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



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North Fork of the St. Lucie River Water Reservation

The joint state-federal Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) identifies restoration of the Indian River Lagoon – South as an integral step in achieving systemwide benefits in the south Florida ecosystem. Subject to extreme salinity variations, the St. Lucie Estuary and Indian River Lagoon together are home to more than 50 endangered or threatened species. Restoring a more natural volume, timing and distribution of flows to the river, floodplain and estuary will give native plant and animal life a better opportunity for recovery.

The Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) of 2000 required the South Florida Water Management District to legally protect water intended for the natural system before any federal funding could be authorized to construct the CERP Indian River Lagoon – South project. The District adopted a water reservation rule for the North Fork of the St. Lucie River, and construction is underway on the C-44 Reservoir and Stormwater Treatment Area components.

Defining water reservations

- A water reservation is a legal mechanism to set aside water for the protection of fish and wildlife or public health and safety. When a water reservation is in place, quantities and timing of water flows at specific locations are protected for the natural system. The necessary quantities and timing are determined using data which link local hydrology to the needs of fish and wildlife.
- All presently existing legal uses of water are protected so long as the use is not contrary to the public interest. If a project develops water above the amount needed to protect fish and wildlife, the Governing Board may certify the volume available for allocation to consumptive uses.

Reservations benefit the environment

Long-term success of ecosystem restoration is measured, in part, by the ability of native fish and wildlife to thrive in the habitats restored. Key facts considered in the development of the North Fork of the St. Lucie water reservation in support of CERP restoration efforts included:

- The St. Lucie Estuary and Indian River Lagoon together form the most diverse estuarine environments in North America. The lagoon contains the St. Lucie Estuary, a designated Estuary of National Significance.
- Land and marine animals include shortnose sturgeon, smalltooth sawfish, the Florida scrub jay, peregrine falcon, sandhill crane, manatee and five species of sea turtles – hawksbill, green, loggerhead, leatherback and Kemp's ridley. Plants include Lakela's mint, Johnson's seagrass and bay cedar.

(more)

- The St. Lucie River is designated an Outstanding Florida Water. The river has more species of fish than any other river in Florida, and more than 500 fish species have been documented within a 2-mile radius of the St. Lucie River where it meets the Indian River Lagoon.
- The North Fork of the St. Lucie River is a state aquatic preserve and part of Florida's "Save Our Rivers" program. More than 650 native species, including fish, amphibians, reptiles, birds, mammals, invertebrates, plants and phytoplankton, have been located and identified within the preserve and adjacent floodplain, including 33 species of special concern and 20 additional rare species. The preserve also contains rookeries for the endangered wood stork.

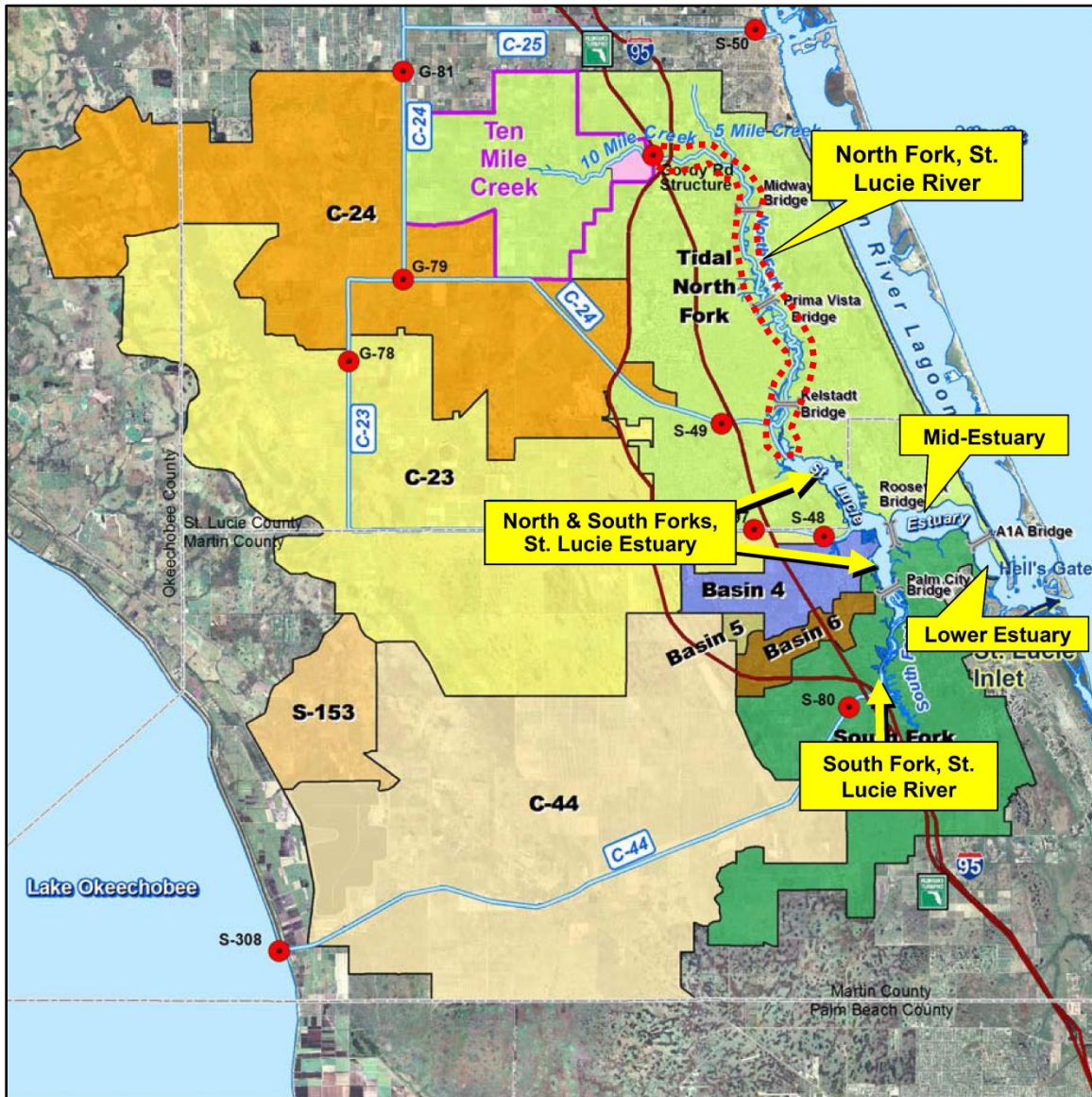
Background and conditions

- Considered the most diverse estuarine environment in North America, the St. Lucie Estuary and Indian River Lagoon support multimillion-dollar fishing, tourism, agricultural and recreational industries. In 2007, the economic benefits of the Indian River Lagoon were estimated at \$3.7 billion.
- Altered hydrology of the system results in highly variable freshwater outflow to the St. Lucie Estuary, often either too much or too little, creating abnormal downstream salinity levels throughout the year.
- Extreme salinity variations and ever-increasing inflows have contributed to major changes in the natural communities of the estuary, as seen by seagrass and oyster losses.
- Key elements of the CERP Indian River Lagoon – South Project are reducing high-volume discharges of fresh water to the St. Lucie Estuary, providing a more natural quantity, quality, timing and distribution of inflows to the estuary and restoring the North Fork of the St. Lucie River and its floodplain.
- Construction of the CERP project was authorized by WRDA 2007.

Reservation development and public input

- The District Governing Board initiated water reservation rule development in April 2008. The public process included:
 - Review by a panel of nationally recognized, independent scientific experts.
 - Public workshops (between April 2009 and October 2009).
- The North Fork of the St. Lucie water reservation was adopted by the Governing Board on Sept. 10, 2009, and became effective on March 18, 2010 (Rule 40E-10.051, Florida Administrative Code).
 - The rule identifies and reserves from consumptive use the water needed for the CERP project.
 - The water reservation ensures that the St. Lucie River, as well as the estuary and southern Indian River Lagoon, fully benefit from the Everglades restoration effort.

Location Map



For more information about this water reservation rule or other previously adopted reservations, please visit www.sfwmd.gov/reservations.