

# Reviving THE river OF grass



December 2008

## 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.

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## Reviving the River of Grass Environmental Benefits and Public Involvement

*In December 2008, the Governing Board of the South Florida Water Management District will consider a proposed purchase agreement with the United States Sugar Corporation regarding the acquisition of more than 180,000 acres of land located south of Lake Okeechobee. This historic transaction would provide water managers with the unprecedented opportunity to store and treat water on a scale never before envisioned for the benefit of America's Everglades, Lake Okeechobee and the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee rivers and estuaries.*

### Potential Environmental Benefits

- Increases water storage to reduce harmful freshwater discharges from Lake Okeechobee to the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee rivers and estuaries
- Improves the delivery of cleaner water to the Everglades
- Prevents tons of phosphorus from entering the Everglades
- Reduces the need for "back-pumping" water into Lake Okeechobee
- Manages Lake Okeechobee within a more desirable ecological range

### Preliminary Restoration Assessments

District engineers and scientists have begun exploring potential restoration projects using this vast tract of land. As part of a preliminary hydrologic evaluation, the District utilized a new computer modeling tool called the Reservoir Sizing and Operations Screening (RESOPS) model to simulate, evaluate and screen a variety of options, all in a "virtual" world.

- The RESOPS model can quickly test a large number of scenarios using 41 years of rainfall and hydrologic data from throughout South Florida.
- These scenarios will help to determine which combinations of water storage, including reservoir sizes, can best meet restoration objectives.
- Approximately 250,000 individual scenarios were tested in 60 days.
- RESOPS analysis shows that increasing water storage and treatment capability within the Everglades Agricultural Area could provide the significant environmental benefits described above.

### Ensuring Public Involvement

- The significance of this potential Everglades land purchase led the District to take additional steps to keep the public informed and involved with the acquisition and how it will enhance opportunities to restore the Everglades.
- To provide the most up-to-date information on the acquisition, the District has a dedicated Web site at [www.sfwmd.gov/riverofgrass](http://www.sfwmd.gov/riverofgrass). This site is a comprehensive repository for acquisition-related materials including: news releases, fact sheets, presentations, photos and videos, Q & A's, news articles, resolutions, letters and proposals.



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## ***Reviving the River of Grass:*** **Environmental Benefits and Public Involvement**

### **Ensuring Public Involvement** *(continued)*

- With the contract now under consideration by the District's Governing Board, additional details and records (other than trade secret information as defined in Florida Statute 812.081) associated with the acquisition, including appraisals, are posted on the Web site for public review.
- At public meetings scheduled for December 2, 15 and 16, the District's Governing Board will continue evaluating the results of the District's extensive due diligence and consider the terms and conditions of the proposed purchase contract and lease agreement.
- If the acquisition is finalized, full-scale planning – with public involvement – will take place to identify environmental restoration project footprints and specific water storage, water quality treatment and conveyance project options.
- District engineers are currently evaluating a range of conceptual project configurations to provide a starting point for an extensive and detailed public project planning process.
- With full public involvement, all project planning will follow a step-by-step approach; identify challenges and opportunities; clarify goals, objectives and constraints; and identify and evaluate projects to meet those goals.
- The District will continue to update its Web site and to broadcast upcoming public meetings to encourage public access to all discussions and decisions.