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FLORIDA GETS A PLAN TO HELP PROTECT ITS OCEANS AND COASTS

FT. LAUDERDALE, FL –The state of Florida has awarded the Florida Ocean Alliance a grant to develop a much-needed Strategic Plan for Florida’s Oceans and Coasts. Senate President Bill Galvano championed the project as part of the Legislature’s focus on Florida’s ever-growing water issues. The Alliance will work closely with the Florida Department of Environmental Protection and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission in carrying out the project. This activity supports Governor Ron DeSantis’ Executive Order for protecting Florida’s environment and water quality. The legislation was sponsored by Sen. Debbie Mayfield (R-Melbourne) and Rep. Chris Latvala (R-Clearwater).

Florida’s economy and its citizens depend heavily on the region’s water resources. But growing environmental and anthropogenic pressures put them at great risk. The state’s recent water crises of harmful blue green algal blooms (with red tide as a particularly devastating example), coral disease that is killing Florida’s remaining coral reefs, as well as storm inundation such as the 2018 Panhandle hurricane, have made important ocean and coastal resources a priority for both the economy and environment.

To help create a Strategic Plan to protect the state’s water resources, the Alliance will host public hearings across the state with citizens and other stakeholders, including industry, environmental groups, and research institutes. The project will provide a roadmap for the state to

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address the conservation and management of the state's estuaries, bays, and oceans in order to preserve them for future generations.

Senate President Bill Galvano supported the strategic plan as a key means to address Florida's water issues. "Florida is an oceans state with the longest coastline in the continental US at over 8,000 miles. This year the Legislature prioritized managing and protecting our state's valuable water resources, including ocean and coastal waters. The proposed strategic plan is needed to address the critical needs of Florida's waters. Healthy ocean and coastal waters are vital to our state's economic health, as well as ensuring a high quality of life for all Florida residents."

"The project addresses both legislative and public concerns over Florida's recent water crises," said Stan Payne, chair of the Florida Ocean Alliance and Director of the Seaport and Airport in St. Lucie County. "We will offer resilience solutions to these problems as the state strives to cope with these issues. Over 75 percent of Florida's population resides in 35 coastal counties so water issues are critical statewide. Moreover, Florida's economy is dependent on key water-related industries, among them tourism, seaports, and recreation industries. The Alliance study in 2010 found that over \$584 billion in gross regional product was contributed by Florida's coastal counties to the state's economy. More than 228,000 jobs in Florida are directly created by activities supported by ocean resources, and this increases to over 440,000 jobs when indirect effects are taken into account."

The Florida Ocean Alliance (www.floridaoceanalliance.org) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, private-public partnership of private industry, trade, academic and environmental organizations promoting awareness and understanding of the ocean's importance to the economy and

environment of Florida. The Alliance has provided ocean priorities to the Legislature and the Governor every year for the past two decades.

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