



Legislative Update

Water Resources Advisory Commission Meeting
Thursday, January 3, 2008

Budget

The legislature is planning reducing the current year (FY07-08) state budget by as much as \$200 million to \$600 million during the first few days of the 2008 session. The House Policy and Budget Committee is proposing \$542 million in CURRENT year reductions.

Funding will also be very tight for the FY 08-09 budget as the legislature continues to respond to the down turn in revenues. However, the Governor's budget priorities are strong for the environment. Here is an excerpt from his budget announcement:

In addition to investing \$200 million in energy and climate change initiatives, Governor Crist proposes spending \$300 million to protect and preserve Florida's environment through Florida Forever, adding to the nearly 3.6 million acres of land already in conservation. The Governor also recommends \$200 million to continue the nation's largest environmental restoration project, which includes \$50 million for the restoration of Lake Okeechobee, \$50 million for its downstream coastal estuaries and \$100 million to fully fund the state's annual share of Everglades restoration.

As traditional water sources become overstressed and Southeastern states continue to experience extraordinary drought conditions, Governor Crist proposes \$60 million for alternative water supply development to encourage investment in desalination and reclamation and reuse of storm or waste water. In addition, the Governor is recommending \$25 million to protect water quality and develop water supplies in West Central Florida as well as \$5 million for the continued implementation of the Florida Keys Wastewater Management Plan.

Everglades Restoration Funding

Senator Saunders and Representative Mayfield filed identical bills to increase the bonding authority for the Save Our Everglades Trust Fund from \$100 million to \$200 million and also extend the authority to issue bonds to fund the State's share of Everglades restoration through the year 2020.

Indian River Lagoon

Representative Harrell has filed a House Memorial urging Congress to provide full funding for the Indian River Lagoon – South Restoration Project.

Property Taxes

Property Tax reform will continue to be on the forefront this session. Speaker Rubio announced that the House will focus on implementing long-term revenue caps on state and local governments. He also announced that the Government Efficiency and Accountability Council will examine property tax system issues such as the presumption of correctness and homestead loopholes. There will be legislation that is necessary to implement Amendment One which passed on January 29th. There are also numerous proposals by the Taxation and Budget Reform Commission that can be placed directly on the ballot for constitutional revisions. District staff are monitoring these activities to determine what impact they may have on district ad valorem revenues.

Agency Sunset

The Department of Environmental Protection, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, and the Water Management Districts are all being reviewed this session as part of the Legislature's Agency Sunset procedures. It is very early in the process but it appears that all reports will recommend the continuation of these agencies. The Legislature will most likely focus on recommendations on water management district governance and budget approval processes.

Florida Consumer Fertilizer Task Force

The Florida Consumer Fertilizer Task Force presented their Final Report to the Senate Committee on Agriculture. Recommendations include a model ordinance that local governments will be required to use in passing a fertilizer ordinance unless they can demonstrate that a stricter ordinance is necessary to address at least one of the following criteria: 1) the local government has verified impaired waters and is facing possible TMDL requirements under state or federal laws, 2) the local government has verified harm to human health or the environment that warrants additional consumer fertilizer requirements, or 3) the local government demonstrates a need to improve water quality and prevent future impacts of consumer fertilizers on the environment.

Florida Forever Successor Program

The Legislature may take up a successor program for Florida Forever. As the Florida Forever program enters its final years, there has been discussion of legislation this session to renew and refine the state's conservation land acquisition program.

Ocean Outfalls

The Department of Environmental Preservation has proposed legislation concerning ocean outfalls. Their proposal requires all ocean outfalls to go to advanced wastewater treatment by 2018 and to eliminate the discharges (except

for wet weather) by 2025. Miami-Dade County and Broward County continue to raise technical concerns.

Water Use Restriction Compliance

Senator Aronberg and Representative Williams filed legislation regarding Water Use Restriction Compliance. This legislation will improve our enforcement authority for non-compliance of water use restrictions. The bill will provide administrative enforcement authority for violations during declared water shortage emergencies. Currently, water use restriction violations are enforced through the County Courts. Under the proposed legislation the District simply sends the Administrative Complaint, and the violator then sends in the fine. If the violator challenges, the complaint will be settled through the State's Division of Administrative Hearings.

Session Started March 4th and will end on May 2nd

If you have any questions, please contact:

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