#### A whale of an idea

The first notion of designing Mechanatee was born from a chat over lunch between Wood and Austin Fox, an oceanographer at Florida Tech, who asked Wood: "Can you build me a manatee?" Fox wanted a "robo-tee" to measure things most modern Remotely Operated Vehicles (ROVs) can't in manatee herds, mostly because they're too loud. Wood told Fox, "sure," but that it would take 5-10 years.

'We would like the robotic manatee to make intelligent decisions," Wood said.

The tail is the biggest hurdle: it must have the same range of motion as a real manatee. "When we get this right, we'll extrapolate this out to other mammals such as a whale," Wood added.

#### **Training a spy**

This sea cow "spook" needs to learn how not to spook real sea cows. Artificial intelligence will teach Mechanatee the best-known tricks of sea-cow spy craft, by using "nature's blueprints." It's designed to be what's called biomimetic: In other words, to mimic natural biological processes.

Similar concepts have been used at MIT to study tuna. They call theirs "Robotuna." Others have made robotic sharks. Yale researchers are working on a sea turtle bot. But most current ROVs are way too noisy to study sea cows without scaring them.

minimize any stress on manatees during biological research.

Early in the project, they got manatee bones from Brady They 3D scanned them at Florida Tech's Vertex, a new "applied innovation hub" to create plastic vertebrae. Now, it's just a matter of designing a spine that can move like a manatee's.

Inside the Edwin A. Link Ocean Instrumentation Lab, they're in the process of doing that and also developing artificial muscles for the manatee, using memory shape metal alloys. Those and hydraulics will mimic natural manatee movements. Their spy's cover will be cue the Mission Impossible intro -atype of rubber-like silicone skin.

Among their other goals is for Mechanatee can top efficiency of propdriven ROVs. "This could be a major stepping stone for long-range vehicles," Saad said.

"It's going to learn from prior missions," Amarosa added.

They're asking outside the box questions such as: If they add a camera to Mechanatee, could facial recognition software identify and track specific manatees? The tech already exists.

They hope to score some grant money to keep their Mechanatee project afloat.

Because permitting would be lengthy and difficult in the United States, they'd first aim to test Mechanatee in Belize.

There are obvious implications for military use of such approaches, but these students say they're more interested in saving sea cows, so they took a different route.

"We're environmentalists, first," Saad said. Contact Waymer at (321) 261-5903 or

The Florida Tech students aim to jwaymer@floridatoday.com.

REQUEST FOR **QUALIFICATIONS** STORMWATER IMPROVEMENT <u> ALTERNATIVE ANALYSIS –</u> GILMORE DRIVE AND WEST BASIN <u>QuestCDN#: 9569675</u> The City of Gulf Breeze intents interests in the Stormwater Improvement Alternative Analysis – Gilmore Drive and West Basin bidding online through QuestCDN.com, until 2:00 PM local time on April 22, 2025 The City of Gulf Breeze intents to professional engineering obtain consulting services for the STORMWATER IMPROVEMENT ANALYSIS ALTERNATIVE GILMORE DRIVE AND WEST BASIN. The City intents to select one professional engineering consultant firm to provide this service. Consultants with demonstrated expertise in this field are invited to submit a technical submittal for this project. Professional services are being procured in accordance with the Consultant's Competitive Negotiation Act (CCNA) (F.S. 287.055), Office of Management and Budget Uniform Guidance for Federal Awards (2 CFR 200), and the U.S. Department of Treasury RESTORE Act Financial Assistance Standard Terms and Conditions and Program-Specific Terms and Conditions. A mandatory pre-selection meeting will be held on Thursday, April 03, 2025, at 9:00 AM in the City Council Chambers, Gulf Breeze City Hall, located at 1070 Shoreline Drive. Interested firms may secure a complete package and all other pertinent information by visiting http://cityofgulfbreeze.us/requestfor-proposals/. Downloading of documentation and submittal of a bid for the project require registration with QuestCDN and the payment of fees. Documentation may be viewed at no charge.

The City of Gulf Breeze reserves the right to accept or reject any or all submittals, waive any responder informalities, and re-advertise for responses when deemed in the best interest of the City. Responders shall not lobby or otherwise attempt to persuade or influence City Council members, officials, or staff on decisions to be made relating to the bid, except in public presentations requested by the City. 11127598 March 20, 27, 2025

AD#11142973 3/21 3/28/2025

### CITY OF FORT LAUDERDALE INVITATION TO BID EVENT NO. 426 COMPREHENSIVE UTILITIES STRATEGIC MASTER PLAN UPDATE (CUSMP)

The City of Fort Lauderdale, FL (City) is actively seeking qualified, experienced, and licensed firm(s) ("Consultant" or "consultant" or "vendor/firm" or "Proposer" or "proposer" or "Firm") to provide professional engineering and planning services for Water and Sewer Master Planning as further described in Section III – Scope of Services. Those firms which are interested in submitting proposals in response to this Request for Qualifications (RFQ) shall comply with Section IV– Submittal Requirements.

This project is located at 101 NE 3rd Avenue, Suite 2100 in the City of Fort Lauderdale. The work to be accomplished under this contract includes, but is not limited to, updating the Water and Sewer Master Plan.

Pursuant to Florida Statues §287.057(19) (c), and the Procurement Manual, Section F.6., a consultant who has been selected to prepare the Master Plan, or who has contributed to the preparation of the Master Plan solicitation, shall not be eligible to provide any subsequent services awarded pursuant to the Master Plan, in order to avoid any perceived or actual conflict of interest. This exclusion shall take effect immediately upon the award of the contract.

Sealed Proposals will be received electronically until <u>2:00 p.m.</u>, local time, on <u>April 16, 2025</u>, and opened online immediately thereafter.

Licensing Requirements: Licensed Professional Engineer

### OR

Any other State or County License(s), Certification(s) or Registration(s) deemed legally permissible by the City to conduct the nature of the work required in this solicitation. Any sub-contractors employed by the Proposer shall be licensed and insured in accordance with this solicitation. Additionally, it is the Proposer's responsibility for ensuring that any sub-contractors' work meets the requirements of this solicitation at all times. Request for Proposal City of Key West will receive bids for the following

RFP Name RFP 25-004 Water Quality Monitoring Program

RFP Opening April 17, 2025 @ 3:00PM RFP Location Office of the City Clerk, 1300 White St., Key West, FL 33040

Documents may be requested from DemandStar @ www.demandstar.com or call 800.711.1712 or @ www.cityofkeywest-fl.gov. All responses must be received on or before the date and time specified. The City of Key West reserves the right, at its sole discretion, to accept or reject any and all responses and to waive informalities or irregularities when it is in the best interest of the City. 03/20/25 - KWC

419853 3955564

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS The CITY OF PENSACOLA will receive sealed proposals as listed below. Specifications and addenda will be posted to the City's website at <u>www.cityofpensacola.com/bids.as</u> px. For questions, contact purchasing@cityofpensacola.com or 850-435-1835. The City shall have the authority to reject all proposals and advertise for new proposals. RFP NO.: 25-025 / TITLE: THREE (3) YEAR CONTRACT то CONDUCT NATURAL GAS DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM LOCATING SERVICES FOR PENSACOLA ENERGY SUBMITTALS DUE: 04-21-25 TIME: 2:30 P.M. LOCAL TIME 11134352 March 19, 26, 2025

INVITATION TO BID 25-042-ITB Tarpon Street and Riverside Piers Construction The City of Fort Myers is seeking submittals for 25-042-ITB Tarpon Street and Riverside Piers Construction which will be uploaded electronically on or before Monday, April 21, 2025, at 2:00 pm. Interested participants are encouraged to download the solicitation documents. For more details visit https://procurement.opengov.com/po rtal/cityftmyers CITY OF FORT MYERS Marty K. Lawing, City Manager Mary Hagemann, City Clerk 3/18/25 11129428

BEACH Invitations to Bid (unsealed) Gopher Tortoises relocation project The City of Indian Harbour Beach is soliciting unsealed bids for relocating 8 gopher tortoises from the Algonquin Sports Complex per a Florida DEP permit. Unsealed proposals, including an estimated time frame for commencement and completion of work, and an itemized cost, should be emailed by 4:00 p.m. on Tuesday, April 1, 2025 to John W. Coffey, ICMA-CM at icoffey@indianharbour.org. For additional information contact City Manager John W. Coffey at icoffey@indianharbour.org, or call 321-773-3181. Sue Frank, MMC City Clerk

CITY OF INDIAN HARBOUR

NOTE: Payment on this contract will be made by Visa or MasterCard

Pre-Bid Meeting/Site visit: There will not be a pre-proposal meeting for this RFQ.

Point of Contact City of Fort Lauderdale, Procurement Services Division Attn: Erick Martinez – Senior Procurement Specialist 101 NE 3rd Avenue, Suite 1650 Fort Lauderdale, FL 33301 Fax: (954) 828-4019 E-mail: EMartinez@fortlauderdale.gov **3/18, 3/25/2025 7784674**  25-D-00023 <u>Professional ENGINEERING SER-</u> <u>VICES to Perform Underground Utility Locating</u> <u>Services (Est. \$7,500,000).</u>

Due April 3, 2025 at 2 pm

CITY OF TAMPA, PUBLIC WORKS, JIM GREINER - 813/274-8598 FAX: 813/274-8080 jim.greiner@tampagov.net

### INVITATION TO BID

The City of Venice invites sealed bids from qualified bidders to provide the following goods or services, which is described in detail in the Specifications.

Bid No.: 3176-25

#### Bid Title: Venice Public Fishing Pier Hurricane Damage Repair PROJECT DESCRIPTION:

The Venice Public Fishing Pier is located at 1600 S. Harbor Drive, Venice, Sarasota County, Florida. The scope of the project includes removal and replacement of hurricane damaged framing, decking and railing, on the T section leaving concrete pile caps, piles, and stainless-steel connectors in place, and removal and replacement hurricane damaged deck on the west end of the main pier, leaving primary structural components (beams, pile caps, piles, and railings) in place. The work also includes replacement of damaged pigeon deterrent system, blocking access to horizontal surfaces on the pier structure. Existing fish cleaning stations will remain. Existing water and electrical services damaged will be restored as is. Existing light fixtures that were damaged by the hurricane will be replaced to match existing. The existing pier footprint and heights will remain unchanged. There will be no foundation work. Contractor will be required to relocate the existing fence that was installed to close the damaged portion of the pier and restore any impacts to the pier from the fence removal/relocation. The contractor shall relocate the fence to a location seaward of the landward most fish cleaning station at a maximum to allow continued use of the pier and at least one fish washing station. Materials may be staged on the fenced area of the pier that was not damaged, however, care must be taken when transporting materials to and from the pier as the areas will have pedestrians present. The bait shop and restaurant will remain open during construction, therefore, coordination with the restaurant owner will be required. If an additional laydown area is needed, that will be coordinated with the City and the business owner. Contractor shall provide Forest Stewardship Council chain of custody documentation identifying where all IPE wood used on this project has been harvested and certifying that it was harvested legally. Project bid shall include all elements necessary to complete the project as defined.

It is the contractor's responsibility to inspect the site and bid a complete project including all required elements. Award of the contract will be based on the Total Not to Exceed Lump Sum Base Bid. BID OPENING LOCATION: City of Venice, Venice City Hall, Building Conference Room, room # 169, 401 West Venice Ave., Venice FL 34285 BID SUBMITTAL DEADLINE and BID OPENING DATE & TIME: April 22, 2025, at 2:00 PM

### MANDATORY PRE-BID MEET-ING: YES DATE & TIME: March 28, 2025, at 1:00 PM

LOCATION: City of Venice, Venice City Hall, Building Conference Room, room # 169, 401 West Venice Ave., Venice FL 34285

Specifications and Bid documents are available by calling Demand-Star at (800) 711-1712 or by their Internet address at

http://www.demandstar.com.

Proposers may also pick up Bid documents at the City of Venice Procurement- Finance Department, Room 204, 401 West Venice Ave., Venice Florida 34285, (941) 882-7422 at no charge.

A Mandatory Pre-bid Meeting/site visit will be held on March 28, 2025, at 1:00 p.m., City of Venice, Venice City Hall, Building Conference Room, room # 169, 401 West Venice Ave., Venice FL 34285. Representatives from the City will be present to discuss the overall project and the Invitation to Bid. Interested Firms are encouraged to attend.

All questions, comments, or concerns about this ITB must be submitted in writing to Mr. Peter A. Boers, Procurement- Finance Department, for the City of Venice, Room 204, 401 West Venice Avenue, Venice, FL 34285 or e-mail at <u>pboers@venicefl.gov</u> Mr. Boers is the only designated representative of the City authorized to respond to comments, questions, and concerns. The City will not respond to comments, questions or concerns addressed to any person other than Mr. Boers. If the City determines that a particular comment, question or concern necessitates a global response to all Proposers, the City will issue a clarifying memorandum or addendum. The final day that the City will accept questions will be April 11, 2025, by 1:00 p.m.

Bids must be submitted in four sets and at least one set must bear an original signature, in a sealed envelope marked "Invitation to Bid #3176-25: "Venice Public Fishing Pier Hurricane Repair" and mailed or delivered to the City of Venice-Purchasing Department, 401 W. Venice Ave. Room # 204, Venice, FL 34285, no later than the deadline specified. The City assumes no responsibility for bids received after the bid submittal time or at any location other than that specified, no matter what the reason. Late bids will be held unopened and will not be considered for award.

No bid will be received after the specified time for acceptance and no bidder may withdraw his bid within a period of ninety (90) days after the actual date of opening thereof.

Bids will be considered only from bidders who have the applicable license, if a license is required by the City of Venice and/or State of Florida, for the type of work specified. A copy of the applicable license must be submitted with bid if a license is required.

The City reserves the right to reject any or all bids in whole or in part, with or without cause, to waive any requirements, irregularities or technical defects therein, when it is deemed to be in the interest of the City.

CITY OF VENICE, FLORIDA Publish: Saturday, March 22, 2025 Wednesday, March 26, 2025 #11143277

#### Notice to Receive Sealed Bids RFP 2025-01

Pursuant to the regulations found at 2 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), Part 200 et seq., in addition to the statutory authority requirements, and programmatic guidance governing the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Disaster Recovery Programs, the City of Apalachicola invites qualified firms to submit a bid for **Battery** Park V Pier Improvements. This project will include improvements to the Battery Park V Pier Apalachicola, Florida. in The proposed improvements will include the repair to decking and structural members of the Battery Park V Pier, as well as the addition of ADA compliant handicap parking spaces and sidewalk.

Marina Drive, Port St. Joe, Florida 32456, 850-227-7200. Please contact Shannon Renfro, SRenfro@Dewberry.com for bid documents. The bid must conform to Section 287.133(3) Florida Statutes, on public entity crimes. Completion date for these projects will be 120 days from the date Notice to Proceed is presented to the successful bidder. Liquidated damages for failure to complete the project on the specified date will be set at \$200.00 per day. Please indicate on the envelope that it is a sealed bid for the "Battery Park V Pier Improvements". Sealed bids will be received until Thursday, <u>April 17, 2025, at 10:00 am</u> (EST) at the City of Apalachicola City Hall, 192 Coach Wagoner Blvd., Apalachicola, Florida 32320 and will be opened and read aloud on Thursday, April 17, 2025, at 10:05 am

### (EST).

All submitted bids must include copies of insurance, all relevant licenses, detailed experience, labor and equipment capabilities and

Bid documents can be obtained at Dewberry Engineers, Inc., 324

financial capacity to complete the work.

The City of Apalachicola reserves the right to waive informalities in any bid, to accept and/or reject any or all bids, and to accept the bid that in their judgement, will be in the best interest of the City of Apalachicola.

If you have any questions, please contact Josh Baxley, P.E, via phone at 850-693-2181 or email at jbaxley@ dewberry.com.

The City of Apalachicola, Florida encourages Minority Business Enterprises to respond to this bid invitation.

March 20 2025 LSAR0261286

### HERITAGE HARBOUR NORTH COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DISTRICT REQUEST FOR QUALIFICATIONS FOR DISTRICT **ENGINEERING SERVICES (EVALUATION OF RE-USE WATER** SYSTEM WITHIN CDD MAINTAINED LANDS)

**NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN** that Heritage Harbour North Community Development District (the "District"), located in Manatee County, Florida announces that professional engineering services will be required for the evaluation of the re-use water system within District maintained lands, with services that may include include, without limitation, evaluation, planning, preparing reports, and preparing plans, designs and specifications. The engineering firm selected will provide such services as are required by the District in the evaluation of the re-use water system.

The District seeks engineering firms with strong qualifications and proven experience in re-use water systems. Any firm or individual ("Applicant") desiring to provide professional services to the District must: 1) hold applicable federal, state and local licenses; 2) be authorized to do business in Florida in accordance with Florida law; and 3) furnish a statement ("Qualification **Statement**") of its qualifications and past experience on U.S. General Service Administration's "Architect-Engineer Qualifications, Standard Form No. 330," with pertinent supporting data. Among other things, Applicants must submit information relating to: a) the ability and adequacy of the Applicant's professional personnel; b) whether the Applicant is a certified minority business enterprise; c) the Applicant's willingness to meet time and budget requirements; d) the Applicant's past experience and performance, including but not limited to past experience with re-use water systems, past experience as an engineer for any community development districts and past experience in Manatee County, Florida; e) the geographic location of the Applicant's headquarters and offices; f) the current and projected workloads of the Applicant; and g) the volume of work previously awarded to the Applicant by the District. Further, each Applicant must identify the specific individual affiliated with the Applicant who would be handling the necessary engineering tasks.

The District will review all applicants and will comply with the state procedures as established by the "Consultants' Competitive Negotiations Act", Section 287.055, Florida Statutes. All Applicants interested must submit eighteen (18) printed copies of the proposal as well as one (1) USB drive containing electronic copies of Standard Form No. 330 and the Qualification Statement prior to **12:00 noon** on Monday, April 21, 2025 by email to jimward@jpwardassociates.com ("District Manager's Office"). Applicants may provide any additional information that outlines their gualifications relating to this Project

The Board shall select and rank the Applicants using the requirements set forth in the CCNA and the evaluation criteria on file with the District Manager, and the highest ranked Applicant will be requested to enter into contract negotiations. If an agreement cannot be reached between the District and the highest ranked Applicant, negotiations will cease and begin with the next highest ranked Applicant, and if these negotiations are unsuccessful, will continue to the third highest ranked Applicant.

The District reserves the right to reject any and all Qualification Statements. Additionally, there is no express or implied obligation for the District to reimburse Applicants for any expenses associated with the preparation and submittal of the Qualification Statements in response to this request.



850/248-8270

### 25-28 Stormwater Utility Fee Study

Invitation To Bid Purchasing 541618, 541620

### Overview

### Summary

The Bay County Board of County Commissioners (County) is seeking statements of qualifications from firms with experience in updating a schedule of stormwater fees referenced in the Bay County Code of Ordinances. On January 18, 2005, the Board of County Commissioners approved a stormwater utility ordinance, which established a flat stormwater fee for developed residential and non-residential parcels. The scope of this project includes the review and revision of the current public storm water utility Financial Model and Fee Structure.

Question Submission Deadline:

March 28, 2025, 5:00pm

Proposal Submission Deadline:

April 8, 2025, 2:00pm



850/248-8270

### 25-32 Disaster Recovery Consultant Services

Invitation To Bid Purchasing 541611 Summary

Any protest regarding the terms of this Notice, or the evaluation criteria on file with the District Manager, must be filed in writing, within seventy-two (72) hours (excluding weekends) after the publication of this Notice. The formal protest setting forth with particularity the facts and law upon which the protest is based shall be filed within seven (7) calendar days after the initial notice of protest was filed. Failure to timely file a notice of protest or failure to timely file a formal written protest shall constitute a waiver of any right to object or protest with respect to aforesaid Notice or evaluation criteria provisions. Any person who files a notice of protest shall provide to the District, simultaneous with the filing of the notice, a protest bond with a responsible surety to be approved by the District and in the amount of Twenty Thousand Dollars (\$20,000.00).

### **Heritage Harbour North Community Development District JAMES P. WARD, DISTRICT MANAGER**

IPL0222274 Mar 23 2025

ELECTRONIC OR SEALED PROPOSALS for RFP NO: 25-32 Disaster Recovery Consultant Services will be received by the BOARD OF County COMMISSION-**ERS OF BAY County, FLORIDA at the** Purchasing Department, 840 West 11th Street, Suite 2500, Panama City, Florida 32401 up until 2:00 PM (central time) Wednesday, April 2, 2025.

### LEGAL NOTICE

### CITY OF ST. PETE BEACH REQUEST FOR BIDS AS-NEEDED SEAWALL REPAIRS & MAINTENANCE

The City of St. Pete Beach is soliciting bids from qualified contractors for As-Needed Seawall Repair and Maintenance. Specifications can be downloaded directly from the City of St. Pete Beach website. Refer to https://www.stpetebeach.org/, and click on Government, then Bids and Proposals - https://www.stpetebeach.org/Bids.aspx.

All submitters must contact the City's Procurement Manager, in writing via e-mail (jtaylor@stpetebeach. org), with their intention to bid, along with their company name and contact information at least five (5) business days before the bid package is due.

All bids should be submitted electronically to either Bonfire or DemandStar no later than 9:00 a.m. on Wednesday, April 23, 2025 (Deadline). Only electronic bids will be accepted.

03/19/25 jb

28618-1

NOTICE TO ALL DESIGN BUILD FIRMS conference room of the DEES administration building, located at 901 NW 66th Avenue, Margate, FL 33063.



The School Board of Palm Beach County, Florida invites qualified ELECTRICAL, MECHANICAL, PLUMBING, AND FIRE PROTEC-TION CONSULTANTS, licensed by the state of Florida, to submit Proposals to provide Consultant Services on Continuing Contract. The RFP document may be obtained from BidNet Direct at https://www.bidnetdirect.com/palmb eachschools. The School Board reserves the right to waive minor technicalities in any proposal. Proposals shall be submitted through BidNet Direct by: <u>April 21</u>, 2025, no later than <u>2:00 P.M.</u>, EDT. 3/24, 3/31, 4/7/25 11150864

RFP\_2025\_002 <u>Suwannee Sound/Cedar Key</u> OYSTER RESTORATION Project Involving the Placement of Reef Building Substrate and/or Live Oyster Seed on Damaged or Degraded Oyster Reefs.

Due April 10, 2025 at 2 pm

LEVY COUNTY COMMISSION, ALICIA TRETHE-WAY, BRONSON - 352/486-5218 or 352/441-0964 tretheway-ali@levycounty.org

The City of Cape Coral, Florida will receive Proposals for <u>Professional Engineering, Design and Construction Services for Weir 2, 8 and 13 Replacement</u> <u>Project</u> RUT2559SH, in accordance with the specifications on file. Detailed specifications and instructions for submittal may be obtained online at https:// capecoral.ionwave.net/Login.aspx. PROPOSALS ARE TO BE SUBMITTED THROUGH ION WAVE NO LATER THAN <u>3:00 P.M. on April 16, 2025</u>. PRO-POSALS WILL NOT BE PERMITTED TO BE SUBMITTED AFTER THAT TIME.

By Order of the City Manager

Kimberly Bruns, City Clerk

### RFQ NO. 2025-008 WWTP HEADWORKS REHABILITATION

Sealed Design/Build Qualifications packages will be received by the City of Margate Purchasing Division, Second Floor, Margate City Hall, 5790 Margate Blvd., Margate, FL 33063 until <u>11:00 a.m.</u> local time on Thursday, <u>May 1. 2025</u> from qualified firms for a completed project for RFQ 2025-008 WWTP Headworks Rehabilitation.

There will be a <u>non-mandatory pre-</u> proposal conference held on Wednesday, <u>April 16, 2025 at 10:00 am</u> in the large RFQ packets may be obtained by visiting the Purchasing Division at the City Hall address above or by visiting the Purchasing section of our website www. margatefl.com and completing an online registration form. Additional information and/or assistance may be obtained by contacting Purchasing by phone at (954) 935-5346 (refer to RFQ No. 2025-008).

Kelly McGilvray Buyer II 3/24/2025 7787621

### DOT-ITB-25-8041-JR

Long Term Protected GOPHER TORTOISE CONSERVATION RECIPIENT SITE to Accept Gopher Tortoises From Donor Site Within SR 91 Florida's Turnpike From O'Brien to US 27 Project in Lake Co.

Due March 31, 2025 at 2:30 pm

DEPT. OF TRANSPORTATION, TURNPIKE, JA-MIE REYES, OCOEE – 407/264-3204 (x. 3495) tp.purch@dot.state.fl.us

### REQUEST FOR QUALIFICATIONS FOR ENGINEERING SERVICES FOR THE VERANDA COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DISTRICT

RFQ for Engineering Services The Veranda Community Development District ("District"), located in St. Lucie County, Florida, announces that professional engineering services will be required on a continuing basis for the District's roadway improvements, stormwater management system, water distribution system, wastewater system, landscaping, hardscaping and irriaction system improvements, and other public improvements authorized by Chapter 190, Florida Statutes. The engineering firm selected will act in the general capacity of District Engineer and will provide District engineering services, as required.

Any firm or individual ("Applicant") desiring to provide professional services to the District must: 1) hold applicable federal, state and local licenses; 2) be authorized to do business in Florida in accordance with Florida law; and 3) furnish a statement ("Qualification Statement") of its qualifications and past experience on U.S. General Service "Architect-Engi-Administration's neer Qualifications, Standard Form No. 330," with pertinent supporting data. Among other things, Applicants must submit information relating to: a) the ability and adequacy of the Applicant's professional personnel; b) whether the Applicant is a certified minority business enterprise; c) the Applicant's willingness to meet time and

budget requirements; d) the Applicant's past experience and performance, including but not limited to past experience as a District Engineer for any community development districts and past experience with Palm Beach County; e) the geographic location of the Applicant's headquarters and offices; f) the current and projected workloads of the Applicant; and g) the volume of work previously awarded to the Applicant by the District. Further, each Applicant must identify the specific individual affiliated with the Applicant who would be handling District meetings, construction and other engineering services, tasks.

The District will review all Applicants and will comply with Florida law, including the Consultant's Competitive Negotiations Act, Chapter 287, Florida Statutes ("CCNA"). Applicants interested must AII submit one (1) electronic copy on a flash drive of Standard Form No. 330 and the Qualification Statement by 5:00 p.m. on Thursday, May 1, 2025, to the attention of Michael Special McElligott, District Services, Inc., The Oaks Center, 2501A Burns Road, Palm Beach Gardens, Florida 33410 ("District Manager's Office").

The Board shall select and rank the Applicants using the requirements set forth in the CCNA and the evaluation criteria on file with the District Manager, and the highest ranked Applicant will be requested to enter into contract negotiations. If an agreement cannot be reached between the District and the highest ranked Applicant, negotiations will cease and begin with the next high-

est ranked Applicant, and if these negotiations are unsuccessful, will continue to the third highest ranked Applicant.

The District reserves the right to reject any and all Qualification Statements. Additionally, there is no express or implied obligation for the District to reimburse Applicants for any expenses associated with the preparation and submittal of the Qualification Statements in response to this request.

Any protest regarding the terms of this Notice, or the evaluation criteria on file with the District Manager, must be filed in writing, within seventy-two (72) hours (excluding weekends) after the publication of this Notice. The formal protest setting forth with particularity the facts and law upon which the protest is based shall be filed within seven (7) calendar days after the initial notice of protest was filed. Failure to timely file a notice of protest or failure to timely file a formal written protest shall constitute a waiver of any right to object or protest with respect to aforesaid Notice or evaluation criteria provisions. Any person who files a notice of protest shall provide to the District, simultaneously with the filing of the notice, a protest bond with a responsible surety to be approved by the District and in the amount of Ten Thousand Dollars (\$10,000.00). VERANDA COMMUNITY DEVEL-OPMENT DISTRICT www.verandacdd.org

Pub:March 24, 2025 TCN11143000

### The Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD) is seeking sealed bids/proposals for the following:

### RFB 25-4732 FLINT AND PEACE CREEKS DEBRIS REMOVAL FY25. Nonmandatory pre-bid conference and site visit(s) will be held on Wednesday, April 2, 2025:

Peace Creek – 10:00 am Local Time at the North side of the intersection of Old Bartow Eagle Lake Road and Crossover Road in Bartow, Florida 33830. Latitude: 27°56'5.11"N | Longitude: 81°48'52.58"W.

Flint Creek - 2:00 pm Local Time at the Flint Creek Structure, 12307 Kelso Road, Thonotosassa, Florida 33592.

Please refer to the solicitation document for more information.

St Petersburg, City of

727-893-7220

Consulting Services, Solar Energy, Energy Efficiency, Mechanical, Electrical, Plumbing and Fire Protection Projects

**Request For Qualification Engineering** 90607, 90608, 90610, 90627, 90628...

Project ID: RFQ- 25 – 108

Summary

The City of St. Petersburg is seeking responses from qualified vendors to provide consulting services for Solar Energy, Energy Efficiency, Mechanical, Electrical, Plumbing and Fire Protection Projects on as-needed basis. Projects may be funded by the City, State, Federal or other agencies or by a combination of funding sources. Projects funded in whole or part with non-City funds shall be designed in conformance with the funding agency's requirements.

DUE DATE: Tuesday, April 15, at 2:00 p.m. Local Time. Contact: Ari Horowitz.

### To view or listen to bid opening: Join Microsoft Teams meeting on your computer or mobile app via https://bit.ly/4bMBID0

Or call in (audio only) +1 786-749-6127,,394843905# United States, Miami Phone conference ID: 394 843 905#

The solicitations may be obtained through the District's Internet website at http://www.watermatters.org/procurement under "View Our Solicitations" or on DemandStar, www.demandstar.com. For more information contact Procurement Services at procurement@watermatters.org, (352) 505-2970, or in Florida: 1-800-423-1476, TDD ONLY 1-800-231-6103. 3/23/2024

(28932h)

**Deadline for Questions:** 

April 7, 2025, 12:00pm

**Deadline for Question Response:** 

April 9, 2025, 12:00pm

Deadline for Submittals:

April 17, 2025, 3:00pm

Invitation to Bid		species of crayfish from competing with an indigenous species of crayfish. Includes all material, equipment and labor necessary to complete the scope of work in accordance with the specifications contained berein
Black Creek Crayfish Project 9810.060		or work, in accordance with the specifications contained herein.
Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) Advertisement Status: OPEN		A vendor submitting a bid should be registered in the MyFloridaMarketPlace (MFMP) system and with SunBiz prior to the bid opening.
Advertisement Number: ITB-11978		For a copy of this bid, click on the link at the bottom of the advertisement page on the Vendor Information Portal (VIP) to download.
Agency Advertisement Number: FWC 24/25-66C Version Number: 1 Published Date/Time: 03/14/2025 12:48 PM		Email a completed Confidentiality Exemption Form (Attachment A) to Ran- dolph.Golightly@myfwc.com to receive an electronic copy of construction plans and all other associated documents.
Start Date/Time: 03/14/2025 12:48 PM End Date/Time: 04/21/2025 03:00 PM		Please direct all questions to:
Responses Open Date/Time: 04/21/2025 03:00 PM		Name: Randy Golightly Phone: (850) 617-9648 Address: 1875 E Orange Ave Tallahassee, FL 32311
Commodity Codes		Email: <u>Randolph.Golightly@MyFWC.com</u>
Code	Description	
72141505	Earthmoving service	
72154007	Dewatering service	
The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission is seeking competi-		

tive pricing for installing a new weir in Black Creek to prevent an invasive

### TIMBER CREEK COMMUNITY DEVELOP-MENT DISTRICT

### **INVITATION TO BID**

Pond Repair and Restoration for

Timber Creek CDD

Hillsborough County, Florida

Timber Creek Community Development District (the District) hereby requests bids to provide services relating to pond repair and restoration for Timber Creek Community Development District, all as more specifically set forth in the Project Manual.

The Project Manual will be available beginning Friday, March 21, 2025, at 12:00 p.m. (EST). The project manual will be available electronically and a paper copy of the manual can be picked up at Inframark, 2005 Pan Am Circle, Suite 300, Tampa, FL 33607. The District Manager shall be the contact person regarding the Project Manual. Lisa Castoria can be reached by email at Lisa.Castoria@inframark.com.

service as outlined in the Project Manual and meet the following gualifications: (i) fully licensed and insured, (ii) 5 years minimum continuous operation (iii) experience with at least three other projects involving pond repair and restoration similar to the Timber Creek CDD project, with verifiable references on those projects, (iv) Bidder must be in good financial standing with no history of bankruptcy or financial reorganization, (v) Bidder will be encouraged to have made a site visit prior to submitting the bid and will be responsible for 100% of their own takeoffs, and (vi) Bidder must submit a total price.

The District has the right to reject any and all bids, make modifications to the work, and waive any minor informalities and irregularities in bids as it deems appropriate, if it determines in its discretion that it is in the best interest of the District to do SO.

Any person who wishes to protest the Project Manual, or any component thereof, shall file with the District a written notice of protest within seventy-two (72) hours after the Project Manual is made available, and shall file a formal written protest with the District within seven (7) calendar days after the date of timely filing the initial notice of protest. Filing will be perfected and deemed to have occurred upon receipt by the District Manager, Inframark, 2005 Pan Am Circle, Suite 300, Tampa, FL 33607. Failure to timely file a notice of protest or failure to timely file a formal written protest shall constitute a waiver of any right to object to or protest the contents of the Districts Project Manual. The formal written protest

shall state with particularity the facts and law upon which the protest is based.

Ranking of bids will be made on the basis of qualifications according to the evaluation criteria contained within the Project Manual. Any and all questions relative to this project shall be directed in writing, by e-mail only, to Lisa Castoria at Lisa.Castoria@inframark.com, no later than Thursday, April 17, 2025, at 2:00 p.m. (EST).

Firms desiring to provide services for this project must submit one (1) original hard copy AND one (1) digital PDF copy of the required bid by 5:00 p.m. (EST) on April 23, 2025, to Inframark, 2005 Pan Am Circle, Suite 300, Tampa, FL 33607 AND by emailing District Manager Lisa Castoria at Lisa.Castoria@inframark.com. Bids shall be submitted in a sealed opaque package, shall bear the name of the Bidder on the outside of the package, and shall identify the name of the project. Bids will be publicly opened at 12:00 p.m. (EST) on Thursday, April 24, 2025, at Inframark, 2005 Pan Am Circle, Suite 300, Tampa, FL 33607; those received after the time and date stipulated above will be returned unopened to the Bidder. Any bid not completed as specified or missing the required bid documents as provided in the Project Manual may be disqualified.

Firms desiring to submit bids must submit the required bid no later than 5:00 p.m. (EST) on Wednesday, April 23, 2025, to the District Managers office located at Inframark, 2005 Pan Am Circle, Suite 300, Tampa, FL 33607. There will be a Pre-Bid Meeting held at 11:00 a.m. (EST) on Tuesday, April 1, 2025, at the Timber Creek Clubhouse located at 10224 Opaline Sky Court, Riverview, FL 33578.

The District is a special-purpose taxing District created by Chapter 190 Florida Statutes. The entities submitting bids must be able to provide for the level of

Timber Creek Community Development District

Lisa Castoria, District Manager

Publish Date: March 23, 2025 29617

FWC 24/25-67 <u>RFQs for Professional ENGINEER-</u> <u>ING SERVICES for a Wide Variety of Environmen-</u> tal Resource Projects Throughout Florida.

Due April 30, 2025 at 3:30 pm Questions Due: 5:00 pm, 4/2/25. https://

vendor.myfloridamarketplace.com/search/bids/ detail/12039

FLORIDA FISH & WILDLIFE CONSERVATION COMMISSION, JOSHUA STRINGER, TALLAHAS-SEE - 850/617-9617 joshua.stringer@myfwc.com

### REQUEST FOR QUALIFICATIONS FOR ENGINEERING SERVICES

### FOR THE WEST PORT EAST COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DISTRICT

### **RFQ for Engineering Services**

The West Port East Community Development District (District), located in Charlotte County, Florida, announces that professional engineering services will be required on a continuing basis for the Districts stormwater systems, and other public improvements authorized by Chapter 190, Florida Statutes. The engineering firm selected will act in the general capacity of District Engineer and will provide District engineering services, as required.

Any firm or individual (Applicant) desiring to provide professional services to the District must: 1) hold applicable federal, state and local licenses; 2) be authorized to do business in Florida in accordance with Florida law; and 3) furnish a statement (Qualification Statement) of its qualifications and past experience on U.S.

-Engineer Qualifications, Standard Form No. 330, with pertinent supporting data. Among other things, Applicants must submit information relating to: a) the ability and adequacy of the Applicants professional personnel; b) whether the Applicant is a certified minority business enterprise; c) the Applicants willingness to meet time and budget requirements; d) the Applicants past experience and performance, including but not limited to past experience as a District Engineer for any community development districts and ida; e) the geographic location of the Applicants headquarters and offices; f) the current and projected workloads of the Applicant; and g) the volume of work previously awarded to the Applicant by the District. Further, each Applicant must identify the specific individual affiliated with the Applicant who would be handling District meetings, construction services, and other engineering tasks.

General Service Administrations Architect -Engineer Qualifications, Standard Form No. 330, with pertinent supporting data. Among other things, Applicants must submit information relating to: a) the ability and adequacy of the Applicants professional personnel; b) whether the Applicant is a certified minority business enterprise; c) the Applicants willingness to meet time and budget requirements; d) the Applicants past experience and per-

> The Board shall select and rank the Applicants using the requirements set forth in the CCNA and the evaluation criteria on file with the District Manager, and the highest ranked Applicant will be requested to enter into contract negotiations. If an agreement cannot be reached between the District and the highest ranked Applicant, negotiations will cease and begin with the next highest ranked Applicant, and if these negotiations are unsuccessful, will continue to the third highest ranked Applicant.