



NEWS RELEASE

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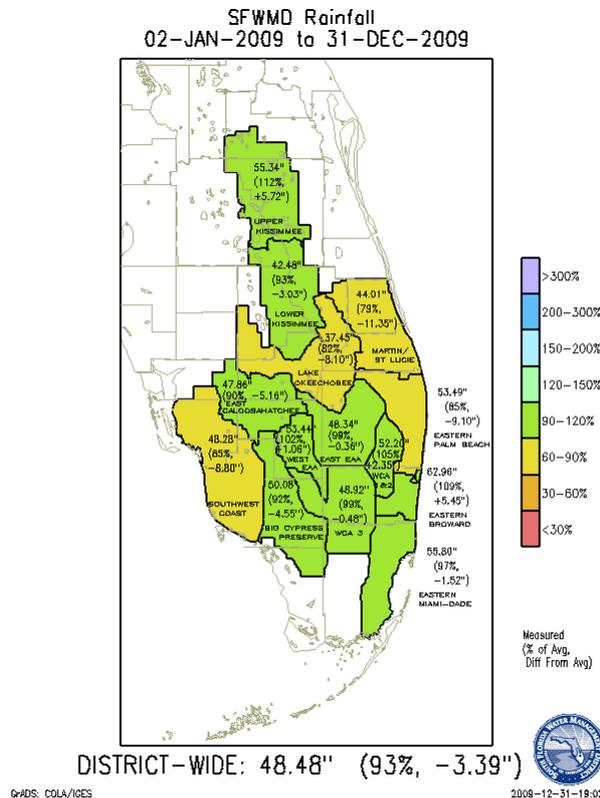
South Florida Water Management District

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2009 Roller Coaster of Weather Extremes, Water Management Challenges *Treasure Coast among the driest areas in South Florida in 2009*



(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.

“Treasure Coast residents are keenly aware of the water management challenges caused by South Florida’s variable weather, especially after ending the year inundated with rain following two dry months,” said SFWMD Governing Board member Kevin

Powers. "As the District works to manage flood control and water supply, conservation remains the best way for residents to help protect our limited 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, Martin and St. Lucie counties began the year amid dry conditions, with only 3.51 inches of rainfall from January to the end of April, representing 30 percent of the average and a deficit of 8.12 inches.

The wet season began in May and eased drought conditions. The Treasure Coast still ended the year as one of the driest areas in the region, with a total of 44.01 inches of rainfall, representing 79 percent of the average and a deficit of 11.35 inches. The year-end total was boosted by nearly 6 inches of rainfall in December alone.

"The extended dry periods on the Treasure Coast in 2009 further underscore the reasoning behind the Governing Board's approval of year-round water conservation measures placing permanent limits on landscape irrigation," Powers said. "Landscape irrigation limits are proven to be an effective water conservation tool. Making these limits permanent in Martin and St. Lucie counties and across the entire region makes sense."

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.