

Friends *of the* Everglades

2023 State Legislative Priorities

1 Demand cleaner water, now

Poor water quality is the root cause of blue-green algal blooms and red tide, seagrass loss and manatee die-offs and other harmful outcomes. Improved water quality will safeguard marine life, human health and Florida's economic vitality. To achieve this goal, the Legislature must:

- Adopt all recommendations of the state's Blue-Green Algae Task Force and Harmful Algal Bloom/red tide Task Force.
- End the "presumption of compliance" for agricultural operations enrolled in Best Management Practices (BMPs) and instead require verification that pollution-reduction measures are working.
- Prioritize Basin Management Action Plans (BMAPs) with the greatest impact on water quality.
- Implement stormwater system inspection and monitoring.
- Require periodic septic tank inspections.
- Oppose legislative proposals to establish "seagrass mitigation banks," which could result in increased loss of seagrass.
- Support funding for science-backed Everglades restoration projects and other programs to fund water-quality improvements projects.

2 Restore more wetlands, send more clean water south

Acquire more land for Stormwater Treatment Areas (STAs). Harmful discharges from Lake Okeechobee remain a periodic threat to the Caloosahatchee and St. Lucie estuaries; high water levels threaten the ecology of the lake itself, and the southern Everglades and Florida Bay still don't receive enough clean freshwater. The new U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Lake Okeechobee System Operating Manual (LOSOM) and construction of the Everglades Agricultural Area (EAA) Reservoir will reduce, but not end, discharges; more land is needed to create additional capacity to store water and move it south. Additionally, the [National Academies of Sciences has concluded](#) more man-made wetlands may be needed so phosphorus levels in water sent to the Everglades meet court-ordered limits, and to ensure the EAA Reservoir will be effective.

With that in mind:

- The state must acquire additional lands in the EAA to create additional man-made wetlands called Stormwater Treatment Areas (STAs).
- If no willing sellers are available in the EAA, eminent domain should be an option. The Legislature removed this tool from its toolkit in 2017 with the passage of SB 10. It should be restored.
- Capacity in the existing STAs (about 60,000 acres) should be prioritized to protect public health and the environment — not large industrial sugarcane growers.



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3 Smarter, controlled development

Re-strengthen the state's role in growth management. Florida's 1985 passage of the Growth Management Act was a milestone for smart planning. But the 2011 Community Planning Act effectively gutted growth management in Florida, eliminating the Florida Department of Community Affairs and removing crucial checks and balances over local planning decisions. To make things worse, the Legislature has penalized citizens who try to enforce their communities' comprehensive plans.

Florida needs to re-establish the bipartisan consensus for a common-sense state role in growth management. To do so, it must:

- Re-establish the Department of Community Affairs or create a similar agency
- Empower regional planning councils to play a more robust role in proposed changes to local comprehensive plans
- Remove limitations on the state's ability to object to and challenge bad amendments to local comprehensive plans
- Renew state law's prior protections for rural and environmentally sensitive lands
- Repeal penalties levied on local citizens who bring legitimate but ultimately unsuccessful challenges to questionable development approvals.

4 Stop sugarcane burning

Phase out pre-harvest burning; increase air-quality monitoring. Sugarcane growers regularly burn fields to facilitate harvest, causing smoke and ash to blanket nearby communities, which contributes to health problems like asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).

- Sugarcane burning represents an environmental injustice, acutely affecting low-income communities of color in the Glades region.
- Sugarcane burning must be phased out as growers transition to "green" harvesting.
- Air-quality monitoring in the Glades communities must be increased and improved until the burning stops.

