



# NEWS RELEASE

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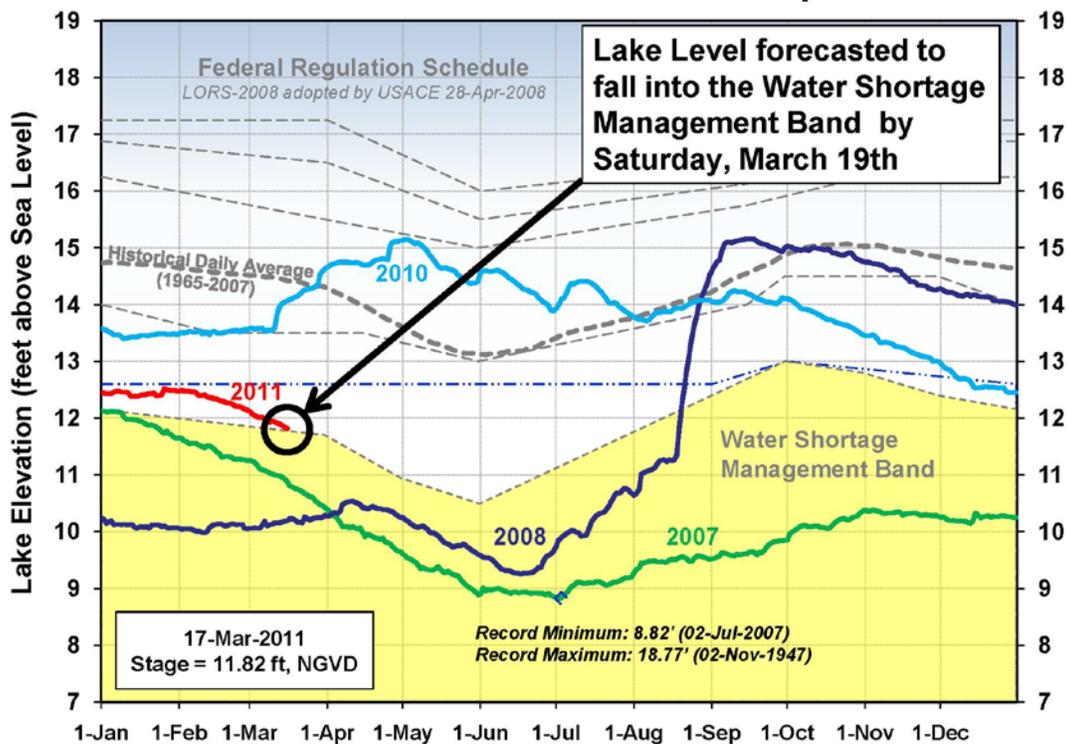
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## Lake Okeechobee Sliding Toward Water Shortage Zone *SFWMD preparing measures to protect water supply*

### Lake Okeechobee Water Level Comparison



(Click on the graphic for a larger version.)

**West Palm Beach, FL** – South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) water managers reported today that they expect the Lake Okeechobee water level to fall below its water shortage stage on Friday or Saturday. This means the agency will likely expand water restrictions in the coming days to protect water resources following one of the driest periods in 80 years.

“This record-setting dry season highlights the immense challenges in balancing the multiple needs of the environment, 7.5 million residents, businesses and agriculture across 16 counties,” said SFWMD Executive Director Carol Ann Wehle. “Our actions now are crucial to carry us through this water shortage.”

Water in Lake Okeechobee, the “liquid heart of Florida,” serves as South Florida’s backup water supply. At 11.82 feet NGVD on Thursday – and falling – the lake’s level is following a decline rate similar to 2007, when the lake reached its record low level of 8.82 feet NGVD. SFWMD meteorologists are forecasting a low chance for significant rain in the next seven days to recharge the system, and due to ongoing dry conditions, regional water levels continue to fall.

The District continues to monitor levels and will closely evaluate conditions into the weekend to determine what actions will be taken to protect regional water resources. These may include additional measures to reduce residential, golf course and agricultural irrigation. A water shortage warning is already in place across the 16-county region.

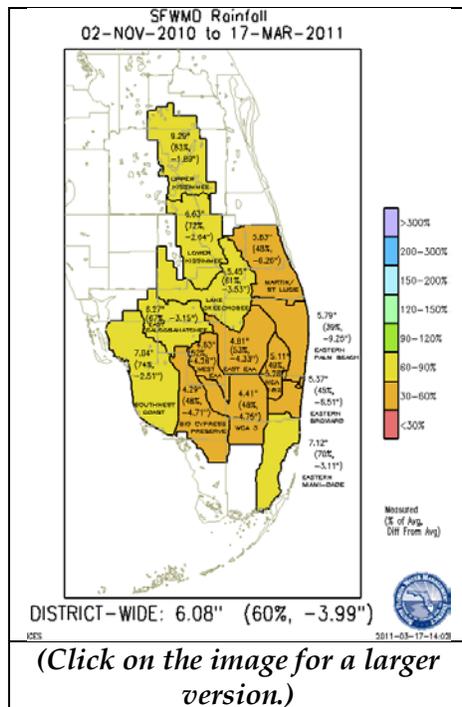


### Lake Okeechobee Fast Facts

- 730 square miles
- Lake watershed spans 10 counties, 5,400 square miles
- Largest lake in the southeastern U.S.
- Average depth is only 9 feet
- Important habitat for fish, wading birds, wildlife
- Provides flood protection
- Provides backup water supply
- Provides recreation

### Low Rainfall and Dry Conditions

District-wide rainfall for March has so far registered 0.94 inches for a deficit of 0.68 inches, or only 58 percent of the historic average for the month. This total included a rainfall event last week that, while helpful, was not enough to overcome an overall dry season deficit that stood at nearly 4 inches as of Thursday. The most severe deficits were in Martin, St. Lucie, Palm Beach, Broward and Miami-Dade counties along with the Water Conservation Areas.



March continues a dry trend that began with a record rainfall deficit in October 2010, 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 received a total of 5.69 inches, less than

half the average rainfall for that five-month period, or 6.54 inches below average. Eastern Palm Beach County faced the biggest deficit during that period with a shortfall of 12.53 inches, or only 32 percent of its average rainfall.

Lake Okeechobee is more than two feet below the historical average for this time of year. Lake levels are expected to dramatically decline as temperatures rise and evapotranspiration rates increase.

Links to information about year-round landscape irrigation limits, current conditions and water-savings tips are available at [www.sfwmd.gov/waterwatch](http://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.*