



SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

NEWS RELEASE

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SFWMD Governing Board Approves Watershed Protection Plans for Caloosahatchee, St. Lucie Rivers

Plans mark another step toward protection of the Northern Everglades

West Palm Beach, FL – The South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) Governing Board recently took another step toward protecting and improving the health of the Caloosahatchee and St. Lucie rivers and estuaries by approving Watershed Protection Plans for both rivers. With extensive input from the public, the District completed the plans in December in cooperation with the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services and Martin, St. Lucie and Lee counties.

“This is a significant step in the implementation of the Northern Everglades Protection Program,” said SFWMD Governing Board Chairman Eric Buermann. “With the contribution and support from members of the public, state partners, conservationists and elected officials, these plans provide a comprehensive roadmap for achieving water storage and water quality enhancements for both estuaries and river watersheds.”

Highlights of the Caloosahatchee River Watershed Protection Plan include:

- Implementation of best management practices on more than 430,000 acres of agricultural lands and more than 145,000 acres of urban lands.
- Construction of approximately 36,000 acres of reservoirs and 15,000 acres of Stormwater Treatment Areas and Water Quality Treatment Areas.
- Potential reduction of total phosphorous loads to the Caloosahatchee Estuary by 166 metric tons per year (39 percent) and total nitrogen by 1,840 metric tons per year (38 percent).
- Restoration of more than 2,000 acres of wetlands within the watershed.
- Provision of approximately 400,000 acre-feet of water storage within the watershed.

Highlights of the St. Lucie River Watershed Protection Plan include:

- Implementation of best management practices on more than 297,000 acres of agricultural lands and nearly 84,000 acres of urban lands.
- Construction of approximately 11,800 acres of reservoirs and more than 8,500 acres of Stormwater Treatment Areas.
- Potential reduction of total phosphorous loads to the St. Lucie Estuary by 209 metric tons per year (55 percent) and total nitrogen by 1,210 metric tons per year (56 percent).
- Restoration of 95,000 acres of wetlands and natural areas within the watershed.
- Removal of more than 8 million cubic yards of silty muck sediment from the St. Lucie Estuary to improve water quality.
- Provision of approximately 200,000 acre-feet of water storage within the watershed.

The Caloosahatchee and St Lucie Watershed Protection Plans are a part of the State's efforts to improve and protect the Northern Everglades ecosystem, which stretches from the Kissimmee Chain of Lakes south to Lake Okeechobee and includes the coastal rivers and estuaries. In 2007, the Florida Legislature expanded the Lake Okeechobee Protection Act to strengthen protection for the Northern Everglades, recognizing the importance and connectivity of the entire Everglades ecosystem. Implementation of this program will improve the quality, quantity, timing and distribution of water to the natural system, enhancing land management to reduce nutrient runoff and by constructing local and regional water quality and water storage projects.

"The Watershed Protection Plans will help us maintain the diverse ecosystems found in the Caloosahatchee and St. Lucie estuaries," said Michael W. Sole, Secretary of the Florida Department of Environmental Protection. "By enacting these plans, we will be preserving the natural beauty of these estuaries for generations of Floridians to come."

Following approval by the SFWMD Governing Board, the Caloosahatchee and St. Lucie Watershed Protection Plans were submitted to the Florida Legislature for ratification. The plans recommend a phased implementation approach with the first phase to include projects initiated or constructed between 2009 and 2012. The plans build upon existing and planned programs and projects, and successfully consolidate previous restoration efforts into a broader approach focused on restoring the entire Northern Everglades system.

Since 2000, the State has invested more than \$3.8 billion to improve the quality and the natural flow of water in America's Everglades. For more information about the Northern Everglades and Estuaries Protection Program, visit www.sfwmd.gov.

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About the South Florida Water Management District – [Celebrating 60 Years \(1949-2009\)](#)

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.