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**Construction of Everglades Restoration Projects  
Also Include Public Access and Recreation**

**Some stormwater treatment areas already open for wildlife viewing and hunting;  
similar opportunities planned for reservoirs, other stormwater treatment areas**

Increasing water storage and treatment options through the construction of large-scale reservoirs and constructed wetlands are essential components of Everglades restoration. Along with the environmental benefits these facilities will provide – such as major projects under way now along the St. Lucie Canal, Caloosahatchee River and Everglades Agricultural Area – they also create increased opportunities for recreational use by outdoor enthusiasts.

“Making sure the public is able to enjoy public lands is a state of Florida legislative mandate, a top priority of the Governor and Cabinet and a solid commitment of the South Florida Water Management District,” said District Governing Board member Michael Collins. “Through several years of extensive work with the public, this commitment has become a reality on hundreds of thousands of acres of District-owned lands.”

The District Governing Board approved a proactive policy in 2004 designed to ensure access to Everglades restoration lands. A series of public workshops and public meetings ensured that hunters, fishermen, hikers, birdwatchers and other nature-based activists had the opportunity to comment and provide feedback. Recognizing that any proposed public usage must first and foremost be compatible with restoration goals, the agency developed the Public Access and Recreational Use Policy. This workshop continues to meet quarterly to provide public input to recreation decisions on district lands.

The recreation policy specifies that the permitting, design and construction phase of all restoration projects must also include public access along with the funding to provide facilities for a variety of nature-based recreational activities – provided such uses are consistent with the project’s restoration purposes. A phased-in, step-by-step process ensures that planned recreation activities grow over time in a manner compatible with the projects purpose. Recreation should start after project construction is complete and the facility is operational for some reasonable time.

For example, the 40,000 acres of stormwater treatment areas built to reduce phosphorus levels in water before it flows into the Everglades went through a period of operations and monitoring before being opened up to the public. The current stormwater treatment area recreation has grown successfully over the last several years. New designs for public

access sites will be built in 2007. Not only are these constructed wetlands now successfully removing excess phosphorus, they have also become some of the most popular bird-watching and duck-hunting areas in the nation. This year, alligator hunting has been added to the list of recreation activities allowed in these marsh areas.

For the St. Lucie, Caloosahatchee and Everglades Agricultural Area reservoirs, a similar process will be used to allow public boating access. While the project design will include the construction of boat ramps and parking facilities, the public will not have immediate access to the reservoirs. The District will first operate and monitor conditions to ensure the projects are functioning properly from a restoration perspective and that any unforeseen issues are adequately addressed.

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