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DEP AWARDS \$2.7 MILLION FOR RAINY SEASON RESPONSE AND OPERATIONS

~ Funds will provide relief from excessive high-water conditions ~

SOUTH FLORIDA – The Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) announced today a \$2.7 million grant award to the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) to increase water storage in the region and improve the district's ability to send water south from Lake Okeechobee.

The funds allow the district to use public sites for temporary water storage in the region creating much-needed capacity in anticipation of high-water conditions. In addition, the funding also reimburses the district for extended operations at critical pump stations, which allowed the district to increase storage and expedite the process of sending excess waters from the state's Water Conservation Areas south to Everglades National Park and, eventually, to tide during the 2014 rainy season.

"Building out and strengthening south Florida's water storage, treatment and conveyance capacity is vital to mitigating any negative effects of stormwater runoff on our estuaries each year," said DEP Deputy Secretary Drew Bartlett. "It's a complex effort to grow and maintain our infrastructure but it's an extremely worthwhile investment that we're pleased to fund with the support of Governor Scott and the Florida Legislature."

The district will be reimbursed for various tools and operations they utilized during the 2014 rainy season to ensure the health and viability of Lake Okeechobee and the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee estuaries. District efforts included:

- The identification and use of public lands for additional water storage;
- Extending operations at major pump stations to move a significant amount of water south from Lake Okeechobee;
- Monitoring and maintaining vegetation in the region's stormwater treatment areas to ensure additional water flows were not negatively impacting system's ability to remove excess phosphorous from Everglades-bound water; and

- Removing barriers to southward flow, such as vegetation, which could hinder water conveyance.

In addition to reimbursement for activities tied to the 2014 rainy season, grant funding extends through June 2015, allowing the district to identify and employ these proven mitigation strategies at the start of the 2015 rainy season as well.

“This grant from the Department of Environmental Protection is vital for the continuing efforts to lower water levels in Lake Okeechobee,” said SFWMD Executive Director Blake Guillory. “This funding will allow the District to maximize flexibility in our infrastructure of pump stations and stormwater treatment areas to move lake water south into the water conservation areas.”

The district has stored an average volume of 86,257 acre-feet of water annually through the acquisition or leasing of public and private lands, also referred to as the Dispersed Water Management Program. At the close of the 2014 rainy season, 28 of the district’s 29 storage sites were utilized providing much-needed storage capacity for the region. The Dispersed Water Management Program, when combined with the district’s efforts to move more than 70 billion gallons of water from Lake Okeechobee to various destinations throughout the region, helped to protect the Caloosahatchee and St. Lucie estuaries from damage due to high-water conditions.

To learn more about how the district stores excess water, click [here](#). To learn more about the district’s efforts to move water south, 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.

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