



Lee County & Water-Related Information: Blue-Green Algae State of Emergency

What it is:

Executive Order 16-155 issued by Gov. Rick Scott on June 29 (and amended June 30) for Martin, St. Lucie and Palm Beach counties on the east coast and Lee County on the west coast.

What it Means:

- South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) can deviate from the regulation schedule for the Kissimmee Chain of Lakes and store additional water north of Lake Okeechobee (Lake O). That helps limit flow into the lake and reduces the urgency for the Corps to discharge from it.
- SFWMD can work with state and community partners to explore opportunities to increase water flowing south from Lake O.
- SFWMD can store additional water through dispersed water storage projects.
- Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) must take specific actions to address the issues caused by blooms.
- DEP is designated as the lead agency for all crisis management responsibilities related to the Emergency.

What's Happened:

- The state has developed a hotline for South Florida residents to report algal blooms. That number is 855-305-3903.
- The state is deploying teams of additional staff to more rapidly survey and sample areas impacted by blooms. Sampling results can be found at the DEP link: <https://depnewsroom.wordpress.com/algal-bloom-monitoring-and-response/>
- The inclusion of Lee County in the Executive Order ensures Lee County receives fair treatment and triggers additional resources to help combat potential poor water quality.

Current Situation:

- Staff observations indicate no significant blue-green algae blooms in Lee County at this time.
- No Lee County beaches are closed; Lee County parks remain open and water is safe for swimming, per the Department of Health.
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) has reduced the amount of water flowing from Lake Okeechobee.

Recent County Actions:

BoCC: On a recent trip to Washington, D.C., County Commissioners invited USACE headquarters staff to tour the area and conduct a forum with state and local officials in Lee County to update the community on responses, planned actions and timelines. Staff currently is working on logistics.

VCB: Lee County Visitor & Convention Bureau is:

- Providing FAQs and talking points to tourism industry partners and front-line staffers;
- Assessing resources and options to inform potential visitors that although Lee County is part of the Executive Order we do not have safety issues related to blue-green algae blooms;
- Using social media to provide frequent and continuous updates with links to the appropriate state entities to enable visitors to monitor water-quality reports.

EDO: Lee County Economic Development is distributing the state's business-damage assessment survey to area businesses and industry stakeholders.

Natural Resources: Lee County Natural Resources monitors water quality data on a routine basis and is in continuous contact with DEP.

BACKGROUND:

Lee County Commissioners remain vigilant in addressing water-quality concerns that could impact our community.

Funding commitment:

- \$25 million spent on projects in the last five to 10 years.
- \$12.2 million planned for future projects.
- \$60 million roughly estimated in expenditures during the next 15 years for state-mandated TMDL (Total Maximum Daily Load) compliance.
- \$96 million spent during last five years in capital and operations toward stormwater-management activities.
- \$316 million spent on purchase of 25,000 acres of Conservation 2020 land.

Milestones:

1980	Six Mile Cypress Slough Land Purchases
1989	CREW Land Purchases
late 1980s, early 1990s	Weir structures added to Six Mile Cypress, Kehl Canal, Whiskey Creek to retain water
1996	Conservation 2020 Program
1997	NPDES (National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System) MS4 permit holder
2005	Ten Mile Canal – first filter marsh
2007	Northern Everglades Estuary Protection Act (NEEPA)- Boma purchase
2008-9/2012	TMDL/ BMAP stakeholder

Time commitment:

Since the late 1980s, Lee County has taken proactive measures to address impairments to local waterways and preserve the natural system:

- The current County Commissioners have made frequent visits to Washington, D.C., Tallahassee, West Palm Beach and Okeechobee for water-related meetings as well as to other Florida west coast counties.
- They have dedicated countless hours both in-county and out of town on water-related issues working with local, state and federal officials advocating supportive policy and obtaining funds for current and future projects geared toward improving water quality.