



SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

NEWS RELEASE

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South Florida Water Managers Call for Water Use Reductions as Dry Conditions Worsen

District encourages voluntary conservation across the region



Water levels in the Port Mayaca area fell significantly in February.

(Click on the pictures for larger versions.)

West Palm Beach, FL — As below-average rainfall causes water levels across Central and South Florida to continue declining, the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) Governing Board today took action to protect regional water supplies.

A water shortage warning approved by the Governing Board encourages residents and businesses throughout the District's 16-county region to voluntarily reduce water use. Under a separate water shortage order, specific permitted water users in the L-8 Basin of Palm Beach County are required to reduce withdrawals by 15 percent.

“With water levels falling and the peak of the dry season yet to come, we must take every prudent precaution,” said Tommy Strowd, SFWMD Deputy Executive Director of Operations and Maintenance. “Today’s actions are a step toward safeguarding the regional water supply against the effects of an already record-setting dry season. We are asking South Florida’s residents and businesses to do their part to help the region cope with extreme dry conditions by reducing their water use,” as they have done in the past.

The Governing Board action follows the driest October-to-February period since District recordkeeping began 80 years ago.

To protect water resources, conservation measures now in place include:

- Residents across Central and South Florida are being asked to increase water conservation efforts and continue following year-round landscape irrigation measures. Today's warning does not apply to indoor water use or car or boat washing.
- Because of significantly low water levels in the L-8 Canal, a 15 percent reduction in water withdrawals is in place for permitted water users, such as agriculture, improvement districts and water suppliers, within the L-8 Basin – which includes central and eastern Palm Beach County.
- A water shortage warning issued in November for the Lake Okeechobee Service Area, Lake Istokpoga and Indian Prairie Basin remains in place. The warning calls for permitted water users – mostly agricultural users – to reduce water use through voluntary limits.

The SFWMD will continue to monitor water levels to determine if additional steps need to be taken in the coming weeks.

Low Rainfall and Dry Conditions

District-wide rainfall for February registered 0.34 inches for a deficit of 1.93 inches, or only 15 percent of the historic average for the month. This is the third-driest February in the District's 16-county region since recordkeeping began in 1932.

None of the basins in the District received more than 29 percent of their historical average rainfall in February. The most severe deficits were in Broward and Miami-Dade counties and Water Conservation Area 3, where less than 6 percent of average rainfall was recorded.

February continued a dry trend that began with a record rainfall deficit in October, which signaled an early start to the 2010-2011 dry season along with moderate strength La Niña conditions. La Niña is a weather phenomenon that often generates below-average rainfall during the dry season.

From October through February, the District's 16-county region has received a total of 5.69 inches, less than half the average rainfall for that five-month period, or 6.46 inches below average. Eastern Palm Beach County has faced the biggest deficit during that period with a shortfall of 12.43 inches, or only 32 percent of its average rainfall.

Lake Okeechobee is currently at 11.92 feet above sea level – more than two feet below the historical average for this time of year – and is dropping rapidly. Rainfall in the first week of March provided a negligible reprieve. Without significant rainfall in the

coming weeks, lake levels are expected to dramatically decline as temperatures rise and evapotranspiration rates increase.

Water Conservation is Key

The South Florida Water Management District's Comprehensive Water Conservation Program was approved by the Governing Board in September 2008 to encourage more consistent use of water resources throughout South Florida. Numerous stakeholders worked with the District to define specific regulatory, voluntary, incentive-based education and marketing programs that will help foster a year-round conservation ethic. The program includes Year-Round Landscape Irrigation Conservation Measures that took effect in March 2010.

Links to information about irrigation limits by area, current conditions and water-savings tips are available at www.sfwmd.gov/waterwatch.

More information is available at:

- [SFWMD Weather/Rainfall Data](#)
- [National Weather Service Dry Season Forecast](#)
- [Climate Prediction Center FAQ on La Niña](#)
- [Climate Prediction Center Precipitation Forecast](#)

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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.