



2026 STATE LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

The Coastal & Heartland National Estuary Partnership, which includes 10 counties and 27 cities in Central and Southwest Florida, as well as state and federal govt. agencies, have the following collective state legislative priorities for 2026. The CHNEP is part of the National Estuary Program (NEP) authorized by Congress, which fosters natural resource management that is consensus-based, non-regulatory, and based on sound science.

- Continue and expand annual funding for the Coastal & Heartland National Estuary Partnership, including recurrent dedicated state funding.
- Create or strengthen nutrient and pollution reduction policies to reduce loads from wastewater, septic, agricultural runoff, reclaimed water, stormwater, fertilizer and internal “legacy loads”.
- Expand funding for innovative nutrient reduction projects, especially those that promote natural system solutions.
- Establish a statewide, long-term funding program through the Florida Department of Environmental Protection with sufficient funds for competitive, local cost-share projects for estuary restoration including:
 - Upgrading wastewater treatment to advanced wastewater treatment and increasing capacity
 - Septic to sewer conversion
 - Groundwater contamination remediation projects
 - Habitat protection and restoration (ex. seagrass, oysters, living shorelines)
 - Stormwater retrofitting projects
 - Legacy load / muck removal remediation projects
 - Resiliency projects and planning
- Support increased funding of Florida Forever and Florida Rural and Family Lands programs.
- Support of local governments’ continued ability to enact and maintain more stringent environmental protection ordinances.
- Support harmful algal bloom monitoring and emergency event response, prioritizing nutrient reduction efforts.



2026 FEDERAL LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

The Coastal & Heartland National Estuary Partnership (CHNEP), which includes 10 counties and 27 cities in Central and Southwest Florida, as well as state and federal governmental agencies, have the following collective federal legislative priorities for 2026. The CHNEP is part of the National Estuary Program (NEP) authorized by Congress, which fosters natural resource management that is consensus-based, non-regulatory, and based on sound science.

- **REAUTHORIZATION OF THE NATIONAL ESTUARY PROGRAM**
 - Reauthorization of the Clean Water Act – Section 320 in 2026 (with funding levels of at least \$50 million for each fiscal year 2027-2031 for the National Estuary Program).
- **CONTINUED NATIONAL ESTUARY PROGRAM AND COMPETITIVE GRANT FUNDING UNDER CURRENT AUTHORIZATION**
 - Appropriate \$1 million annually for each of the 28 entities in the National Estuary Program, consistent with current authorized funding levels.
 - Appropriate at least \$2.5 million annually for the EPA Coastal Watershed Grants programs.
- **ESTUARY CAUCUS MEMBERSHIP EXPANSION**
 - Support expansion of the bi-partisan Congressional Estuary Caucus to support water quality protection and vibrant coastal economies.
- **EVERGLADES RESTORATION**
 - Support full funding of Everglades Restoration and projects that restore the Western Everglades including the Caloosahatchee River & Estuary.
- **ADDITIONAL FEDERAL FUNDING**
 - Support supplemental funding for priority restoration, research, and monitoring needs of the four Florida National Estuary Program entities (including for harmful algal bloom research and monitoring, water infrastructure improvements and new technology R&D, transformational infrastructure improvement projects that benefit water quality, habitat restoration and coastal resilience, etc.)
 - USFWS Everglades to Gulf Coast Conservation Area implementation.