

The “Treasure Coast Clean Water Act”

Short Title: Treasure Coast Clean Water Act

Sponsor: Bernard Taylor (FL-21)

Purpose: To prevent, mitigate, and clean up harmful algal blooms (HABs) in Florida’s Treasure Coast and surrounding waterways through stricter pollution controls, water infrastructure upgrades, and improved oversight.

Section 1. Findings

Congress finds that:

1. Harmful algal blooms (HABs), fueled by nutrient pollution and mismanaged water discharges from Lake Okeechobee, are causing serious environmental, health, and economic harm to the Treasure Coast.
 2. Toxic algae blooms threaten drinking water, kill fish and wildlife, damage tourism and fishing industries, and pose severe health risks to residents.
 3. Current state and federal water management policies fail to adequately control nutrient runoff or prioritize downstream community health.
 4. A coordinated, federally supported response is needed to protect the Treasure Coast’s waterways and the communities that depend on them.
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Section 2. Strengthening Water Quality Standards

(a) The Clean Water Act (33 U.S.C. 1251 et seq.) shall be amended to require **enhanced nutrient pollution standards** for waters connected to Lake Okeechobee, the St. Lucie River, Indian River Lagoon, and their tributaries.

(b) The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) shall establish **enforceable numeric nutrient criteria** for nitrogen and phosphorus levels in these waters, superseding inadequate state standards.

(c) EPA shall require the State of Florida to submit a **Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) compliance plan** with enforceable deadlines and penalties for noncompliance.

Section 3. Upgrading Agricultural and Urban Runoff Controls

(a) Establish the **Treasure Coast Nutrient Reduction Program (TCNRP)** to provide **federal grants and cost-sharing** to:

- Upgrade stormwater systems to prevent nutrient runoff
- Implement **best management practices (BMPs)** on agricultural lands, including precision fertilizer application, buffer zones, and cover crops
- Retrofit or replace failing septic systems with modern, nitrogen-removing alternatives

(b) Require **mandatory nutrient management plans** for all large agricultural operations in the Lake Okeechobee watershed, subject to federal inspection and penalties.

(c) Prohibit **biosolids spreading** (treated sewage sludge) in areas draining into the Treasure Coast watershed unless nutrient-neutral technologies are used.

Section 4. Reforming Lake Okeechobee Discharge Practices

(a) Direct the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to **revise the Lake Okeechobee System Operating Manual (LOSOM)** to:

- Prioritize **public health and water quality** for downstream communities over sugar industry irrigation preferences.
- Minimize harmful discharges into the St. Lucie Estuary during algae-prone months.
- Increase storage and treatment north and south of the lake to reduce emergency discharges.

(b) Establish a **Treasure Coast Water Management Advisory Board**, composed of local governments, tribal representatives, environmental scientists, and community stakeholders, to advise the Corps on discharge decisions.

Section 5. Rapid Response & Cleanup

(a) Create a **Harmful Algal Bloom Rapid Response Fund**, administered by EPA and NOAA, to:

- Fund immediate cleanup operations for toxic algae blooms
- Provide emergency health services and monitoring for affected communities
- Support local businesses impacted by HAB-related beach closures or fishery shutdowns

(b) Require **real-time public notification systems** for all algae bloom events, including water testing data accessible to the public.

Section 6. Research and Innovation

(a) Establish a **National Harmful Algal Bloom Research Center** in partnership with Florida universities and local governments to:

- Advance bloom prediction models and early warning systems
- Develop algae mitigation technologies, including bioremediation and nutrient capture
- Study long-term health impacts of chronic exposure to algal toxins

(b) Provide competitive federal grants for pilot projects to test **innovative nutrient removal and algae control technologies** in Treasure Coast waterways.

Section 7. Enforcement and Accountability

(a) Increase civil and criminal penalties for **corporate and agricultural polluters** who exceed nutrient discharge limits, including daily fines and mandatory corrective action.

(b) Authorize citizen suits under the Clean Water Act to allow residents and NGOs to hold polluters accountable in federal court.

(c) Require annual EPA reports to Congress on progress toward nutrient reduction and bloom mitigation goals in the Treasure Coast region.

Section 8. Funding

This Act shall be funded through:

- Reallocating portions of existing federal water infrastructure and agricultural conservation programs
 - Assessing a **pollution mitigation fee** on large nutrient dischargers in the Lake Okeechobee basin
 - Federal appropriations as needed, recognizing the national economic and environmental significance of Florida's waterways
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Section 9. Effective Date

This Act shall take effect upon enactment, with nutrient criteria and discharge reforms to be implemented within **24 months**.