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## **WATER STORAGE CAPACITY IN NORTHERN EVERGLADES TO GROW WITH LATEST DEP GRANT**

**~Department awards \$3 million to store excess water on public and private lands~**

**NORTHERN EVERGLADES** – The Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) announced today a \$3 million grant award to the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) to support its thriving Dispersed Water Management Program. The program, which creates additional water storage on private and public lands, provides another tool to reduce the amount of water flowing into Lake Okeechobee and the Caloosahatchee and St. Lucie estuaries during high-water conditions. The funds will cover service payments and operations and maintenance costs for the program.

“Additional water storage throughout south Florida is critical to successfully protecting the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee estuaries during the region’s annual rainy season,” said DEP Secretary Herschel T. Vinyard Jr. “This unique program, supported by Governor Scott and the Florida Legislature, is a win-win for area residents because it puts south Florida’s landscape to work providing much-needed storage at limited cost.”

Every summer, the south Florida region is at risk of experiencing high-water conditions due to seasonal spikes in rainfall. Initiated nearly 10 years ago, the Dispersed Water Management Program aims to mitigate some of that risk by identifying, acquiring and using public and private lands to store excess surface water. The program encompasses a coalition of public agencies, environmental organizations, ranchers and researchers united in growing the region’s storage capacity. The program encourages private property owners to retain water on their land rather than drain it, accept and detain regional runoff for storage, or do some combination of both.

“This summer, the District’s improved flood control operations plus water storage on public and private lands made a significant difference in protecting South Florida’s fragile coastal estuaries,” said SFWMD Executive Director Blake Guillory. “Critical funding from the Florida Department of Environmental Protection will allow this important Dispersed Water Management Program to further expand storage capacity.”

The program has stored an average annual volume of 86,257 acre-feet of water, or

approximately 43,000 Olympic-sized swimming pools, which is in addition to the regional storage and treatment capacity provided by stormwater treatment areas, reservoirs and other regional facilities. Of the 43 identified Dispersed Water Management project sites, 29 are operational with the remaining sites being planned or under construction by the South Florida Water Management District. At the close of the 2014 rainy season, 28 of the 29 sites were full. The total possible retention capacity for all 43 sites is 93,372 acre-feet or approximately 29 billion gallons of water.

“As we saw during the 2014 rainy season, additional water storage throughout south Florida is extremely beneficial during high-water conditions,” said Senator Joe Negron. “The more water storage options we have, the better we can respond to rainfall fluctuations throughout the season, protecting our estuaries in the process.”

“South Florida’s rivers and estuaries are treasures that deserve our attention and protection,” said Representative Ray Rodrigues. “While we can’t stop the rains from coming every season, we can minimize their impact through successful efforts like the Dispersed Water Management Program.”

For more information about the Dispersed Water Management Program, click [here](#).

#### **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](http://www.dep.state.fl.us).

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