



SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

## OPINION

January 29, 2016

### **Heavy January Rainfall Required Extraordinary Flood Control Action**

This winter has brought extraordinary amounts of rainfall to South Florida. In response, the South Florida Water Management District has taken extraordinary actions to fulfill its mission of providing flood protection for residents and businesses within the 16 counties the agency serves.

One much talked-about action was the “back pumping” of water into Lake Okeechobee that started on Jan. 27, the wettest January day in South Florida in 25 years. Intense, short-term rainfall concentrated on Glades communities south of the lake threatened the integrity of the local flood control system. SFWMD water managers quickly took the necessary step of turning on the pumps to protect thousands of families and businesses.

While back pumping has been a controversial practice over the years, it is a rare event these days – utilized just eight other times since 2008. The SFWMD Governing Board’s current policy is to only use back pumping under emergency conditions for flood control purposes. Those conditions are clearly spelled out in a Florida Department of Environmental Protection permit regulating use of the pumps.

After an already wet start to the winter, January has brought more than 9 inches of rain across South Florida. That’s five times the historic average and more than any single month in the 2015 rainy season. Faced with this record-setting rainfall, water managers are working to provide flood control while minimizing harm to natural areas such as the St. Lucie Estuary. However, options are limited with water storage areas already full.

There is broad consensus that the long-term solution is more water storage capacity. The District is making progress on critical projects needed to achieve this goal, including construction of the stormwater treatment area and pump station components of the C-44 Reservoir and rehabilitation of the Ten Mile Creek reservoir. Governor Scott’s proposed budget and the “Legacy Florida” legislation sponsored by Rep. Gayle Harrell promise to provide dedicated funding to continue this momentum well into the future.

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