



NEWS RELEASE

January 8, 2010

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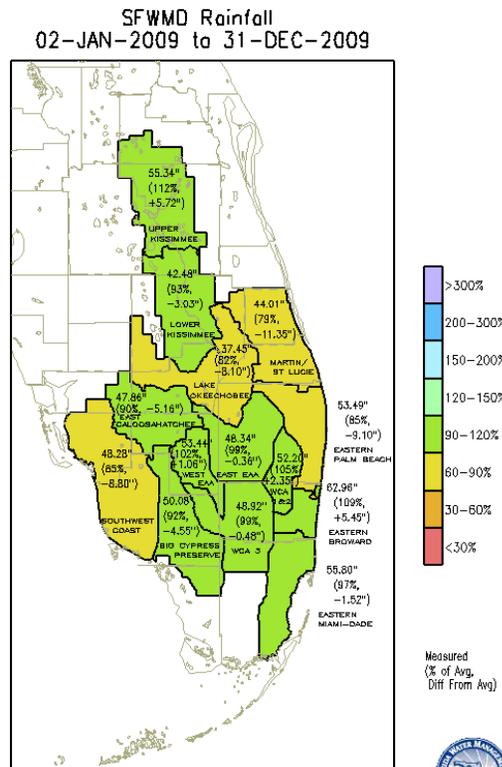
South Florida Water Management District

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2009 Roller Coaster of Weather Extremes, Water Management Challenges *Moderate rainfall deficit continues in Lake Okeechobee region*



DISTRICT-WIDE: 48.48" (93%, -3.39")
GADS: COLA/GES 2009-12-31-19:02
(Click on picture for a larger version.)

West Palm Beach, FL – Last January, the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) entered 2009 during the driest six-month period in South Florida’s history. The month of May set a rainfall record followed by a near-record dry October. The new year begins with caution as the height of the dry season looms once again.

“The rainfall deficit in the Lake Okeechobee region highlights the challenge we face in managing flood control and water supply for 7.5 million residents, businesses and ecosystems, including the lake and the Everglades,” said SFWMD Governing Board

member Joe Collins. “We know that water conservation will help with this balance and protect regional water resources.”

Last winter and early spring, water managers were faced with an average 10.13-inch rainfall deficit by the end of the dry season in April 2009. In an abrupt turnabout, May 2009 became the wettest May on record, with 9.04 inches of rain falling across the District. The 2009 wet season reached 40.09 inches of rainfall from May through the last days of October, representing a nearly average amount for this time period. Yet by month’s end, October became the fourth driest October on record. From a water supply perspective, significant rainfall in December helped replenish many groundwater resources, particularly along the east coast.

Lake Okeechobee began the year close to 14 feet NGVD, dipped to about 11 feet around mid-May and rebounded back to approximately 14.5 feet in mid-September. The lake level on December 31 was 13.58 feet NGVD. This range provides near ideal conditions for submerged and emergent aquatic vegetation, the foundation of lake wildlife. Apple snails – the sole food of the endangered snail kite – as well as breeding fish and birds thrive in these conditions.

In all, a total of 48.48 inches of rain fell District-wide from January 1 through December 31, 2009, which is 93 percent of the average and represents a 3.39-inch deficit. Locally, the lake region began the year amid dry conditions, with only 1.94 inches of rainfall from January to the end of April 2009, representing 21 percent of the average, or a 7.39-inch deficit.

The wet season began in May, and the region ended the year with a total of 37.45 inches of rainfall, representing 82 percent of the average and an 8.10-inch deficit.

“The lake experienced a very good year in terms of ecological health,” Collins added. “Yet we must remain vigilant when it comes to water supply, which is among the reasons why the Governing Board adopted year-round water conservation measures. Permanent limits on landscape irrigation will benefit the lake and protect South Florida’s water resources.”

The SFWMD continues to closely monitor water levels and is urging residents and businesses to conserve water and follow landscape irrigation restrictions in effect. More information about irrigation restrictions by area is available on the District’s [water restrictions](#) Web site. For water saving tips, visit www.savewaterfl.com.

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About the South Florida Water Management District

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.