



### About the South Florida Water Management District

The South Florida Water Management District is a regional, governmental agency that oversees the water resources in the southern half of the state – 16 counties from Orlando to the Keys. It is the oldest and largest of the state's five water management districts. The agency mission is to manage and protect water resources of the region by balancing and improving water quality, flood control, natural systems and water supply. A key initiative is cleanup and restoration of the Everglades.

### About the Big Cypress Basin

The Big Cypress Basin, part of the South Florida Water Management District, covers Collier County and portions of Monroe County. A network of 162 miles of primary canals, 45 water control structures and 4 pumps provide flood control to the basin and also protect regional water supplies and environmental resources.

## Focus on Western Everglades Picayune Strand Restoration Project



*The Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP), the Congressionally approved framework for restoring, protecting and preserving the water resources of central and southern Florida, calls for State-Federal partnership construction of the Picayune Strand Restoration Project. The multi-component effort is successfully reestablishing natural habitats and restoring sheetflow to enhance wetlands and benefit coastal estuaries.*

More than 85 square miles of former wetlands in western Collier County were drained in the 1960s for a failed real estate development (Southern Golden Gate Estates). Road construction and canal excavations severely impacted the area, reducing aquifer storage, increasing freshwater discharges to estuaries in the Ten Thousand Islands, disrupting native plant communities and increasing the frequency of wildfires.

The Picayune Strand Restoration Project will restore surface water flow to vital wetlands in the western Everglades, ensure wetland plants and animals thrive – including the endangered Florida panther – and improve the quality of water flowing to the Ten Thousand Islands estuaries. Expected benefits also include a more natural fire regime and improved aquifer recharge.

## HIGHLIGHTS

**This project will result in a diverse mosaic of habitats that will yield multiple benefits:**

- Restored and enhanced habitat for fish and wildlife
- Reduced drainage of adjacent sensitive ecosystems
- Improved aquifer recharge to protect underground water supplies and prevent saltwater intrusion
- Reduced freshwater releases/ improved health of downstream estuaries
- Increased recreational opportunities



### State Completed Initial Work – Continues to be Active Partner

The State of Florida took the lead on acquiring 55,000 acres of needed land (involving more than 17,000 landowners) and completed the initial construction phase. In 2007 the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) backfilled seven miles of Prairie Canal and removed 65 miles of roadways – resulting in more than 13,000 acres of restored and enhanced habitat. A series of culverts have also been constructed under U.S. Highway 41 allowing more natural sheetflow to wetlands south of the road.

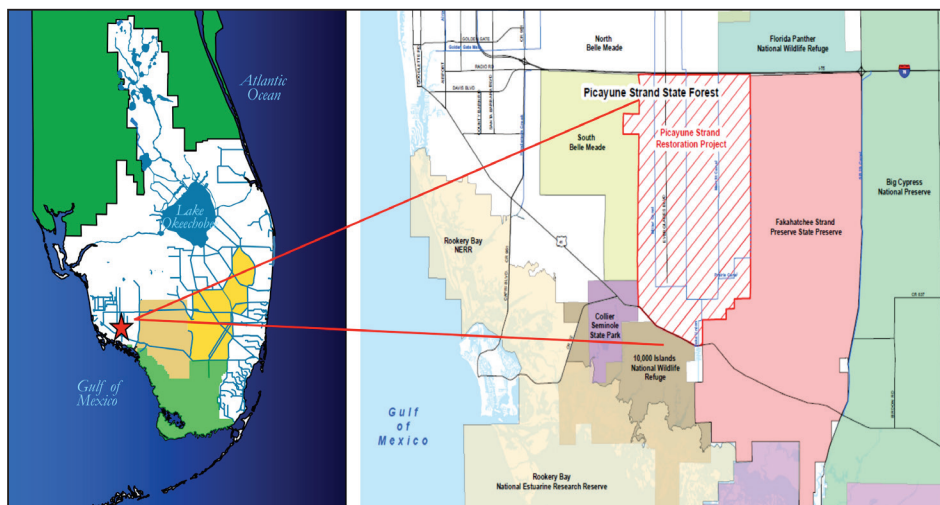
Continued State funding in 2015 is being used to acquire additional adjacent lands, to conduct operational testing and monitoring for the first of three pump stations and to construct a manatee mitigation feature that will ensure a continued warm water refugium in the Port of the Islands area. As part of this project, the SFWMD will also build a flood control levee and assist with further roadway removal.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers completed the Merritt Canal pump station in 2014. In addition, 65 miles of road was removed and 10 miles of canal was filled. Federal work on the Faka Union and Miller pump stations are also underway, along with additional road removal and future canal filling.

- Water reservations, a legal mechanism to set aside water for the protection of fish and wildlife or public health and safety, for the Picayune Strand and Fakahatchee Estuary ecosystems were adopted by the SFWMD in 2009.
- State work completed to-date (canal filling; road removal; culvert installation) has yielded more than 13,000 acres of restored and enhanced habitat.
- Pump station construction, additional roadway removal and canal filling are underway by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.
- The Merritt Canal pump station is in the operational testing and monitoring phase.
- The SFWMD will also dredge a two-acre warm water basin for manatee use and construct a seven-mile flood protection levee.
- Project completion is scheduled for 2018.

For more information on projects and strategies being implemented by the State of Florida to improve the Everglades, visit [www.sfwmd.gov/restorationprogress](http://www.sfwmd.gov/restorationprogress).

For more information on the federal role in the Picayune Strand Restoration project and implementation of the broader Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan, visit [www.evergladesrestoration.gov](http://www.evergladesrestoration.gov).



### Stats and Status:

- The CERP project was authorized in the Water Resources Development Act of 2007.
- More than 55,000 acres were acquired for the project footprint. Additional lands (~1,200 acres) are needed in the adjacent Fakahatchee Strand and Belle Meade areas.

*With construction well underway, key features of the approximately 55,000-acre project include removing or degrading more than 227 miles of roads, installing three pump stations, backfilling and plugging 40 miles of canals and distributing overland flows via spreader canals.*



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