

## OPINION

### How the Florida Legislature is addressing algae blooms and sea level rise | Opinion

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The Florida Ocean Alliance is working to develop a Florida Ocean and Coastal Strategic Policy Plan to help address coastal resilience in the wake of recent state water crises (red tide, harmful algal blooms, and hurricanes) and long-term sea level rise, Florida Senate President Bill Galvano writes. (Photo: CHKnox / Getty Images)

Florida is a state of true natural wealth, from our blue-water oceans and extensive coasts to our vast wetlands and unique coral reefs. These riches provide a foundation for a strong economy with diverse industries and occupations, a way of life enviable throughout the country and around the world.

Unfortunately, just as Florida's natural bounty provides unique opportunities, we also face distinct challenges that threaten our beloved oceans and coasts and the natural resources we so dearly

depend upon. From harmful algal blooms, to a rising sea and powerful storms, to aging infrastructure that struggles to meet the needs of a diverse, growing population, Florida's centers of industry and population are directly linked to our vibrant coastal communities.

As such, our perimeter of prosperity is uniquely susceptible to the impacts of sea level rise and other problems affecting our coasts.

To protect our natural wealth and to ensure resilience for the future, we must address this issue head on. As such, we need a strategic plan of action. A plan that takes into account what is already being done and what still needs to be done. A plan that is based on facts and science, and addresses a diversity of resources and a wide variety of users. A plan that will lead to real action now, not in the distant future.

Earlier this year, the Florida Legislature approved funds to create a research and science-based plan to address pressing issues that impact our coasts. We directed the Florida Ocean Alliance (FOA), a nonpartisan group comprised of leaders from industry, academia, nonprofits and others, to hold stakeholder meetings across the state and deliver a plan for review by the Legislature.



**Florida Senate President Bill Galvano** (*Photo: Special to the Democrat*)

Specifically, FOA is working to develop a Florida Ocean and Coastal Strategic Policy Plan to help address coastal resilience in the wake of recent state water crises (red tide, harmful algal blooms, and hurricanes) and long-term sea level rise, and to improve the conservation and management of Florida's significant ocean and coastal resources.

FOA will also provide an economic update of Florida's ocean and coastal economy to identify growth in marine industries with potential to expand the state's economy. Recent water issues are an all-too-present reminder of the need to address and mitigate damages to avoid a long-term impact on the state's tourism economy and other marine-related industries.

The final plan will aid the Florida Department of Environment Protection and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission in complying with Gov. Ron DeSantis' Executive Order 19-12, proposing major reforms to protect Florida's environment and water quality.

With public input and the scientific expertise available in the state, I am confident we have the resources we need to enact real solutions to protect Florida's future. That is not to say it will be easy. With so many people relying on so many interconnected resources, conflicts will arise and change will be needed. But we hope to work through a transparent process that builds consensus and takes varying perspectives into account.

I invite you to participate in this important process by attending stakeholder meetings, providing input online, and by supporting our efforts to develop a plan of action to better manage our oceans and coasts.

Florida is a coast-rich state with a wealth and diversity of resources and citizens. We all want a secure and stable economy, a safe place to live, resilient communities, good jobs, clean water and coasts, abundant fisheries, and healthy coral reefs and wetlands. Please visit [floridaoceanalliance.org](http://floridaoceanalliance.org) for more information. We look forward to your input.

*Bill Galvano, R-Bradenton, is the president of the Florida Senate.*