

The logo for Vote Water, featuring a stylized checkmark symbol to the left of the text "VOTE WATER". The checkmark is composed of a blue vertical bar and a white diagonal bar. The text "VOTE WATER" is in a bold, blue, sans-serif font. The entire logo is set against a white background within a teal-bordered box.

VOTE WATER

2025 ANNUAL REPORT



✓ MISSION STATEMENT

*Inspiring Floridians
to demand leaders and
policies that promote
clean water.*

OUR VISION

*We will serve as the voice and conscience
of 23 million Floridians who recognize the
importance of clean water to marine life,
human health and economic vitality.*

✓ GET READY, GET SET... PIVOT

IT WAS A BIG couple of days for VoteWater and our sister organization Friends of the Everglades. It was mid January, 2025, and I was walking into a crowded conference room with VoteWater Executive Director Gil Smart and Friends of the Everglades Executive Director, Eve Samples. We were attending the 2025 Everglades Coalition (EVCO) Conference at the Miccosukee Casino & Resort, and we had a mission.



BLAIR WICKSTROM
BOARD PRSIDENT

Along with other staff and board members from VoteWater and Friends of the Everglades (FOE), we were prepared to launch the "Rescue the River of Grass" campaign to the 60+ local, state and national conservation and environmental organizations attending the conference.

The FOE science team completed the research and the board and staff laid out the plan. We were armed with professionally produced marketing material and walked into the conference with a goal of launching the next phase of Everglades restoration.

The launch was successful. In one week 3,315 people signed the Rescue the River of Grass petition. The movement to acquire the needed 100,000+ acres in the Everglades Agricultural Area (EAA) was underway.

That is, until dump trucks, an endless line of them, started rolling through the Everglades and into the Big Cypress National Preserve. Everything changed for both organizations overnight when the federal government and the state of Florida partnered to build a massive detention center, "Alligator Alcatraz," on the grounds of the Dade-Collier Training airport mid-June 2025.

Fortunately both organizations, which were staffed up and actively engaged in the Rescue the River of Grass campaign, could pivot and shift all resources to immediately oppose the development of a prison in the Everglades.

Friends of the Everglades filed lawsuits, including a federal suit alleging violations of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The cases are ongoing; meanwhile, VoteWater joined other conservation groups in filing an amicus ("friend of the court") brief and supported the cause via its newsletter and social media channels.

But the biggest takeaway from the year was that VoteWater was in position to pivot from the Rescue the River of Grass campaign to ridding the Everglades of Alligator Alcatraz. And on top of these major issues in 2025, VoteWater helped drive legislation protecting Florida's State Parks. We fought the Southland rock mine proposal, endorsed several key candidates in the fall elections, published "Deep Dive" investigations while continuing to update VoteWater's "Dirty Money Project." It was, to put it mildly, a big year for VoteWater.

The coming year could be even bigger. And truth be told, we're just getting started.

✓ ONLY VOTERS CAN PROTECT OUR MOST PRECIOUS RESOURCES

I SOMETIMES WALK the Jensen Beach Causeway Bridge in the morning for exercise. The walk begins on the western edge of the Indian River Lagoon and ends at the Atlantic Ocean. Along the way I watch the sun rise over Hutchinson Island, the boats anchored or headed out for the day. Sometimes there are dolphins or manatees.

I pass the omnipresent row of anglers standing on buckets or stepstools to cast over the rail. I see seagulls and pelicans; osprey perch atop the lampposts and scream.

I see, hear, experience many of the things that make our region special and irreplaceable, things that many of us take for granted. This is just what living in and around coastal south Florida is like. And you don't know what you've got 'til it's gone.



GIL SMART
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Unfortunately it's getting easier to see it disappearing in real time. More land is cleared for development, altering the flow of water and destroying habitat. We recreate in waters that we aren't quite sure are safe. Sure, the massive algal blooms of years past haven't reappeared. But everyone knows it's just a matter of time.

Meanwhile, our political leaders appear unmoved and continue to side with powerful special interests. They allow Big Sugar to quietly insert favorable language into legislation. They push to allow sprawl outside urban growth areas — they're even trying to eliminate the Urban Development Boundary in Miami-Dade and other communities.

In a state where our quality of life and our economic well-being relies on preserving our waterways and natural areas, why must we constantly fight proposals to degrade these treasures?

Yet fight we must, and will.

For our natural world cannot protect itself; only voters can protect it. Every election is a choice between leaders who defend our waterways and those who put polluters and special interests first. Voting for clean water means safeguarding our health, our economy, and our future.

We invite you to join us in defending these things which make Florida special, so that they might continue do so for generations to come.

VoteWater.org

✓ 2025 IMPACTS

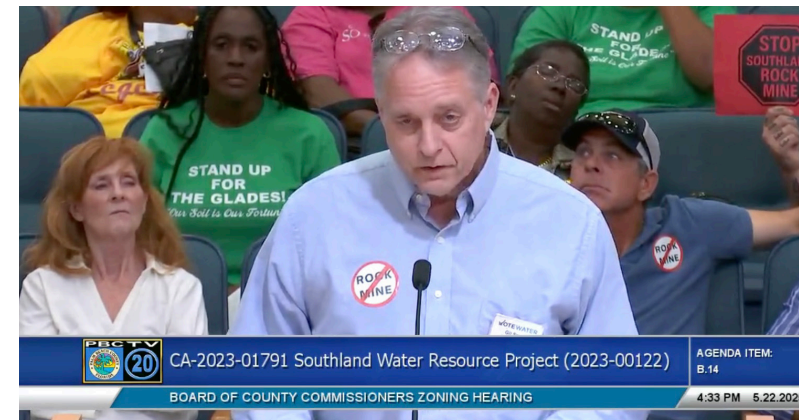


IN 2025 WE FOUGHT TO PROTECT OUR STATE PARKS:

VoteWater was on the front lines of the drive to protect Florida's state parks from development, working with state lawmakers to help pass legislation that provided permanent protections for these cherished wild places.

IN 2025 WE BATTLED BIG SUGAR'S ROCK MINE:

VoteWater has been (and will continue to be) a prominent opponent of the plan to build a massive rock mine on Big Sugar-owned land in the Everglades Agricultural Area. VoteWater Executive Director Gil Smart spoke against the rock mine at numerous government hearings and our open letter to Gov. Ron DeSantis warned that his legacy of Everglades restoration could be at risk if mining operations damage the adjacent EAA Reservoir.



VoteWater.org

✓ 2025 IMPACTS

IN 2025 WE JOINED THE FIGHT AGAINST 'ALLIGATOR ALCATRAZ': We used our social media megaphone to marshal opposition and joined other conservation groups in filing an amicus (“friend of the court”) brief against the Everglades detention center, which continues to inflict damage on the greater Everglades ecosystem and could serve as a dangerous precedent.



IN 2025 WE ENDORSED CLEAN-WATER CANDIDATES: Even though it was an off-year election there were some important local races, and VoteWater endorsed candidates for Miami Mayor and Miami Beach Commission who put clean water at the top of their agenda. Look for more endorsements in the pivotal 2026 midterm elections.

✓ 2025 IMPACTS



IN 2025 WE TRACKED 'DIRTY MONEY': Dirty money to dirty politicians is a root cause of dirty water, so VoteWater updated and expanded our online database of campaign donations from polluters to elected officials. In 2026 we'll keep “following the money” to keep you informed about how special interests buy influence in the halls of power.



IN 2025 WE STEPPED UP OUR ORIGINAL INVESTIGATIVE REPORTING: Our “Deep Dive” series took on complex but crucial clean-water topics like the impact of algaecides and glyphosate on our waterways; the growing problem of lyngbya/Dapis in the Indian River Lagoon and beyond; and the potential harm the proposed EAA rock mine could inflict on the local environment — and the multi-billion dollar EAA reservoir right next door.

✓ RESCUE THE RIVER OF GRASS: A GROWING CALL TO HEAL THE EVERGLADES



SINCE 2018, VoteWater and Friends of the Everglades have worked in close partnership to advance clean-water protections. That alliance will deepen in 2026 and beyond as we move forward with the Rescue the River of Grass campaign.

Launched in early 2025, Rescue is a major campaign to finish Everglades restoration by securing and restoring land south of Lake Okeechobee. Doing so would curtail damaging lake discharges, send enough clean water to Everglades National Park and Florida Bay, protect public health and Florida’s water-based economy, and capitalize on voter-approved Amendment 1 funding to acquire land in the Everglades Agricultural Area.

With more than 100 organizations on board and over 34,000 petition signers, the momentum is real. VoteWater’s lobbying strength, rapid-response advocacy, and ability to elevate supportive public officials will be decisive in moving this proposal forward.



FRIENDS, A 501(C)3 Founded by Everglades icon Marjory Stoneman Douglas in 1969, focuses on policy and advocacy. VoteWater, as a 501(C)4, can engage in political activity, like supporting or opposing candidates for public office.

✓ THE CHALLENGES AHEAD



FIGHTING THE ‘ALLIGATOR ALCATRAZ’ PRECEDENT

The Everglades immigrant detention center known as “Alligator Alcatraz” isn’t just a problem because of the damage it’s inflicted on the ecosystem. Equally as worrying is that in using emergency powers to sidestep the National Environmental Policy Act’s requirement that an environmental review be done prior to building a “major federal project,” Florida could set a disastrous precedent for others who would ignore federal environmental law — and inflict untold damage on water resources and wild places in Florida and beyond.



GROWTH PRESSURES INCREASE, NATURAL FLORIDA AT RISK

The 2026 Florida Legislative session was remarkable for the number of pro-“growth” bills introduced, many of which sought to expedite development and silence citizens by allowing huge development proposals to be approved without any public input. In community after community development pressure is intensifying, putting clean water and other natural resources at risk — and demonstrating once again how important it is to elect leaders willing to say “no.”



WATER QUALITY MISSING THE MARK; NOW WHAT?

The South Florida Water Management District must soon meet strict water quality targets before releasing water from the Stormwater Treatment Areas (STAs) into the Everglades Protection Area (EPA). And it looks like the District could fall short.

Beginning with Water Year 2027 (which begins May 1, 2026), discharges from the STAs must be below 13 parts phosphorus per billion every 3 out of 5 years, and cannot exceed 19 parts per billion in any single year. The latest SFWMD “water year” data shows the STAs are missing this mark, raising the question: Now what? **The clear answer:** Rescue the River of Grass and acquire more land for storing and cleaning the water.



CRUCIAL MIDTERM ELECTIONS LOOM

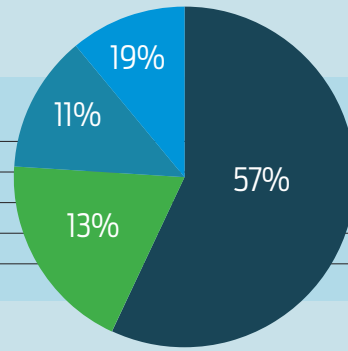
Will clean water be a defining issue at the ballot box this fall? When the water looks clear, it’s easy to assume everything’s under control — but in Florida, the next water crisis is never far away. Unfortunately, relatively few candidates have made protecting Florida’s waterways a priority — and that’s why we’re working hard to help you find and support those who will.



2025 ANNUAL FINANCIAL REVIEW

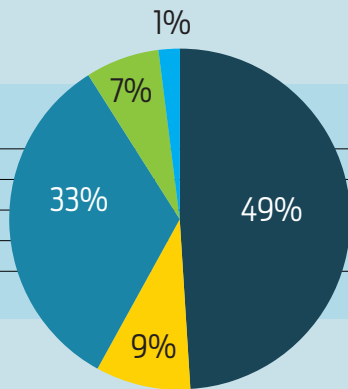
SUPPORT

	AMOUNT	PERCENTAGE
Individuals	\$108,043.00	57%
Corporate	\$191.00	0%
Trusts/Foundation	\$36,000.00	19%
Membership	\$25,344.74	13%
Marketing Data	\$20,640.40	11%
Total	\$190,219.14	



EXPENDITURES

	AMOUNT	PERCENTAGE
Education and Outreach	\$59,189.00	49%
Public Affairs	\$10,240.00	9%
Administration	\$40,154.00	33%
Fundraising	\$8,885.00	7%
Membership	\$1,655.00	1%
Total	\$120,123.00	



BOARD OF DIRECTORS:
BLAIR WICKSTROM
PRESIDENT

JASON BULTMAN
VICE PRESIDENT

RICHARD TROTTA
TREASURER
BILLY HINNERS
SECRETARY

SUZEE BAILEY
MICHAEL BEAUTYMAN
JOHN CASSANI
RAY JUDAH
PHILIP KUSHLAN

3727 SE OCEAN BLVD.,
SUITE 200A,
STUART FL 34996
(772) 212-2939
INFO@VOTEWATER.ORG



And politicians in Washington and Tallahassee are still undermining efforts to fix the dysfunctional ecosystem, even as they bloviate about its beauty and majesty and irreplaceability.”

- Marjory Stoneman Douglas

Photos by Multimedia Producer Leah Voss, and Alex Smart
Graphic design donated by Florida Sportsman



**“THE HEALTH OF WATERS
IS THE CHIEF MEASURING ROD BY
WHICH CIVILIZATION IS JUDGED.”**

—Luna Leopold

