

Indian River Neighborhood Association

Legislative Priorities for the 2025-2026 Session

Restoring Balance for a Resilient Indian River County and Sustainable Florida

Executive Overview

The Indian River Neighborhood Association (IRNA) presents our legislative priorities essential to protecting Indian River County's environmental integrity, economic vitality, and quality of life. Recent state preemptions have severely hampered local communities' ability to address unique challenges, from managing growth to protecting natural resources. This report outlines a clear path forward to restoring balanced governance, securing our water future, and preserving Florida's natural heritage.

I. DEFENDING HOME RULE: Restore Local Authority

The Crisis: Senate Bill 180 (SB 180) and aspects of the Live Local Act have created a regulatory paralysis. SB 180 prohibits local governments from adopting any regulation deemed "more restrictive or burdensome" for one year following hurricane impacts—effectively freezing all of Florida under this restriction through October 2027. Meanwhile, the Live Local Act mandates approval of high-density development while SB 180 simultaneously prevents communities from updating infrastructure standards to manage the consequences.

The Trap: Communities are forced to approve density increases that strain stormwater systems, roads, and utilities, yet are prohibited from strengthening standards to address these impacts. This legislative contradiction sets communities up for environmental degradation and infrastructure failure.

Legislative Actions Requested:

1. Full Repeal of SB 180, Sections 18 & 28

- Remove the regulatory freeze and litigation weaponization provisions
- Supported by many local governments and environmental organizations

2. Amend the Live Local Act

- Restore requirements for public hearings before planning boards and elected commissions
- Grant authority for reasonable, context-sensitive design standards
- Apply density bonuses contextually to surrounding areas, not entire jurisdictions
- Honor local height restrictions and other local ordinances

3. Establish a "Home Rule Bill of Rights"

- Require the state to demonstrate compelling statewide interest before preempting local land use authority
 - Set higher procedural thresholds for future preemptions
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II. MODERNIZING WASTE MANAGEMENT: End Biosolid Land Application

The Problem: Land application of treated sewage sludge (biosolids) introduces massive quantities of nutrients into watersheds, directly contributing to the pollution crisis the state is spending billions to combat.

The Solution: Florida can lead the nation by banning this outdated practice and investing in proven waste-to-value technologies like the Janicki Omni Processor (Sedron Varcor System). This technology transforms sewage sludge into:

- Renewable electricity (powering the system with excess to sell)
- Clean, potable water
- Pathogen-free, nutrient-rich commercial fertilizer

This shifts municipalities from "pay-to-dispose" to "invest-to-create-value" and a pro-environment, pro-innovation, pro-business solution.

Legislative Actions Requested:

1. Implement Phased Statewide Ban

- Phase out Class B biosolid land application over five years
- Allow municipalities time to transition to alternative technologies

2. Fully Fund the Biosolids Grant Program

- Appropriate significant recurring funds for the program established by HB 1405 (2023)
- Prioritize proven waste-to-value technologies that eliminate nutrient discharge

III. RESTORING INTEGRITY TO CONSERVATION FUNDING

The Scandal: In October 2025, the Governor and Cabinet approved spending \$83 million for a nearly 4-acre Destin parcel with "virtually NO actual conservation value." The seller, a major political donor, profited over 900% on a decade-old \$8 million investment. The deal:

- Completely bypassed the Florida Forever scientific review process
- Used seller-commissioned appraisals that included millions for docks on sovereignty lands already owned by the public
- Was rushed through in two minutes without public comment
- Could have instead purchased 60,000 acres of conservation easements or 25,000 acres of critical habitat

The Impact: This betrayal of public trust poisons the well for the entire Florida Forever program, demoralizing legitimate landowners and undermining public confidence in government stewardship.

Legislative Actions Requested:

1. Fund Florida Forever at \$500 Million Annually

- Provide robust recurring funding to acquire high-priority lands before they're lost to development
- Honor Florida's bipartisan conservation legacy

2. Mandate Use of Florida Forever Process

- Require ALL state conservation purchases to go through the transparent Acquisition and Restoration Council (ARC) review
 - Prohibit politically-driven "line-item" projects inserted into budgets
 - Ensure scientific merit, not political connections, drives conservation investments
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IV. PROTECTING FLORIDA'S NATURAL HERITAGE

The Connection: The health of the Indian River Lagoon is directly tied to Everglades restoration. Massive nutrient-laden discharges from Lake Okeechobee into the St. Lucie Estuary (part of the southern IRL system) cause toxic algal blooms and ecological collapse in our local waters. Every dollar invested in projects that "Send Water South" reduces damaging discharges into the Indian River Lagoon.

Legislative Actions Requested:

1. Fully Fund Everglades Restoration

- Support annual state appropriation of at least \$750 million for CERP
- Prioritize and expedite the EAA Reservoir and other projects restoring southward water flow

2. Defend Public Lands from Incompatible Uses

- Prohibit golf courses, lodges, and intensive private development on state parks and conservation lands
 - Require transparent public process for any proposed surplus, sale, or swap of public lands
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Conclusion: A Call to Action

These priorities represent a comprehensive vision for a sustainable Florida where:

- Local communities are empowered to protect their unique character
- State investments in environmental restoration are equitable and effective
- Public trust in governing institutions is restored
- Florida's natural heritage is preserved for future generations

The IRNA respectfully urges our legislative delegation to champion these actions. The health of Indian River County and the integrity of Florida's environment depend on bold leadership and principled governance. The time to act is now. Thank you for your attention.

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