

# WATER QUALITY

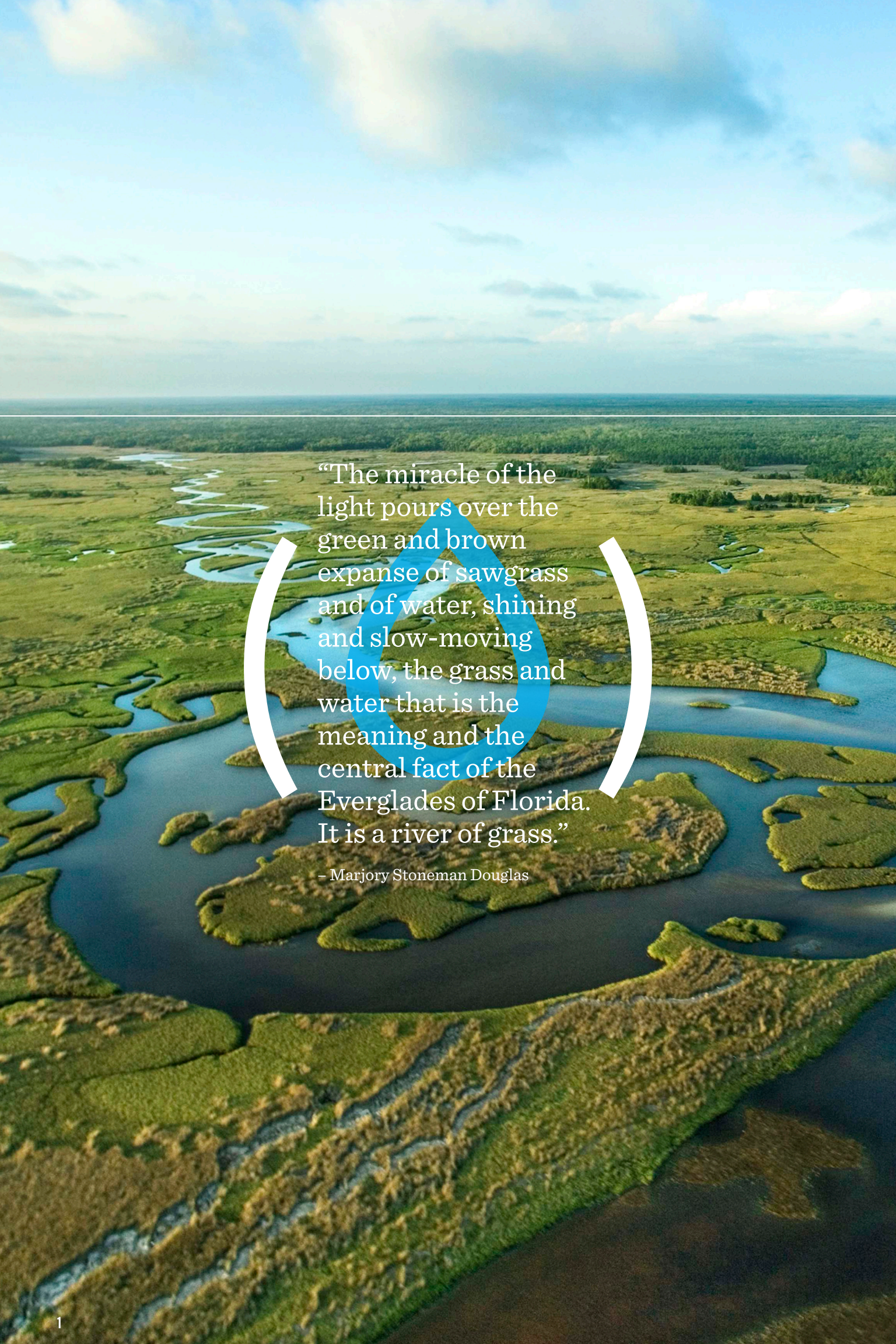
ISSUES OVERVIEW & ADVOCACY EFFORTS

Presented by



FloridaRealtors®  
The Voice for Real Estate® in Florida





“The miracle of the light pours over the green and brown expanse of sawgrass and of water, shining and slow-moving below, the grass and water that is the meaning and the central fact of the Everglades of Florida. It is a river of grass.”

- Marjory Stoneman Douglas



# Florida Realtors® Water Quality Issue Brief

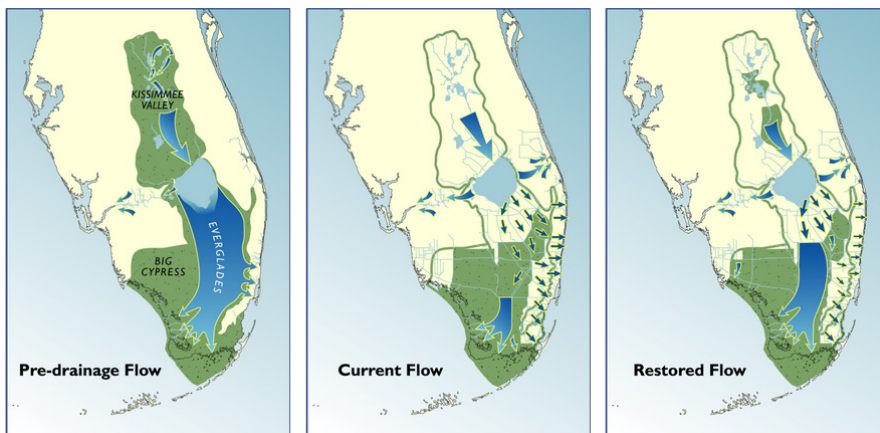
Florida is experiencing a water crisis. Stakeholders are asking, “How do the state and federal government manage the nation’s largest environmental restoration project? What is needed to help prevent excessive amounts of nutrients, such as nitrogen, from polluting two large estuaries on the east and west sides of Lake Okeechobee?”

## The answers are complicated and complex.

### To understand today, we must look to the past

Florida’s water system stretches from Orlando to the north, to Florida Bay to the south. In the early 1900s, the areas south of Lake Okeechobee became known for fertile soil that was ideal for farming. These lands would flood during the wet season and dry out during the dry season. They were some of the most fertile farming lands in the world.

In what is now known as the Everglades Agriculture Area (EAA), state and federal government collaborated to create complex drainage and water movement structures. These structures are necessary to make sure that the towns forming around farmlands are safe from potentially dangerous flooding from Lake Okeechobee. A dam was constructed in 1915 to help with flood control. This human-made levee consisted of mud



Prior to the construction of various water management structures, the lands south of Lake Okeechobee were prone to significant flooding. Over the past seven decades, the engineering projects around the lake have allowed the area to develop.

and other natural materials and reached a height of only 4- to 6-feet high. From 1926 to 1928, two massive hurricanes hit south Florida<sup>1</sup>, causing Lake Okeechobee to overflow, flooding surrounding farming communities and causing significant damage to property. Thousands of people lost their lives. In response, the federal government pushed for water and flood control around Lake Okeechobee. The result was a massive levee that stretches 70 miles along the south shore of the lake and roughly 40 miles around other areas. The project, completed in the 1960s, was named the Herbert Hoover Dike.

<sup>1</sup> Florida’s forgotten storm: The Hurricane of 1928

This new structure was invaluable to the security of the residents south of Lake Okeechobee. However, one unintended consequence of the structure was that billions of gallons of water that organically flowed south from Lake Okeechobee to the Everglades and on to Florida Bay was redirected to the east, west and various other canals.

At the same time, the federal government began channeling the Kissimmee River to have better control of the water entering Lake Okeechobee. Once in Lake Okeechobee, water would then be discharged to the east and west to the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee estuaries. The image to the right reflects these discharged flows.

## Restoring the River of Grass

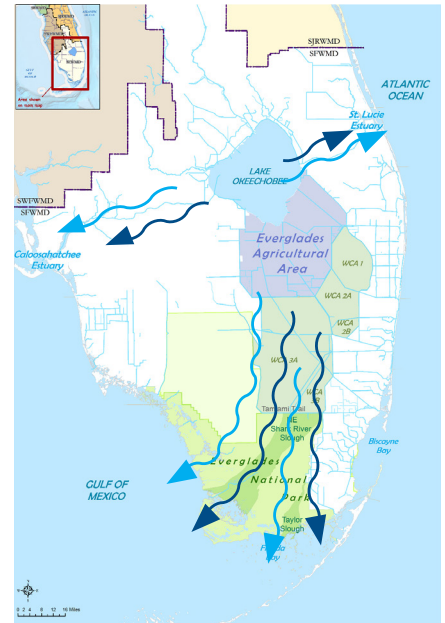
Throughout the latter half of the 20th century, many water managers and environmentalists began to realize the negative impacts that flood control projects were creating in Everglades National Park and surrounding estuaries that require cleaner, fresh water. The Water Resources Development Act of 2000 created what is now known as the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP)<sup>2</sup>. This plan covers 18,000 square miles and includes over 60 different projects. With a total cost of \$8 billion, it continues to be the nation's largest environmental restoration project.

CERP is a 50/50 cost share partnership between the federal government and the state of Florida. However, since the inception of CERP, the federal government has not met their funding portion. Florida Realtors® is eager to work with the National Association of REALTORS®, our congressional delegation, and other federal partners to ensure that the federal government adequately funds their portion of the 50/50 partnership. CERP has completed multiple projects, and many others are in the planning, design or construction phases<sup>3</sup>. We will continue to advocate for both state and federal funding for CERP.

## Florida Realtors® advances water issues at the state level

In the 2014 general election, voters approved a constitutional amendment that requires 33 percent of net revenues from the existing excise tax on documents go toward environmental purposes in the Land Acquisition Trust Fund (LATF). Also, the Legislature has passed two significant pieces of environmental funding legislation.

**House Bill 989**, supported by Florida Realtors, was enacted to amend state law, so the largest appropriation from LATF goes toward Everglades restoration and the state's portion of CERP<sup>4</sup>. This funding source is also used for springs protection, beach renourishment, statewide drinking water projects and other initiatives. Since the amendment's passage, the LATF has appropriated more than



Engineering projects such as the Herbert Hoover Dike were a boon to the areas surrounding Lake Okeechobee, allowing Floridians to live there without the significant flooding threats they faced in the past. But like most engineering feats, there were trade-offs. In this instance, water that once naturally flowed south is now primarily redirected to the east and west estuaries.



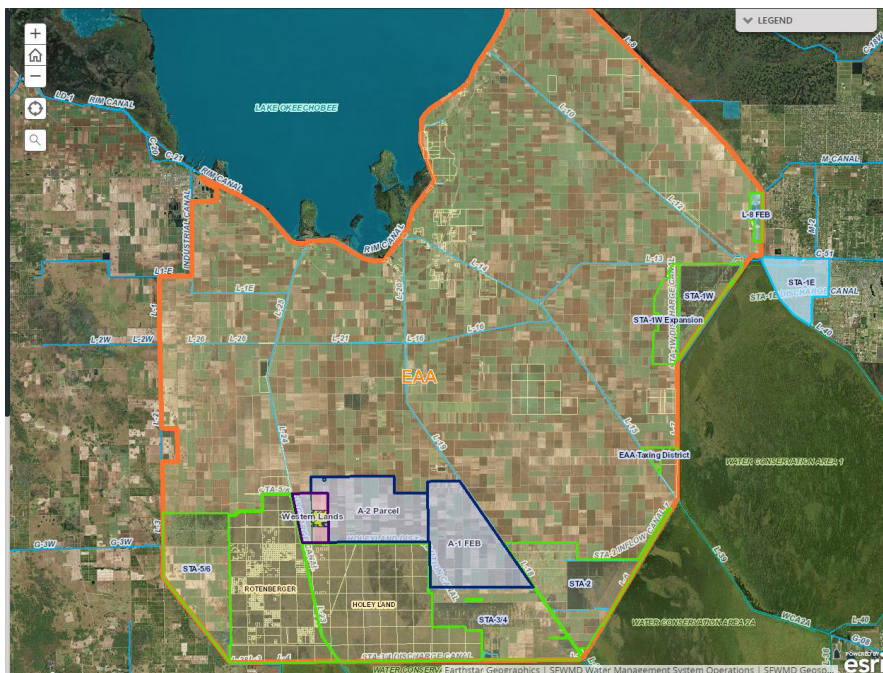
The Herbert Hoover Dike, outlined in orange, is one of the most important flood control structures in the state, enclosing much of Lake Okeechobee's 720 square miles and rising to an average height of 30 feet. It is currently undergoing an extensive rehabilitation process due to its age, however, this process is on schedule to end in 2022.

<sup>2</sup> Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan

<sup>3</sup> Summary of CERP Projects

<sup>4</sup> HB 989: Implementation of the Water and Land Conservation Constitutional Amendment

\$550 million toward Everglades restoration, including \$50 million for Herbert Hoover Dike repairs and \$450 million toward the state’s portion of CERP. The Legislature also passed **Senate Bill 10**, which created an additional water storage area south of Lake Okeechobee<sup>5</sup>. The purpose of this bill was to find land where water managers could store and clean water that is discharged from Lake Okeechobee, as well as to prevent these discharges from being moved to the estuaries east and west.



Controlling the water flow in and out of Lake Okeechobee is a complex process. To help limit the amount of water that is sent to the east and west estuaries, the state designated two areas of land within the Everglades Agricultural Area (highlighted in blue) to help with water storage and cleanup prior to it being sent to Everglades National Park.

The legislation initially called for 360,000-acrefeet of water storage. However, after extensive hydraulic modeling of the water leaving Lake Okeechobee, the South Florida Water Management District and the Army Corps of Engineers decided on 240,000-acrefeet of water storage. This water storage area is known as the Everglades Agriculture Area Reservoir.

Water cleanup and storage will take place on the A-1 and A-2 parcels (shown above). After the water is cleaned, it will be sent south through the Everglades and eventually to Florida Bay.

### The state weighs in on water issues

Throughout 2018, then-Florida Gov. Rick Scott issued numerous state and local emergency declarations aimed at helping local governments and businesses combat the damaging effects that red tide and blue-green algae are having on coastal estuaries and inland waterways. To date, the state has allocated more than \$13 million in grant money assistance to local governments and businesses.

5 CS/SB 10: Water Resources





Following is a list of where some of these funds are being spent to eliminate red tide and blue-green algae:

Charlotte County .....	\$330,000
Collier County.....	\$190,000
Lee County.....	\$4 million
Manatee County.....	\$750,000
Martin County .....	\$750,000
Pinellas County .....	\$1.3 million
Sarasota County.....	\$1.1 million

### **Florida Realtors® is actively engaged in water issues**

Florida Realtors® has been a strong voice on water issues for many years. The Office of Public Policy worked closely with Senate President Joe Negron on the policy change regarding additional water storage around Lake Okeechobee. We will continue to engage with future legislators to advocate for sound policies that will have a positive effect on environmental restoration efforts.

Most recently, our Public Policy team partnered with the National Association of REALTORS® to press Congress on the urgent need to pass the Water Resource Development Act of 2018 (**WRDA 2018**)<sup>6</sup>.

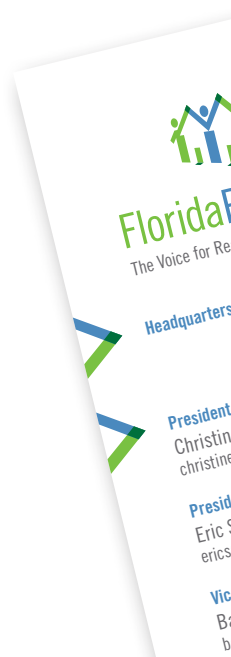
Florida Realtors® sent a letter to Senators Bill Nelson and Marco Rubio to communicate the need for WRDA 2018 to go to the Senate floor for a final vote for passage. Fifty-four local boards/associations of Realtors® signed the letter, which was read into the record during congressional committee meetings. This Realtor®-led advocacy effort helped in the passage of WRDA 2018, which was signed into law by President Trump on Oct. 23, 2018. The state is now allowed to begin spending money on the planning and design of the Everglades Agricultural Area reservoir.

In the past, no provision in the WRDA would allow the state to proceed with spending state-appropriated money with the guarantee of being reimbursed. However, U.S. Rep Brian Mast of the 18th District and others wrote this reimbursement provision into the WRDA 2018. This provision gives the state the authority to begin projects before the federal government appropriates money for 2019.

**The Florida Realtors® Office of Public Policy will continue to advocate for appropriate funding levels for these environmental projects with state and federal officials.**

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<sup>6</sup> Water Resource Development Act of 2018



August 24, 2018

ATTN: Honorable Marco Rubio  
United States Senate  
284 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Rubio,

On behalf of more than 185,000 REALTORS® in Florida, represented by 54 local REALTOR® boards, we write to lend our strong support for this year's Water Resources and Development Act (WRDA) package, S. 2800, America's Water Infrastructure Act of 2018. This legislation includes funding authorization for critical pieces of the Central Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) which will help address the blue-green algae blooms contaminating Florida's waterways and beaches.

The algae blooms are creating an environmental disaster that is causing difficulties for constituents in our great state. These blooms are hurting local economies, impacting housing markets, and causing health concern for numerous Floridians. The crisis is real, and we need your help to prevent it from growing.

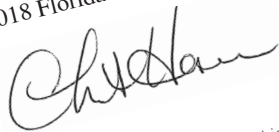
If the WRDA legislation goes to the U.S. Senate floor and ultimately passed, it would assist with the algae crisis by advancing the planning, design, and construction of the Everglades Agricultural Area Storage Reservoir project. This project will significantly increase water manager's capacity to divert damaging discharges away from the coasts for storage, treatment, and release into the Everglades.

As you and many of your colleagues know, the solution to America's most significant environmental restoration plan does not hinge on one specific project. However, the passage of WRDA is a vital piece of a larger initiative to bring normalcy to Florida's citizens and the businesses that line the impacted waters. The WRDA bill needs to be brought to a vote in the U.S. Senate to provide Florida with access to the additional federal resources needed to help solve this crisis. We stand ready to assist you in any way possible to make this happen.

The State of Florida has recently established a dedicated funding source to pay its portion of CERP. Now we need your help to spur Congress into action on WRDA bill. This bill can provide relief for millions of Floridians and their communities, and we look forward to your support in achieving its passage.

Sincerely,

Christine Hansen, CIPS, CRB, GRI  
2018 Florida Realtors® President



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## 2018 Local Board Presidents in Support:

Kenneth Anderson, Michael Artelli, Richard Baranski, Ben Bates, Hollie Billero Buldo, G. Martin Brabham, Rhonda Brewer, Sabrina Burke, Debra Callahan, Abigail Carr, Candace Cecil, Erin Clements, Mari Colgan, Lorie Coogle, Dustyn Corace, Christopher Dixon, Gary Elliott, Suzanne Frisbie, William Golightly, Heidi Gravel, David Grego, Adam Grenville, Donna Guido, Paul Hendriks, Daniel Hernandez, Edward Hirst, L. Michele Holbrook, George Jalil, Lars Kier, Steven Klein, Steven LaFountain, Will Langley, Ronald Lennen, Rosemary Mahoney, Deborah Mays, John McCrory, Liz McMaster, Susan McQuillan, Louis Nimkoff, Kathi Obendorfer, Greg Owens, M. Dianne Pittman, Rona Port, Marvin Puryear, Joseph Pavich, Sr., Manuel Quiros, Steve Rudnianyn, Donald Sarley, A. Cristie Schmidt, John Schmidt, Robin Schwartz, Will Shepherd, J. Kyle Vreeland, H.B. Warren



“Here is land,  
tranquil in its quiet  
beauty, serving not  
as the source of  
water, but as the last  
receiver of it. To its  
natural abundance  
we owe the  
spectacular plant  
and animal life  
that distinguishes  
this place from  
all others in our  
country.”

– President Harry S. Truman,  
*Address at the Dedication of Everglades  
National Park, December 6, 1947*



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Office of Public Policy