

March 2009



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.

Northern Everglades and Estuary Protection Program *St. Lucie River Watershed Protection Plan*

Underscoring the State of Florida's commitment to restoring the greater Everglades ecosystem, the Florida Legislature in 2007 expanded the Lake Okeechobee Protection Act to include protection and restoration of the Lake Okeechobee watershed and the Caloosahatchee and St. Lucie rivers and estuaries. The law required the Coordinating Agencies, including the South Florida Water Management District, Florida Department of Environmental Protection, and Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services in cooperation with Lee and Martin counties and other affected municipalities, to develop the Caloosahatchee and St. Lucie River Watershed Protection Plans. The River Watershed Protection Plans were submitted to the Florida Legislature on January 1, 2009. The Lake Okeechobee Watershed Construction Project Phase II Technical Plan was completed in February 2008.

- The Coordinating Agencies and working team evaluated various alternatives using best available tools and scientific information. The development and comparison of the alternatives- along with extensive input from the public- ultimately identified the best-science based and technologically- feasible options for improving ecosystem health in the St. Lucie River Watershed.
- The St. Lucie River Watershed Protection Plan includes three components: a Construction Project, a Pollutant Control Program, and a Research and Water Quality Monitoring Program.
- The Construction Project and Pollutant Control Program includes water quality projects, along with agricultural and urban best management practices (BMPs), to maximize nutrient loading reductions to meet Total Maximum Daily Loads as they are established for the St. Lucie River Estuary. In addition, it includes water storage projects for improving quantity, timing, and distribution of water in the estuary and for re-establishing salinity regimes suitable for maintaining a healthy, naturally diverse and well-balanced estuarine ecosystem.
- The Research and Water Quality Monitoring Plan describes the current state of knowledge regarding hydrology, water quality, aquatic habitat and effects of Lake Okeechobee on delivery of water to the St. Lucie River Estuary. It builds upon the existing monitoring, research and modeling efforts and makes recommendations and modifications to these efforts to better achieve and assess the water quality and quantity targets of the St. Lucie River Watershed Protection Plan.
- When completed and approved, the St. Lucie River Watershed Protection Plan will be implemented using a phased-approach. Phase I will include projects initiated or constructed between 2009 and 2012 followed by Phase 2 including projects initiated between 2013 and 2018. Long Term Implementation Phase will include projects initiated beyond 2018.

- Benefits of the multi-phased St. Lucie River Watershed Protection Plan include:
 - Implementation of BMPs on more than 297,000 acres of agricultural lands and nearly 84,000 acres of urban lands;
 - Completing Environmental Resource Permit and 40E-61 Regulatory Nutrient Source Control Program rule revisions to better protect water quality and reduce discharge volumes;
 - Construction of approximately 11,800 acres of reservoirs and more than 8,500 acres of Stormwater Treatment Areas;
 - The potential for reducing total phosphorus and total nitrogen loads to the St. Lucie River Estuary by 209 mt/yr (55%) and 1,210 mt/yr (56%), respectively;
 - Restoring approximately 95,000 acres of wetlands and natural areas within the St. Lucie River Watershed;
 - Providing approximately 200,000 acre-feet of water storage within the St. Lucie River Watershed; and
 - Removing approximately 8 million cubic yards of silty muck sediment from the St. Lucie Estuary to improve water quality.

- Subject to ratification by the Florida Legislature, the St. Lucie River Watershed Protection Plan builds upon existing and planned programs and projects, and successfully consolidates previous restoration efforts into a broader approach focused on restoring the entire Northern Everglades system.

- To view the St. Lucie River Watershed Protection Plan, visit <https://my.sfwmd.gov/northerneverglades>