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Ron DeSantis

46th Governor of Florida



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Governor Ron DeSantis Announces More than \$114 Million for Wastewater Treatment Grants to Improve Water Quality Across the State

On September 24, 2021, in [News Releases](#), by Staff

Nearly 50 percent of the funding is dedicated to the Indian River Lagoon Watershed

MELBOURNE BEACH, Fla. – Today, Governor Ron DeSantis was joined by Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Secretary Shawn Hamilton and local officials to announce the awards for the Wastewater Grant Program, which was established in the Clean Waterways Act and funded in this year's Florida Leads Budget for projects statewide to reduce nutrient pollution. Eligible projects include those that upgrade traditional septic systems to include nutrient removal technology, provide advanced wastewater treatment, or convert septic tanks to central sewer. Out of the total \$114 million awarded, more than \$53 million of the wastewater grants – 46 percent of the funding for Fiscal Year 2021-22 – is being granted to the Indian River Lagoon (IRL).

“Since I first took office, expediting water quality restoration has been one of my top priorities,” said **Governor Ron DeSantis**. “The Indian River Lagoon covers 40% of Florida’s East Coast and is one of our state’s most iconic and critical natural resources, contributing an estimated \$2 billion annually for tourism and recreation and \$767 million to the marine industry. I am happy to join DEP and project partners here today to celebrate these projects that will help protect and restore the lagoon for future generations.”

“The Governor’s commitment and advocacy for water quality in our state has been unwavering,” said **DEP Secretary Shawn Hamilton**. “Today we are celebrating a suite of projects that will help prevent or reduce the amount of nutrients going into the Indian River Lagoon, to help reduce the frequency and duration of harmful algal blooms, help restore seagrasses, and protect marine ecosystems. DEP is proud to be a partner in these critical projects, and we look forward to continuing our collaboration with local governments to address water quality across the state.”

With this funding, applicants have proposed projects to benefit the IRL by:

- Connecting an estimated 3,000 septic tanks to central sewer, resulting in an estimated reduction of more than 62,000 pounds of Total Nitrogen (TN) per year and more than 5,000 pounds of Total Phosphorous (TP) per year.
- Upgrading three wastewater treatment facilities, resulting in an estimated reduction of more than 200,000 pounds of TN per year and more than 37,000 pounds of TP per year.

“I was proud to sponsor the Clean Waterways Act which had bipartisan support and implemented major reforms to improve water quality in our state, including the creation of the Wastewater Grant Program at DEP,” said **Senator Debbie Mayfield**. “Under Governor DeSantis’ leadership, Florida has tackled the state’s water quality issues head on. The \$53 million of projects announced today shows the Governor’s commitment to improving the health of the IRL.”

“The Indian River Lagoon is the lifeblood of Brevard County,” said **Representative Randy Fine**. “It is our primary source of recreation, tourism, and economic growth. And for far too many years, it has suffered and its future has been ignored. So I am extraordinarily grateful that today Governor DeSantis has worked with all of us in Brevard to deliver on our collective promise to repair and preserve this national treasure.”

“We value the leadership and commitment to innovation being shown by the Governor, legislators, and DEP by making yet another valuable contribution to the environment in our District,” said **St. Johns River Water Management District Board Chairman Gen. Douglas Burnett**. “This type of funding commitment is what we at the St. Johns River Water Management District Board are looking for to move the needle on restoring the Indian River Lagoon to its natural state to enhance the environment.”

“The Governor, legislators, and DEP continue to prove through their actions that restoration of our waterbodies is a top priority,” said **St. Johns River Water Management District Executive Director Mike Register**. “It’s through major funding commitments like this, paired with our talented and passionate staff, that we can truly reduce nutrient pollution and continue to restore our natural resources.”

“We applaud the Governor’s leadership in addressing water quality issues across Florida,” said **Jim McDuffie, President and CEO of Bonefish & Tarpon Trust**. “Today’s announcement represents new investment in our state’s wastewater infrastructure, beginning with immediate benefits to the Indian River Lagoon through the conversion of thousands of septic tanks to sewer and the upgrading of multiple wastewater treatment facilities. The issues affecting water quality in Florida are complex, and Governor DeSantis has made a commitment to tackle them on behalf of our citizens and future.”

“The Governor’s announcement is really exciting because it is a transformational investment of state funds to improve wastewater infrastructure along the Indian River Lagoon to improve water quality,” said **Duane De Freese, PhD., Executive Director of the Indian River Lagoon Council and the Indian River Lagoon National Estuary Program**.

“Nutrient pollution is a serious problem in Florida, possibly the single most important issue that could make or break our economy,” said **Daniel Andrews, Co-founder and Executive Director, Captains For Clean Water**. “Governor DeSantis’ grants to improve infrastructure are a step in the right direction down a long road. We must continue to fight for lasting solutions that secure the health and usability of our beaches and waterways – the lifeblood of our state.”

“The Indian River Lagoon has a proven champion in Governor DeSantis. He has, from the beginning of his term as Governor, been the strongest advocate for water quality issues facing Florida,” said **Trip Aukeman, Director of Advocacy Coastal Conservation Association Florida**. “His commitment and environmental stewardship will make a huge difference in the recovery efforts for the IRL. In partnership with DEP and others, the multi-phased approach and project funding announced today is historic.”

“Reducing nutrient loads entering the Indian River Lagoon is a critical step in restoring this iconic estuary,” said **Kellie Ralston, Southeast Fisheries Policy Director for the American Sportfishing Association**. “Governor DeSantis has been committed to our state’s water quality since his first days in office. We are excited to see the tangible results of that commitment reflected in DEP’s 2021 Wastewater Grant Program that will fund important septic-to-sewer conversions and wastewater treatment facility upgrades. These projects will make a real difference in the health of the IRL.”

The IRL is the most biologically diverse estuary in North America and an important resource for species such as the Florida scrub-jay, manatees and sea turtles. Currently, the water quality of the IRL is impaired for total nitrogen (TN) and total phosphorus (TP). The nutrients flow into the lagoon from overland runoff, drainage canals, groundwater seepage, and rainfall. Excess nutrients can contribute to increased frequency, duration and intensity of algal blooms and negatively impact the growth of seagrass in the lagoon. Seagrass is the most important resource within the IRL, providing habitat and food for manatees and other species.

DEP’s wastewater grant program is set forth in [403.0673, Florida Statutes](#). The program prioritizes wastewater projects in basin management action plans, restoration plan areas and rural areas of opportunity and also requires at least a 50% match, which may be waived by DEP for rural areas of opportunity.

In June 2021, DEP’s [Protecting Florida Together Water Protection Grants portal](#) was open for proposed project information for the wastewater grant program. The portal closed in July 2021, and submitted projects were reviewed by DEP for eligibility, nutrient reductions, project readiness, cost effectiveness, overall environmental benefit, project location, local matching funds, and water savings and water quality improvement.

A list of all projects selected for funding for FY 2021-22 can be found [here](#).

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