



Southwest Florida Regional Planning Council

2014 Draft Legislative Agenda

The Southwest Florida Regional Planning Council (SWFRPC) is a multi-purpose regional entity created in 1973 pursuant to an interlocal agreement between Charlotte, Collier, Glades, Hendry, Lee and Sarasota counties. The SWFRPC supports legislative actions consistent with the agency mission to plan, protect and improve the physical, economic and social environments for the benefit of future generations, and opposes actions which could weaken the ability to effectively implement the Strategic Regional Policy Plan.

This draft legislative agenda was approved conceptually by the SWFRPC Legislative Affairs Committee and the Council as a whole.

I. Federal Priorities

A. Water Policy

1. Fully support the next **Water Resources Development Act (WRDA)** bill¹, including authorization for the **Caloosahatchee C-43 West Basin Reservoir Project**, and **appropriate the necessary funds to implement the C-43 Reservoir Project**. (Reservoir will provide 170,000 acre-feet of storage within the Caloosahatchee basin and help address high and low flow issues.)
 2. Fast track the **Central Everglades Planning Project (CEPP)** and get congressional support and funding for the project. (The project will move approximately 210,000 acre-feet of water south of Lake Okeechobee and will reduce some of the damaging flows to the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee estuaries.)
 3. The Federal Government needs to fund their share of the **Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP)** and implement the projects agreed to in the plan. (A majority of the lands needed for the projects have been purchased by the State and need Federal funding to move forward with the projects.)
 4. Continue to keep pressure on the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to move as quickly as possible to rehabilitate the **Herbert Hoover Dike**. (The project will protect the communities around Lake Okeechobee and provide more freeboard and temporary storage in the lake to reduce peak flows to the estuaries.)
- B. Support efforts to **suspend implementation of the Biggert-Waters Flood Insurance Reform Act of 2012 federal flood insurance rate hikes** until an affordability study is completed, and to amend the time frame for premium adjustments to allow responsible changes that accomplish the objective of a solvent National Flood Insurance Program based on the findings of the study.

¹ There are currently two water resource bills being considered by Congress: H.R. 3080: Water Resources Reform & Development Act of 2013, and S. 601: Water Resources Development Act of 2013.

II. State Priorities

A. Water Policy

1. **Interim storage on C-43 West Reservoir site** – Project would significantly increase the amount of water that can be stored on the C-43 West Reservoir (Berry Groves) property until the full project is completed. It would require additional infrastructure including building berms and installing larger pumps to put more water on the site. This would be considered phase I of the larger C-43 West Reservoir CERP project and could be included in the state cost share for the federal project. Estimated cost of the interim storage project is \$10 million. In addition, the 1,500 acres of land purchased as part of the Berry Groves acquisition should be used to construct a stormwater treatment area (STA) adjacent to the reservoir to treat water before it is discharged into the Caloosahatchee.
2. **Lake Hicpochee Restoration Project** – Funds needed to complete planning and construction on north and south sides of Lake Hicpochee to increase storage and treatment. Estimated cost for planning and construction is \$20-30 million. Project will result in increased water storage and treatment within the Caloosahatchee basin.
3. **Increase distributed storage in Kissimmee, Lake Okeechobee, and Caloosahatchee basins.** Additional funds are needed for the state to partner with large land owners in the Kissimmee, Lake Okeechobee and Caloosahatchee basins to store more water on the land so that it is not discharged to Lake Okeechobee or to the Caloosahatchee River. No cost estimate available, but new partners could be brought on as funds become available.
4. **Southwest Florida Comprehensive Watershed Plan (SWFCWP)².** Support funding for projects furthering the goals and objectives of the SWFCWP.

- B. Support the continuation of the Southwest Florida Research and Education Center (SWFREC) in Immokalee as part of the Florida Agricultural Experiment Station system, and the continued operation of the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) Extension Service offices in each of the six counties in southwest Florida.**

² The SWFCWP (originally the Southwest Florida Feasibility Study) was recommended in the 1999 Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan. The SWFCWP study area covers approximately 4,300 square miles including all of Lee County, most of Collier and Hendry Counties, and portions of Charlotte, Glades, and Monroe Counties; the project boundary corresponds to that of the South Florida Water Management District Lower West Coast Water Supply Plan Planning Area. The SWFCWP is a regional restoration plan that addresses water resources issues within all watersheds in southwest Florida. Issues addressed by the study include loss of natural ecosystems, fragmentation of natural areas, degradation of wildlife habitat, alteration of natural freshwater flows to wetlands and estuaries, and water quality degradation in surface waters. The Draft Final Plan is currently under review by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.