



LEVY COUNTY LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES 2026 SESSION

Where Business, Family, and Nature Thrive

Levy County Board of County Commissioners
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LEVY COUNTY

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSION

Levy County, situated within Florida's Big Bend region—an area defined by its working forests, fertile farms, rivers, springs, estuaries, and extensive Gulf coastline—spans 1,413 square miles, including 66 miles of Gulf shoreline and 295 square miles of inland and coastal waters. With a population of approximately 46,545 residents, the county includes the municipalities of Bronson (county seat), Chiefland, Williston, Cedar Key, Inglis, Otter Creek, Gulf Hammock, Morriston, Yankeetown, and Fanning Springs.

Levy County's landscape showcases remarkable geographic diversity, encompassing coastal marshlands, spring-fed rivers, and highly productive agricultural lands that together shape its economy, identity, and way of life. From its vibrant coastal communities—known for aquaculture and maritime culture—to its inland farmlands rooted in generations of agricultural tradition, Levy County reflects the enduring charm and resilience of rural Florida. Its residents remain deeply connected to the land and water, united by a shared vision to preserve the county's natural identity while pursuing smart economic growth that sustains agriculture, strengthens community vitality, and safeguards its irreplaceable resources for generations to come.

Charlie Kennedy, Commissioner District 1

Rock Meeks, Commissioner District 2

Desiree Mills, Chair - Commissioner District 3

Tim Hodge, Commissioner District 4

Johnny Hiers, Commissioner District 5

Mary-Ellen Harper, County Manager

Appropriation Request: Replacement of University Oaks System Mains



**Request: \$850,000.00 for Project
Construction Completion**

Estimated Total Project Cost:
\$1,160,000.00

Grant Funding: \$311,670.00 through
Suwannee River Management District

County Match: \$5,000.00

This project is shovel-ready with complete engineering plans.

Levy County owns the University Oaks Water System.

The system serves 160 customers.

Replacement of the water mains will:

- Reduce water loss/leaks - The existing system has aging, deteriorated mains and leaking pipes, which lead to water loss and inefficiencies. Replacing old mains helps conserve water, lower operational costs, and reduce waste.
- Improve reliability & service quality - Upgrading to new pipe (e.g., 6-inch PVC) and replacing deficient segments helps ensure continuous, safe, dependable water delivery to customers.
- Meet Regulatory / Environmental Goals - Because the University Oaks system is a public water system, maintaining system integrity is crucial for meeting water quality and regulatory standards. Also, conserving water and reducing unnecessary withdrawals helps protect aquifer resources and reduce environmental stress. The project is tied to cost-share programs for “repair/replace leaking infrastructure.”
- Support Growth / Future Capacity - As demand grows, a stronger infrastructure is needed to accommodate more customers or higher usage. Upgrading capacity and reducing weak links is part of preparing for future needs.

Appropriation Request: Solid Waste Landfill New Cell

Request: \$3,000,000.00

**Estimated Total Project Cost:
\$5,000,000.00**



Levy County requests state funding support for the construction of a **new Class III landfill cell** designated for debris at the Levy County Solid Waste Facility. The current C&D cell is nearing full capacity and was significantly stressed by debris volumes generated from recent hurricane events impacting Florida’s Big Bend region.

BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

LEVY COUNTY SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT FACILITY

CLASS III TRENCH 2
opened 9/2007

Year	Disposed Tons	Volume Used Cubic Yards	Remaining Volume Cubic Yards	% Remain
			298819	
2007	4534	16050	282769	95
2008	2925	10353	272416	91
2009	1682	5954	266462	89
2010	2734	9542	256920	86
2011	2224	7776	249144	83
2012	2515	9125	240019	80
2013	2582	7381	232638	78
2014	2514	5911	226727	76
2015	3100	12886	213841	72
2016	4696	11983	201858	68
2017	3886	10491	195851	66
2018	4337	10279	185572	62
2019	4152	11650	170582	57
2020	6136	17952	151486	51
2021	7303	19143	132343	44
2022	9478	23590	108753	36
2023	11222	23159	85594	29
2024	18556	35866	49728	17

Levy County operates a Class III Landfill that serves as a regional disposal facility for C&D debris, yard waste, and non-hazardous materials. As a fiscally constrained rural county, Levy manages solid waste operations with limited local revenue sources. The facility plays a critical role in maintaining environmental compliance and community resilience by ensuring debris is processed, contained, and disposed of in accordance with Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) regulations.

Following major storm events, including Hurricanes Idalia, Hermine, Milton, and Helene, Levy County experienced an unprecedented influx of debris. These events severely taxed the existing landfill infrastructure, accelerating the depletion of remaining capacity in the current C&D cell. Without expansion, the county will be unable to maintain compliant disposal operations, increasing the risk of illegal dumping, transport costs to out-of-county facilities, and delayed recovery operations after future disasters.

Hurricane Idalia in 2023
Hurricanes Milton and Helene in 2024

Appropriation Request: Levy County Government Complex Generator with Installation

Request: \$1,000,000.00

**Estimated Total Project Cost:
\$2,000,000.00**



The Levy County Government Center is a central node for county administration, emergency coordination, public records, and essential services. In recent storms and weather events that caused outages, the facility has experienced interruptions in function, delaying critical decisions, hampering service delivery, and increasing public risk. To ensure resilience and continuity of government operations under all conditions, the **installation of a modern standby generator** is warranted.

BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

The Big Bend region of Florida has experienced a high frequency of severe weather events, including hurricanes, tornadoes, and winter storms, causing widespread disruption and damage to infrastructure. According to federal disaster data, Florida has endured numerous weather and climate disaster events exceeding \$1 billion in losses, including droughts, flooding, freezes, severe storms, tropical cyclones, wildfires, and winter storms. The annual average for the most recent five years (2020–2024) is 6.8 major events, reflecting an upward trend in disaster frequency and intensity.

Levy County, situated on the Gulf Coast within this highly exposed corridor, has faced direct and indirect impacts from hurricanes Milton, Debby, Idalia, Hermine, Ian, Irma, and Helene, among others. These events produced significant storm surge, wind damage, and prolonged power outages, disrupting county operations, emergency coordination, and public access to essential services.

To strengthen resilience and improve government service continuity, Levy County is developing the Levy County Government Center, a consolidated campus housing all major administrative and public-facing divisions, including emergency management, records, planning, and finance. However, recent storm events and power failures have highlighted the need for a reliable backup power source to maintain operations during crisis conditions.

As a fiscally constrained rural county within Florida's Big Bend, one of the most disaster-prone regions in the state, this appropriation represents a practical, high-impact measure to enhance public safety, continuity of governance, and community resilience in the face of increasingly frequent and severe weather events.

Policy Request:
Expand SHIP Eligibility for
Manufactured Housing in Rural
Counties



**Request: Expand Grant Allowable Use
for Purchase Assistance under SHIP
Housing Funding**

Estimated Total Project Cost: Existing
Grant Appropriation

Amend provisions of the State Housing Initiatives Partnership (SHIP) Program under Sections 420.9071(8) and 420.9075(5)(c), Florida Statutes, to expand the percentage eligibility **for rural, fiscally constrained counties from 20% to 100%** for the use of SHIP funds toward mobile and manufactured homes constructed after 1994. Eligible homes must be built under the HUD Code, meet Florida Building Code Wind Zone III certification, and be installed on permanent slab foundations with hurricane-resistant anchoring systems.

BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

Since 2009, SHIP has recognized manufactured housing built after June 1994 as “eligible housing.” However, the current statute restricts counties and municipalities from allocating more than 20% of SHIP funds to this category. This limitation disproportionately affects rural and fiscally constrained counties, such as Levy County, where a significant portion of the housing stock consists of older manufactured homes that no longer meet safety standards. These communities experience higher housing costs relative to income, fewer affordable options, and limited new housing development due to infrastructure and financing barriers.

Expanding the SHIP eligibility cap would strengthen housing affordability and access to safe, resilient homes across Florida’s rural regions. Allowing greater flexibility to use SHIP funds for modern manufactured housing provides a cost-effective, code-compliant option for residents who are priced out of traditional housing markets. This change would enable fiscally constrained counties to better leverage limited local resources, promote equity, and replace aging, substandard homes with hurricane-resistant, energy-efficient models. In doing so, it supports workforce and aging populations, enhances disaster resilience, and stabilizes communities. Removing the 20% restriction would help local governments meet SHIP’s core intent, to produce and preserve affordable housing, while reducing long-term recovery costs and addressing critical housing shortages in rural Florida.

Endorsement Request:
State Investment in Rescue and
Emergency Medical Act: One Fully
Equipped Ambulance Per County

**Request: Funding of a fully staffed
ambulance to include salaries,
benefits, operating
costs and replacement of that unit.**

Estimated Total Project Cost:
\$35,000,000 - \$50,000,000 Statewide

The State Investment in Rescue & Emergency Medical Act would **guarantee one fully staffed ambulance in every county** in Florida, and provide state funding for salaries, benefits, operating costs, and replacement of that single unit, with a prioritization of fiscally constrained counties first.

BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

Florida's rural and fiscally constrained counties face significant challenges in sustaining 24-hour emergency medical services due to limited tax bases, escalating operational costs, and workforce shortages. Levy County and similar jurisdictions often operate with minimal ambulances covering large geographic areas, resulting in extended response times, delayed transfers, and diminished service reliability during peak emergencies or multi-incident events. The cost of maintaining a single ALS (Advanced Life Support) ambulance with a two-person crew can exceed \$500,000 annually, a figure unsustainable for small counties without state support.

Stable EMS systems reduce preventable hospitalizations, improve public health outcomes, and lower Medicaid and indigent care expenditures. For fiscally constrained counties, this Act provides a lifeline that ensures essential emergency response functions remain viable despite limited local revenue. The State Investment in Rescue & Emergency Medical Act represents a practical, equitable, and lifesaving policy initiative. It acknowledges that every county, regardless of size or wealth, deserves the capacity to respond effectively when seconds matter most. Levy County respectfully requests legislative and delegation support for this initiative as a top public safety and community resilience priority.

Regional Appropriation Request: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Feasibility Study: Lower Withlacoochee River Restoration Project

Request: \$5,000,000.00

Estimated Total Project Cost: This is
phase 1 to determine the total project
cost.



Legislative appropriation is requested to provide state match funding in support of a **U.S. Army Corps of Engineers feasibility and engineering study for the Lower Withlacoochee River Restoration Project**. The study will evaluate hydrologic, engineering, and environmental alternatives, providing a roadmap for full-scale restoration and regional water quality improvements.

BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

The Lower Withlacoochee River, once a thriving and ecologically rich waterway, has suffered decades of decline due to hydrologic alterations, nutrient pollution, and habitat loss. Despite its designation as Outstanding Florida Waters and federal recognition as a navigable river, the system is now impaired, largely due to the construction of the Inglis Dam and diversion of natural flows into the Cross Florida Barge Canal. This alteration eliminated the river's essential flushing flows, causing sediment buildup, declining water quality, and chronic algal blooms.

Over time, urban and agricultural development throughout the region has reduced base and spring flows by up to 40%, increased nitrate levels more than twentyfold, and accelerated the loss of native aquatic vegetation. Failing septic systems, aging wastewater infrastructure, and runoff continue to exacerbate nutrient loading, particularly around Lake Rousseau.

Restoring the Lower Withlacoochee is a regional environmental and economic priority, with the greatest impacts centered in Citrus County and extending into Levy and Marion Counties.

Legislative support is requested to fund a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers feasibility and engineering study to restore natural flow pathways, improve circulation, and enhance long-term water quality. This project will strengthen ecological resilience, support recreation and fisheries, and protect the shared natural resources of Florida's Big Bend region.