WES-04 FIVE-YEAR WATER QUALITY WORKPLAN
STAFF ANALYSIS

PROPOSAL INFORMATION			
SUBMITTING COUNTY:	Monroe		
SPONSOR CONTACT:	Holly Merrill Raschein, Commissioner, raschein-holly@monroecounty-fl.gov		
FAC COMMITTEE:	WES	**CROSS-CLAIMS:**	
FAC STAFF:	Peter Abello	**DATE:**	October 19th, 2026

This staff analysis is based on the proposal as submitted and does not reflect an adopted position of the Florida Association of Counties.

POLICY PROPOSAL:

FAC supports legislation requiring the Department of Environmental Protection to establish a Five-Year Statewide Water Resource Project Plan, implemented through the Water Quality Improvement Grant Program in s. 403.0673, F.S., and supported by a dedicated annual appropriation, so that local governments and the state can plan, fund, and complete priority wastewater, stormwater, and water quality improvement projects over multiple years.

I. SUMMARY:

Monroe County asks FAC to support legislation requiring the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) to establish a Five-Year Statewide Water Resource Project Plan, implemented through the Water Quality Improvement Grant Program and supported by a dedicated annual appropriation. The goal is to allow local governments and the state to plan, fund, and complete priority wastewater, stormwater, and water quality projects over multiple years. The proposal would direct DEP to develop a five-year plan covering wastewater, stormwater, and other water quality projects, combining projects carried over from the prior plan with newly selected ones. DEP would report recommendations for implementing the plan by January 1, 2028, and submit the plan annually beginning December 1, 2028.

II. PRESENT SITUATION:

Under current law, DEP's Water Quality Improvement Grant Program helps local governments reduce nutrient pollution from wastewater, stormwater, and agricultural sources (s. 403.0673, F.S.). The program funds projects that improve impaired waters, waters with a total maximum daily load, and waters within a basin management action

plan, reasonable assurance plan, or rural area of opportunity. At least 25 percent of each year's appropriation goes to projects in rural areas of opportunity, and DEP announces awards by November 1 of each year in which funds are appropriated.

The program, however, operates one year at a time. Projects compete for funding annually, and the amount available depends on each year's General Appropriations Act. Major wastewater and stormwater projects take several years to design, permit, finance, and build, so local governments must plan these projects around a funding source that is not guaranteed from one year to the next. The Legislature already takes a multiyear approach to resilience projects through the Statewide Flooding and Sea Level Rise Resilience Plan.

The need for water quality funding is substantial. The Office of Economic and Demographic Research's 2025 Annual Assessment of Florida's Water Resources and Conservation Lands forecasts $13.52 billion in costs to comply with basin management action plan requirements through FY 2041-42. The 20-year needs analyses local governments prepare for wastewater and stormwater show a funding gap of more than $49 billion, and the next round of those analyses is due June 30, 2027.

III. EFFECT OF THE PROPOSAL:

The proposal would require DEP to develop a Five-Year Statewide Water Resource Project Plan within the Water Quality Improvement Grant Program, providing predictable, multiyear funding for priority water quality projects. The plan would cover wastewater infrastructure, including treatment, collection, and reuse facilities, septic-to-sewer connections, and conversions of conventional septic to enhanced nutrient-reducing systems; stormwater treatment facilities; and other water quality projects, such as those listed in a basin management action plan, located within a reasonable assurance plan boundary, or improving waters impaired for nitrogen, phosphorus, chlorophyll-a, bacteria, or copper.

Rather than starting over each year, the plan would carry projects forward. Each year's plan would combine projects carried over from the prior plan with projects newly selected through the existing grant process. DEP would report its recommendations for implementing the plan, including a project selection process, by January 1, 2028, and would submit the plan annually beginning December 1, 2028. Also, the proposal would require DEP to collaborate with the water management districts annually before finalizing the plan. The act would take effect July 1, 2027.

IV. COUNTY IMPACT:

This proposal would give counties greater certainty when planning and funding major wastewater, stormwater, and water quality projects. Because projects in the plan would carry forward from year to year, counties could pursue multiyear and phased projects with more confidence that later phases will remain in line for state funding, rather than competing again each year. That predictability could help counties sequence construction, line up other financing, and carry large projects from design through

completion. The proposal would not require counties to do anything beyond the existing grant application process. If implemented, counties should monitor DEP's January 1, 2028 report, which will set the selection process and determine how carried-over projects are treated.

Protective of Home Rule: Yes.

V. FISCAL IMPACT:

- Positive but indeterminate
- Greater funding predictability could improve financing and sequencing for large projects.
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Unfunded Mandate (Art. VII, s. 18, Fla. Const.): No.

VI. LEGISLATIVE & FAC HISTORY:

- Enacted framework: the Clean Waterways Act, ch. 2020-150, created the wastewater grant program now in s. 403.0673, F.S. In 2023, the Legislature renamed it the Water Quality Improvement Grant Program and expanded it to stormwater and agricultural sources.
- Multiyear model: ch. 2021-28 created the Resilient Florida Grant Program and the Statewide Flooding and Sea Level Rise Resilience Plan in s. 380.093, F.S.
- Past FAC statements: N/A
- Guiding Principles coverage: Water and Environmental Sustainability