

February 2016

just the **FACTs**

This fact sheet is provided as a reference to encourage a greater understanding of the various issues related to managing water in South Florida.

Historic 2015-2016 Dry Season Rainfall

The 2015-2016 dry season to date has brought historic rainfall totals to South Florida. In response, the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) has been operating the regional water management system to provide flood protection for South Florida residents and businesses while attempting to minimize harm to natural areas.

Dry Season Rainfall

- From November 2015 through January 2016, South Florida averaged 16.22 inches of rain – the highest total for this three-month period since record keeping began in 1932.
 - The dry season typically lasts through May and brings an average of 18 inches of rainfall, or less than a third of the total in a normal year.
- In January alone, a record 9.18 inches of rain fell across the region, 7.25 inches above the historical average.
- Jan. 22-28 was the single wettest week District-wide since Tropical Storm Isaac in August 2012, and Jan. 27 was the wettest dry season day in 25 years.

Current Operational Response

- Water managers have utilized all public and private lands available to optimize water storage throughout the region.
 - As part of this effort, the District filled the new A-1 Flow Equalization Basin, completed in November 2015 as part of Governor Rick Scott's Restoration Strategies Plan for clean water for the Everglades.
 - The District is also actively storing water on private lands in the Caloosahatchee, St. Lucie and Okeechobee watersheds through the agency's Dispersed Water Management Program.
 - In addition to maximized storage capacity, the District faces other limitations to moving more water to the Everglades. One of these limitations is that discharges from WCA-3 to Everglades National Park during certain times of the year to protect the endangered Cape Sable seaside sparrow.

Protecting Wildlife in Water Conservation Area 3

- To relieve flooding and dire conditions impacting Everglades wildlife, the District has opened water control gates to move about 10,000 gallons of clean water per second out of Water Conservation Area 3 and into Northeast Shark River Slough in Everglades National Park.
- The District is also taking action to protect urban and agricultural areas bordering the increased flows to the park.
- The District's actions follow orders from the Florida Department of Environmental Protection and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission that allowed the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to ease regulatory restrictions on operations in WCA-3. The interagency coordination was prompted by Governor Scott's request to the Corps to take immediate action to relieve the flooding and ease releases of water from Lake Okeechobee to the Caloosahatchee and St. Lucie estuaries.



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Managing Lake Okeechobee

- The Corps manages water levels in the lake with the goal of balancing flood control, public safety, navigation, water supply and ecological health.
 - The Corps bases operational decisions – whether to retain or release water in the 730-square-mile lake – on its regulation schedule.
- Lake Okeechobee’s water level rose as high as 16.40 feet in February, its highest point in more than 10 years. The Corps works to maintain the level between 12.5 feet and 15.5 feet.

Florida’s Commitment to Solutions

- With support from Governor Scott and the Florida Legislature, the District is making progress on several projects to increase water storage and operational flexibility within the regional water management system. These include:
 - Ongoing construction of the C-43 and C-44 reservoirs in Hendry and Martin counties
 - Rehabilitation of the Ten Mile Creek Reservoir in St. Lucie County
 - Completion of the L-8 Flow Equalization Basin and expansion of Stormwater Treatment Area 1 West as part of the Restoration Strategies Plan in Palm Beach County
 - Improvements to the Bolles East Canal in the Everglades Agricultural Area
- Together, these and other initiatives will reduce the need for back pumping into Lake Okeechobee, reduce harmful freshwater discharges to the Caloosahatchee and St. Lucie estuaries and help to restore South Florida’s natural systems while maintaining flood protection for the region’s residents and businesses.
- Governor Scott has proposed an ambitious plan that would provide \$5 billion in dedicated funding for Everglades restoration over the next 20 years to construct these projects.

Need for Federal Commitment

- While Florida’s commitment will help address these issues, the U.S. Congress must fund the federal share of a number of key projects. Among the priorities are:
 - Rehabilitation of the 80-year-old Herbert Hoover Dike around Lake Okeechobee to improve flood protection, water storage and water supply
 - Completion of Modified Water Deliveries to Everglades National Park to enable water to flow more freely into the park
 - Construction of restoration projects in the Central Everglades Planning Project to enable more water to flow south from Lake Okeechobee to the Everglades

“Back Pumping” Operation into Lake Okeechobee

- The Jan. 27 rainfall event brought 6 inches of rain over 24 hours to Glades communities.
- In response, the South Florida Water Management District initiated a rare “back pumping” operation into Lake Okeechobee to provide flood protection for thousands of families and businesses in these communities.
 - The SFWMD Governing Board’s policy limits back pumping operations solely for flood control purposes under conditions clearly defined in a Florida Department of Environmental Protection permit.
 - After the Board’s policy was instituted, the practice has been used only eight other times since 2008 – four of which were following tropical storms.
- In four days of operation, the S-2 and S-3 pumps moved 31,397 acre-feet of water, the equivalent of 3/4 of an inch on Lake Okeechobee. The rainfall event itself increased the lake level approximately 10 inches (375,000 acre-feet of water).
 - Back pumping represented 7 percent of all inflows to Lake Okeechobee the week of Jan. 28-Feb. 3.