



SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

NEWS RELEASE

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U.S. Army Applauds SFWMD Project for Disabled Vets

District Everglades platform increases public conservation land access

 [Audio Interview Available](#)



West Palm Beach, FL — The South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) and its partner, United Waterfowlers — Florida, Inc., received a Freedom Team Award from the U.S. Army for the speedy effort to build a specialized platform in the remnant Everglades for disabled soldiers and residents alike. The waterfowl hunting/bird watching platform was constructed in less than 90 days at the District's Stormwater Treatment Area 5 (STA-5) in Hendry County.

The successful project was the latest SFWMD effort to meld restoration with recreation by increasing outdoor opportunities — and access to them — on public lands. The District has long sponsored a hunting recreation program, yet an e-mail from a wounded veteran made SFWMD Governing Board member Michael Collins and members of the Water Resources Advisory Commission (WRAC), which he chairs, committed to doing more.

“The veteran said, ‘I’m tired of volunteering my time to go down to the hospital and play bingo and watch those guys sitting in chairs inside of the hospital,’” Collins recalled. “It just struck me that for those guys, getting out on one of the levees would be a really good thing to have happen. The great thing about it is we build this duck platform out into the swamp, and it’s actually something that makes a great access point for everybody.”

Working with United Waterfowlers — Florida, Inc., the District built a platform and large wooden boardwalk that can accommodate two wheelchairs. For hunting, the structure can be configured with camouflage netting and other tools of the sport.

“The STA waters have proven to be a fantastic duck hunting opportunity in a world where there are very few hunting opportunities left to the public any more,” Collins added.

The SFWMD and Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission sponsored the first hunt on December 21, when several hunters lent their permits to disabled veterans so they could enjoy the new platform. Bird watchers are also benefiting from the increased access at the STA, renowned for its abundant wildlife. Notably, all of the District’s STAs are compliant with Americans with Disabilities Act requirements.

Recreation Opportunities Continue to Expand

During the past year, the SFWMD took a number of steps to improve recreational opportunities throughout South Florida:

- In October 2008, outdoor enthusiasts gained another spot to enjoy a host of recreational activities with the opening of the 3,700-acre Chandler Slough in Okeechobee, an addition to the Kissimmee River Public Use Area.
- In July 2008, the SFWMD outfitted Stormwater Treatment Area (STA) 1 West, located in central Palm Beach County, with a new parking area leading to a 200-foot viewing platform and gazebos overlooking the watery expanse. The three-mile trail along a section of the levee surrounding the 6,670-acre STA offers hikers, bicyclists, photographers and bird watchers vast views of nature and wildlife such as great blue herons and mottled ducks.
- Also in July, hikers, campers and horseback riders were given access to apply online for recreational use licenses for activities on more than a dozen sites managed by the District. The online application is at www.sfwmd.gov/sul

For more information about the District’s Stormwater Treatment Areas and recreational opportunities, visit www.sfwmd.gov

SFWMD Governing Board member Michael Collins and SFWMD Recreation Planner Jerry Krenz discussed the new public access at STA-5.



[Audio Interview](#)

About the Freedom Team Award

Recognizing what a simple expression of gratitude can mean, the U.S. Army created Freedom Team Salute in 2005. The program recognizes the essential bond between soldiers, family and community and celebrates the sacrifices made by all those who support our soldiers, according to the U.S. Army.

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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.