



SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

NEWS RELEASE

February 12, 2009

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Water Managers Safeguard Water for Everglades Restoration

First water reservation set for Picayune Strand

West Palm Beach, FL — Fulfilling a 2008 commitment to guarantee water for restoration of the Picayune Strand and Fakahatchee Estuary, the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) Governing Board today adopted the first-ever water reservation for America's Everglades. This milestone completes a year-long rulemaking process to develop the reservation, which will serve to protect the ecosystem and wildlife on Florida's Southwest coast for decades to come.

"The first Everglades water reservation is a true restoration achievement, even though it is not a construction project that you can see or visit," said Eric Buermann, Chairman of the SFWMD Governing Board. "Environmental restoration depends on water, and today we have guaranteed that these unique ecosystems will have what they need."

A water reservation is a legal mechanism to set aside water for the protection of fish and wildlife or public health and safety. When a water reservation is in place, volumes and timing of water at specific locations are protected for the natural system ahead of consumptive uses such as new development.

The adoption of today's water reservation also allows the District to enter into a cost-sharing partnership with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to continue construction on Picayune Strand restoration projects. Several project phases have been completed but more work remains.

Located north of Everglades National Park on Florida's Southwest coast, the Picayune Strand was drained in the 1960s for a failed real estate development. Road construction and canal excavations reduced aquifer storage, increased freshwater discharges to estuaries in the Ten Thousand Islands, disrupted native plant communities and increased the frequency of wildfires.

In October 2003, Florida began restoring the Picayune Strand as a part of the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP). The restoration project is restoring surface water flow to vital wetlands to ensure that wetland plants and animals thrive, including the endangered Florida panther, and to improve the Ten Thousand Islands estuaries. Expected benefits also include a more natural fire regime and improved aquifer recharge.

Construction features on the approximately 55,000-acre project include removing or degrading more than 260 miles of roads, installing three pump stations, backfilling and plugging 40 miles of canals and distributing overland flows via spreader canals. Progress to date includes:

- Invested \$125 million to place in public ownership 54,310 acres, which represents 99 percent of the land required to complete the restoration project.
- Filled and plugged 7 miles of the Prairie Canal.
- Completed 25 percent of the road removal necessary for restoration.
- Documented environmental benefits on 13,000 acres of restored area to date.
- Initiated remediation of contaminated sites and completed removal of structures, facilities and debris, including tires, asphalt, concrete and vehicles.
- Completed 100 percent of the design plans for the project's restoration elements and pump stations, along with required permits.

The SFWMD initiated rule development in February 2008 for a reservation of water identified for the Picayune Strand Restoration Project. This rule fulfills the requirement of the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) of 2000 to reserve or allocate the water identified for the natural system in the Project Implementation Report, approved by Congress. The Picayune Strand Restoration Project is one of the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) projects authorized by Congress in the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) of 2007.

» [Just the Facts: District Undertakes Rulemaking to Reserve Water for Picayune Strand – a First for Everglades Restoration](#)

For more information on the Picayune Strand Restoration Project, including the proposed reservation rule language, please visit the District's Web site at: 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.