

May 2016

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**FACTs**

This fact sheet is provided as a reference to encourage a greater understanding of the various issues related to managing water in South Florida.

## Protecting and Improving the Caloosahatchee River and Estuary

*The health of the Caloosahatchee River and Estuary is essential to sustaining the overall way of life and economy of Southwest Florida. Working with local, state and federal government partners, environmental groups, residents and businesses, the South Florida Water Management District is implementing short- and long-term solutions to improve water quality and better manage the timing and quantity of water flows to the Caloosahatchee River and Estuary.*

### Part of an Interconnected System

- Beginning in the late 19th century, the Caloosahatchee River and its watershed underwent extensive modifications that drastically altered the hydrology of the region.
- The once shallow and crooked Caloosahatchee was deepened and widened into a regulated waterway and connected to Lake Okeechobee and the Kissimmee Chain of Lakes for navigation, water supply and flood control purposes.
- Today, the river is part of one of the world's largest interconnected public works systems.

### Operational Decisions

- As local sponsor for this federal system, the District works cooperatively with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to manage Lake Okeechobee water levels – and its freshwater flows to the Caloosahatchee – according to a federal regulation schedule.
- The District relies on its updated Adaptive Protocols for Lake Okeechobee Operations to guide its recommendations to the Corps.
- Revisions to the Adaptive Protocols have been successful in improving dry season conditions in the Caloosahatchee Estuary by decreasing the number of months when salinity values exceeded desired levels.

### Short- and Long-Term Solutions

The District and its partners are implementing operational, water quality, water storage and water supply solutions to improve the health of the Caloosahatchee River and Estuary. These include:

- **Water Storage and Treatment:** The District has committed millions of dollars for water storage and treatment within the Caloosahatchee watershed. Several projects are now under way.

(more)



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- **Basin Management Action Plan:** Adopted by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection in December 2012, the Caloosahatchee Estuary Basin Management Action Plan (BMAP) is a restoration blueprint for reducing nutrient loads in the waterway. The plan utilizes best management practices, public education, local stormwater projects and a variety of related strategies.
- **C-43 West Basin Storage Reservoir:** The Congressionally approved Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) calls for construction of a 170,000 acre-foot reservoir to help store and manage Caloosahatchee basin runoff for meeting estuary needs during the dry season.
  - To date, the District has invested \$118 million to purchase land, construct and monitor test cells and complete the project design. The reservoir project is currently under construction.
  - The District has completed a water reservation – a legal mechanism to set aside water created by the restoration project specifically for the protection of fish and wildlife or public health and safety.
- **Water Quality:** The District and Lee County have purchased 1,773 acres of land in Glades County that will be used for construction of a water quality treatment and testing facility for removing nitrogen from water bound for the estuary. Construction on the first phase of that testing facility began earlier this year.
- **Watershed Protection Plan:** As part of the Northern Everglades and Estuaries Protection Program, the Caloosahatchee River Watershed Protection Plan was developed and submitted to the Florida Legislature in January 2009 by the District, Florida Department of Environmental Protection and Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. Updated in 2015, the Plan identifies the best science-based and technologically feasible options for improving ecosystem health in the watershed.
- **Local Projects:** The District and Florida have partnered with county and city governments on about 100 local water quality improvement and storage projects.
- **Minimum Flows and Levels:** The District has established minimum flows and levels for the Caloosahatchee Estuary and Lake Okeechobee which are currently being updated. Minimum Flow Levels are in place to prevent significant harm to a water body from permitted water withdrawals. Recovery strategies must be developed for water bodies not currently meeting their Minimum Flow Levels.