



# Governor Ron DeSantis signs executive order to implement major water reforms

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SARASOTA, Fla. – Gov. Ron DeSantis visited three areas of the state on Thursday, including Sarasota County, to make a “water policy announcement.”

DeSantis signed an executive order to implement major water reforms. He visited Bonita Springs, Sarasota and Stuart to speak

about the policy.

The order calls for \$2.5 billion over the next four years for Everglades restoration, the establishment of a Blue-Green Algae Task Force, the creation of the Office of Environmental Accountability and Transparency, the appointment of a Chief Science Officer and instruction to the South Florida Water Management District to start the next phase of the Everglades Agricultural Area Storage Reservoir Project design.

“Our water and natural resources are the foundation of our economy and our way of life in Florida,” said Governor DeSantis. “The protection of water resources is one of the most pressing issues facing our state. That’s why today I’m taking immediate action to combat the threats which have devastated our local economies and threatened the health of our communities.”

The executive order, *Achieving More Now For Florida’s Environment*, in full:

*Section 1: Focus on Rapid Improvement for Water Quality, Quantity and Supply*

*I hereby direct the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), the Department of Health (DOH) as provided in paragraph J below, and Visit Florida and the Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO) as provided in paragraph L below, to take the following actions to enhance Florida’s water quality and preserve its natural resources:*

*A. Secure \$2.5 billion over the next four years to invest in Everglades restoration and protecting our water resources.*

*B. Establish a Blue-Green Algae Task Force, charged with focusing on expediting progress toward reducing the adverse impacts of blue-green algae blooms now and over the next five*

years. This task force should support key funding and restoration initiatives to expedite nutrient reductions in Lake Okeechobee and the downstream estuaries. This task force should identify priority projects for funding that are based on scientific-data and build upon Basin Management Action Plans to provide the largest and most meaningful nutrient reductions in key waterbodies, as well as make recommendations for regulatory changes.

C. Update and secure all restoration plans, within one year, for waterbodies impacting South Florida communities, including Lake Okeechobee and the Caloosahatchee and St. Lucie Estuaries. These updates will ensure that the Blue-Green Algae Task Force has the necessary information to provide guidance to DEP on maximizing the investments in water quality improvements.

D. Instruct the South Florida Water Management District to immediately start the next phase of the Everglades Agricultural Area Storage Reservoir Project design and ensure the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers approves the project according to schedule.

E. Expedite key Everglades projects including the C-44 reservoir and stormwater treatment area, C-43 reservoir, Tamiami Trail and additional projects necessary to protect our waterways and natural resources.

F. Work with the South Florida Water Management District to add stormwater treatment to the C-43 Reservoir to provide additional treatment and improve the quality of water leaving this important storage component.

G. Expedite projects with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to improve management of Lake Okeechobee, including updating the Lake Okeechobee Regulation Schedule and identifying water quality treatment technologies to install near water control structures in Lake Okeechobee.

H. Direct DEP to establish a septic conversion and remediation grant program with a local government match requirement.

I. Instruct all five water management districts to increase transparency and accountability by providing data and information to DEP to support key water quality restoration efforts. Instruct all water management districts to review budgets and prioritize available funding to focus on projects that will help address harmful algae blooms and maximize nutrient reductions.

J. Participate in Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's (FWC) Harmful Algal Bloom Task Force to provide technical expertise and assistance studying causes and impacts of red tide. The DOH is also directed to participate in FWC's Task Force to help study air quality and human health impacts of red tide.

K. Continue DEP's red tide emergency grant program to support local governments to clean up their beaches and coastal areas to minimize the impacts of red tide to residents and visitors.

L. Partner with Visit Florida and DEO to identify opportunities within communities and recommend investments in green infrastructure, such as wetland treatment systems, that benefit our natural resources and local economies by increasing recreational and tourism opportunities, while improving water quality.

M. Engage local governments, industry, universities and water management districts to identify and research all viable alternative water supply sources and provide an assessment of funding needs critical to supporting Florida's growing economy. DEP should take all necessary steps to establish recurring funding for an alternative water supply grant program to help communities plan for and implement vital conservation, reuse and

*other alternative water supply projects.*

*N. Engage local governments, industry, citizens and other stakeholders through a targeted education and outreach campaign that will focus on the importance of conservation and reuse efforts and encourage Floridians to implement essential conservation and reuse efforts in their homes, businesses and communities throughout Florida.*

*O. Continue to explore every option to stop Georgia's harmful upstream water use from causing further adverse impacts to the Apalachicola River and Bay.*

## *Section 2: Restructuring to Focus on Accountability, Transparency, and Science to Achieve More Now for Florida's Environment*

*I hereby direct DEP to implement the following actions to ensure the agency is making sound decisions based on the best available science and providing for accountability and transparency:*

*A. Create the Office of Environmental Accountability and Transparency charged with organizing and directing integrated scientific research and analysis to ensure that all agency actions are aligned with key environmental priorities.*

*B. Appoint a Chief Science Officer to coordinate and prioritize scientific data, research, monitoring and analysis needs to ensure alignment with current and emerging environmental concerns most pressing to Floridians.*

*C. Take all necessary actions to move the Environmental Crimes Enforcement Unit from FWC to DEP to align resources focused on environmental protection and ensure strong enforcement of Florida's environmental laws.*

## *Section 3: Ensure Florida's Valuable and Vulnerable Coastlines*

*and Natural Resources are Protected*

*I hereby direct DEP to implement the following actions to protect Florida's coastlines and natural resources:*

*A. Create the Office of Resilience and Coastal Protection to help prepare Florida's coastal communities and habitats for impacts from sea level rise by providing funding, technical assistance and coordination among state, regional and local entities.*

*B. Take necessary actions to adamantly oppose all off-shore oil and gas activities off every coast in Florida and hydraulic fracturing in Florida.*

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