Celebrating Florida's Diversity

27th Annual Conference on Water Management

"We have become not a melting pot but a beautiful mosaic. Different people, different beliefs, different yearnings, different hopes, different dreams."

– JIMMY CARTER
Former U.S. President

A record number of local, state and federal leaders as well as members of the business community gathered at the Hyatt Regency Miami for the 27th Annual Conference on Water Management. The conference, sponsored each year by Florida's five water management districts and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, provides a forum for state and local leaders to discuss the challenges facing water policy and decision-makers.

The South Florida Water Management District hosted this year's conference, which focused on the theme – "Celebrating Florida's Diversity: Our People and Resources." The conference offered the 537 attendees a taste of Miami's cultural diversity through art, music and food. Conference attendees enjoyed a multicultural art display featuring the works of distinguished South Florida fine artists Robert Butler, Ju-Ju Ventura and Sophia LaCroix, who were also on hand to meet attendees. A wall-size mural by students from Miami-Dade County New World School of the Arts depicting Miami's colorful history and culture was also on display. During the opening night reception, the Florida Memorial College Steel Drum Band entertained while attendees visited the record 37 exhibitor booths that offered an extensive array of products and services for effective water management.

A massive mural (16' x 6') by Miami-Dade County New World School of the Arts students colorfully depicts Miami's diverse culture and history.

The conference was also diverse in its subject matter, offering something for everyone on important water-related topics. "From diverse professions and cultures come solutions for diverse water resource issues faced throughout our state," South Florida Water Management District Executive Director Henry Dean said. Keynote speakers and panel experts from across the state and beyond conducted interactive sessions and gave presentations. Topics included water conservation, environmental and Everglades restoration, education and public outreach, building public-private partnerships, how to do business with water management districts and more.

Guided field trips featuring scientists and restoration experts were popular among attendees. The trips included tours of the Everglades Construction Project/Stormwater Treatment Area 1 West in Palm Beach County, the New River in Fort Lauderdale and Biscayne Bay in Miami. Conference-goers also had the option of attending the Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce Board of Governors and Trustees Luncheon that featured keynote speakers Colonel James G. May, Jacksonville District Commander, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and SFWMD Executive Director Henry Dean.

Florida's five water management districts – Northwest Florida Water Management District, Southwest Florida Water Management District, Suwannee River Water Management District, St. Johns River Water Management District and the South Florida Water Management District – as well as the Florida Department of Environmental Protection – work together each year to plan the conference agenda, secure speakers and coordinate field studies. Federal, state and local elected officials, community leaders, representatives from academia, members of the business community, environmental groups and other interested people are all invited – to learn about current projects and share their perspectives on water resource issues.

Now in its 28th year, the self-supporting, nonprofit conference provides water managers an excellent face-to-face forum to share information and discuss water resource challenges and solutions from throughout the state and the nation. Next year's conference, which will be hosted by the Southwest Florida Water Management District, is scheduled for September 3-5, 2003, at the Waterside Marriott in Tampa.

***Windell Paige**, (left) Director, Florida Office of Supplier Diversity, and **Frank Hayden**, SFWMD Procurement Director, participate in a business session.*

Conference visitors stop by one of 37 sponsor booths.

*(left to right) Session panelists Miami-Dade County Commissioner **José "Pepe" Díaz** (former mayor of Sweetwater); SFWMD Executive Director **Henry Dean**; Miami-Dade County Clerk of the Court **Harvey Ruvin**; Miami-Dade County Commissioner **Rebeca Sosa**; and **Colonel James G. May,** Jacksonville District Commander, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers*

Luck Has Nothing To Do With It

Preparation and opportunity key to successful business partnerships

In a recent business outreach workshop held at Indian River Community College, one of the presenters offered the audience some sage advice: "There is no such thing as luck. That perceived situation is the intersection where preparation meets opportunity."

Capitalizing on that proactive attitude, the South Florida Water Management District works to identify and create potential outsourcing opportunities, and to ensure that the business community is notified and informed regarding procurement and contract solicitation requirements. In turn, firms that do their homework and utilize available District resources, will be better prepared to respond to those opportunities when they arrive.

ASSISTANCE IS AVAILABLE

A successful strategy adopted by the District is to offer debriefings to vendors following the award of a solicitation. This is especially helpful to firms that may consistently submit quotes, bids or proposals, but come frustratingly close to receiving a monetary award from the agency. One company expressed it as "always the bridesmaid and never the bride." A review of a company or vendor's past submittals and discussion with District procurement staff can help reveal any discrepancies or shortcomings that the vendor can then use when preparing future submittals. While this provides no advantage or guarantee of receiving an award, it gives the participating vendors and contractors a better understanding of District requirements and expectations.

In advance of some complex solicitations, the District also offers one-on-one sessions with District project managers and procurement representatives. This allows potential respondents to seek clarification on any outstanding issues prior to their formal submittal. Again, these discussions provide no advantage or guarantees, but can prove beneficial to firms seeking to do business with the District.

On any given day, the South Florida Water Management District must acquire the routine goods and services needed to function as a large government organization. Also needed is the innovation and expertise to implement unprecedented world-class projects. According to SFWMD Procurement Director Frank Hayden, vendors who are informed and prepared have the best chance to contract with the agency. "We deal in dollars and data, the two most sought after means of exchange," said Hayden. "It's my job to safeguard the procurement process, create a level playing field and still manage to procure the best quality."

background: Boater on Lake Okeechobee
foreground, at right: American Lotus seedpod

SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

WATER Matters

December 2002/January 2003

Paradise Not Lost

Protecting Southwest Florida's resources

The land and water west of Lake Okeechobee and south of Sarasota has some of the most perfectly preserved natural systems in the world. Cypress and mangrove swamps carry us back to a prehistoric time, to natural ecosystems that have changed little since the first Native Americans came upon this land. Flora and fauna like the ancient bald cypress, red and black mangrove forests, xeric oak hammocks, and pine flatwoods are home to panthers, alligators, manatees and a host of wading birds that exist today much as they did when the first inhabitants of this area, the Calusa, arrived some 6,000 years ago.

While the Calusa civilization that once thrived here is gone, Southwest Florida remains one of the state's fastest-growing areas, drawing hundreds of thousands of new residents from places such as Ohio, Michigan, Illinois and Germany. New people are lured by the subtropical climate, miles of white sandy beaches and the natural systems that have existed here since the beginning of recorded time. As Southwest Florida continues to grow, and millions more settle in this fragile ecosystem, regional and local governments are working to protect the area's environmental integrity while providing essential water supplies and flood control.

Finding a balance between growth – which fuels the economy – and resource protection and preservation poses very real challenges.

The South Florida Water Management District has long recognized the unique needs and characteristics of the state's lower west coast communities. The 16-county agency established its first satellite service center in Fort Myers in 1981. Over the years, local staffing and programs have grown significantly in response to the region's needs.

"We have to work both smarter and harder to keep up with the increase in demands and to ensure preservation of the irreplaceable ecosystem that is Southwest Florida," Carol Wehle, director of the SFWMD Greater West Coast region, said. "We are working with all levels of government, interest groups, the business community and the public to actively identify and address regional issues and concerns."

Think globally

A comprehensive study to look at the needs of the west coast region – similar to, and in conjunction with, the broad-based perspective taken with the Everglades – is now under way. The Southwest Florida Feasibility Study, a cooperative project between the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the District has a number of objectives:

- Conserving and protecting water resources in Southwest Florida;
- Ensuring that environmental, agricultural and urban water supplies are maintained;
- Improving and protecting the ecological viability of natural ecosystems;
- Improving water flows throughout the natural system;
- Protecting and improving water quality throughout the region;
- Protecting and recovering populations of threatened species;
- Reducing flood damages to the region.

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