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CONTACT: DEP Press Office, 850.245.2112, DEPNews@dep.state.fl.us

DEP ISSUES PERMIT TO IMPROVE INDIAN RIVER LAGOON WATER QUALITY

**~Wetlands restoration project will be completed by South Florida Water Management District
in conjunction with Martin County, USDA~**

TALLAHASSEE – Today, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection issued a permit to the South Florida Water Management District and the Natural Resources Conservation Service for the Indian River Lagoon South-Allapattah Ranch Project, authorizing construction of water control features to restore wetlands. The project will restore wetlands by retaining water on the ranch, which is co-owned by the Water Management District and Martin County.

Restoration of the Allapattah Ranch will increase the size of onsite wetlands and will enhance the habitat value for threatened and endangered species and other wildlife. Restoration of the site will reduce the amount of freshwater flows and nutrients which make their way to Indian River Lagoon through on-site retention of rainfall, all while maintaining existing levels of flood protection for nearby properties.

"Restoring wetlands near the source of Martin County stormwater benefits the Martin and St. Lucie County portions of the Indian River Lagoon," said DEP Secretary Herschel T. Vinyard Jr. "This is another great project for this area that will improve the health of this lagoon ecosystem."

The property is under a permanent conservation easement of 12,725 acres with the United States Department of Agriculture's Natural Resource Conservation Service. Martin County and the Water Management District also contributed to the restoration project, the total cost of which is more than \$50 million. Construction will be conducted during the South Florida dry seasons and is expected to take two years to complete.

"I'm pleased to see the Department, Water Management District and County continuing to work on solutions to improve the quality of water in the Indian River Lagoon," said Sen. Joe Negron. "Continued efforts like these to improve water quality are the key to improving this important ecosystem."

"This cooperative project on land purchased by the District and Martin County

enhances existing wetlands on the site, helping to capture and hold stormwater runoff,” said South Florida Water Management District Executive Director Blake Guillory. “This ultimately will help protect water quality downstream in the St. Lucie River and Estuary.”

“Preserving and restoring wetlands is a priority of the Martin County Board of County Commissioners, said Sarah Heard, Chair of the Martin County Board of County Commissioners. “The Allapattah Ranch property is an important component of Everglades Restoration and the Indian River Lagoon South project, which once fully complete and implemented, will help improve our local water quality. Martin County is proud partner in this project, and is grateful for the cooperation of other government entities that have made this possible.”

The property in which the project is taking place is a part of an approximately 21,000-acre Wildlife Management Area managed by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission for hunting and outdoor recreation. The Allapattah Ranch project is located in northern Martin County and lies south of the C-23 canal and about one mile west of I-95.

About the Florida Department of Environmental Protection

The Florida Department of Environmental Protection is the state’s principal environmental agency, created to protect, conserve and manage Florida’s environment and natural resources. The Department enforces federal and state environmental laws, protects Florida’s air and water quality, cleans up pollution, regulates solid waste management, promotes pollution prevention and acquires environmentally-sensitive lands for preservation. The agency also maintains a statewide system of parks, trails and aquatic preserves. To view the Department’s website log on to www.dep.state.fl.us.

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