

**FLORIDA SENATE
State Senator Ken Pruitt
District 28**



PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
April 6, 2006

Contact: Andrew Treadwell
(772) 344-1140

Lake Okeechobee to receive \$36 million in vital funding towards restoration and cleanup

Tallahassee, FL – Florida lawmakers passed preliminary budgets today earmarking critical funding for environmental restoration on the Treasure Coast. Included in the House and Senate budgets is nearly \$36 million in allocations for the Lake Okeechobee Protection Program (LOPP) and the Lake Okeechobee & Estuary Recovery (LOER) plan.

The Lake Okeechobee Protection Program, which has a proposed \$10.8 million, is a comprehensive program designed to restore and protect the lake by improving water quality and implementing long-term solutions. Since its inception in 2000, the program has focused on best management practices to reduce harmful nutrients levels, slowed the spread of exotic species, and created valuable storm water treatment areas to collect and clean excess lake water.

Legislators in both chambers have also agreed to allot an additional \$25 million to the Lake Okeechobee & Estuary Recovery plan announced by Governor Bush last October. The LOER plan is a series of fast-tracked projects that will provide meaningful water improvements to the estuary systems affected by Lake Okeechobee discharges.

Members of the Treasure Coast's legislative delegation, including State Senator Ken Pruitt (R - Port St. Lucie), led the charge to bring significant funding back for lake and estuary recovery.

"Until we stop polluted water from entering Lake Okeechobee, our rivers and estuaries will never be fully protected," said Sen. Pruitt. "A cleaner, lower lake will have the greatest affect on the health of the St. Lucie River."

Over the first five years of the LOPP implementation, the State of Florida committed nearly \$100 million to Lake Okeechobee restoration projects. Legislators like Sen. Pruitt would like to see that total reach \$300 million for LOPP and LOER projects over the next three years.

"Our natural resources are a main economic livelihood on the Treasure Coast," Pruitt said. "We must continue to preserve these assets for many generations to come."

###