



SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

NEWS RELEASE

July 8, 2009

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SFWMD Increases Transparency and Enhances Public Process for Regulatory Permitting Programs

West Palm Beach, FL – The South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) today strengthened its commitment to transparency and open government by increasing public access to its permitting process. The improvements are part of the District's implementation of new state legislation, known as Senate Bill 2080 (SB2080), that delegates authority for permit approvals to executive directors at the state's five water management districts.

The comprehensive legislation, passed by the Florida Legislature in May and signed into law by Governor Charlie Crist on June 30, also reauthorized Florida's five water management districts as part of the state's sunset review process. In addition, the bill offers greater protection for Florida's water resources and environment by encouraging the use of Florida-friendly landscaping.

"Implementing this new law presents the South Florida Water Management District with an opportunity to increase public involvement and participation in the permitting process," said SFWMD Executive Director Carol Ann Wehle. "We remain committed to increasing government transparency, encouraging public participation and upholding our commitment to protect South Florida's water resources."

Water management districts in Florida protect regional water supplies with environmental resource permits that regulate activities that could impact wetlands, alter surface water flows or contribute to water pollution. The districts also use consumptive use permits to regulate ground and surface water withdrawals by major users such as water utilities, agriculture and nurseries, golf courses, mining and other industrial users.

Currently, nearly 90 percent of permits are issued at the SFWMD staff level, with 10 percent going to the Governing Board for final action. Under the new legislation, applications for all permits will go to the agency's executive director. If staff

recommends denial of the permit, the application must go to the Governing Board for further review.

To implement this law as well as to encourage public involvement, the SFWMD is employing several new and improved procedures. These actions include:

- Providing opportunities for interested stakeholders to meet with the SFWMD executive director or other appropriate staff members, prior to permit action, at regularly scheduled monthly meetings that will be webcast on the District's Web site. The first meeting of this type is scheduled for August 18 at the SFWMD headquarters in West Palm Beach.
- Posting a list of new applications received on the District's Web site and ePermitting portal weekly.
- Posting a list of applications deemed complete on the District's Web site and ePermitting portal weekly.
- Posting a list of individual permits issued the previous month on the District's Web site and ePermitting portal.
- Maintaining a standing agenda item on the Governing Board's monthly agenda for the public to provide input on regulatory policy issues.

Further, the public will have additional opportunities during the review process to comment on those projects determined to be of heightened public interest or where there is the likelihood of a request for an administrative hearing. Examples may include 20-year permits for public utilities, applications within or adjacent to a Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) project or permits that have generated significant public interest.

The new measures build on several open government initiatives already in place at the SFWMD. The SFWMD launched its Web-based ePermitting portal in 2005, allowing constituents to use an application/permit search engine to access information online. Since that time, ePermitting has been enhanced to allow customers to conduct a variety of business with the District, including submittal of environmental resource and consumptive use permit applications, submittal of information about permit compliance, access to fee schedules and automatic calculation of permitting fees. The tool also allows customers to apply for, track and manage permits online in real time, at anytime.

To date, nearly 200 people subscribe to the system's notice feature, allowing users to retrieve details on newly received applications, permits, regulatory consent agendas and rulemaking. ePermitting account holders can also subscribe to receive notice details in a weekly report that can be customized by each user, including information by notice type, location or permit type.

In January, the District completed the addition of more than 30 years of regulatory permit information to the existing ePermitting online database. The process required conversion to electronic format of more than 280,000 sheets of microfilm containing 9.1 million documents dating back to the 1970s. The result of the conversion project is direct, easy and quick public access to permit files, representing a more customer-friendly and cost-effective way to do business.

For more information on public meetings and ePermitting, or to access permit information and subscribe to the SFWMD's electronic noticing service, visit www.sfwmd.gov/ePermitting.

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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.