



SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

OPINION

August 8, 2016

SFWMD Took Action Now to Help Save Florida Bay

With mounting impacts from a severe lack of rainfall and freshwater flows to Florida Bay, my colleagues and I on the Governing Board of the South Florida Water Management District directed staff to put their best science into a plan to avert further crisis. They were asked to do this quickly and amid the staggering number of other critical projects that keep South Florida's water management system operating and momentum moving on Everglades restoration.

SFWMD scientists and engineers delivered. In July, the Board approved their plan to move water south to the ailing Bay, doubling the flow of clean, fresh water to Taylor Slough, which connects to the Bay. An average of about 6.5 billion gallons more water per year will flow to the Bay, helping to reduce salinity and promoting the recovery of seagrass that died in the summer drought of 2015.

The project includes eight modest, targeted projects and improvements in the South Dade Conveyance System that cost about \$3.3 million. We are prepared to get these done by beginning of the dry season in November if our federal partners work with us.

To date, it is the only plan of action that will provide some relief now. These operational changes will also significantly help long term. And yet there remains a contingent of pessimists who loudly advocate for a massive land buy as the only solution to all our water challenges. These same detractors allege the volunteers on the Governing Board are not the best qualified to craft policy based on the sound science of a staff that includes some of the world's foremost experts on these subjects.

I believe my education in environmental resource analysis, career as a local realtor, time on this Board – and common sense – qualifies me to say that spending billions on just buying property is a bad deal for taxpayers and the environment. Acquiring mass tracts south of Lake Okeechobee would only divert critical funds and staff away from operations that are making a difference now. Years would go by before any of that new land would be able to store, clean or convey a single drop of water to the Bay – or anywhere else.

I want our residents to know we are working to achieve results now while the broader Everglades projects are finished. I encourage all South Floridians interested in the plight

of Florida Bay to visit www.sfwmd.gov/floridabay to view the details of these efforts and track the progress of the action underway to help save the Bay.

*Melanie Peterson
Governing Board Member
South Florida Water Management District*