



SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

NEWS RELEASE

April 12, 2012

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Updated Leasing Policy Expands Access, Enhances Transparency *SFWMD agricultural leasing program supports essential land management functions*

West Palm Beach, FL — The South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) Governing Board today approved revisions to its existing policy that guides land leasing activities at the agency. The policy amendments enhance transparency and strengthen the agency's leasing program by increasing opportunities for agricultural operators and other businesses to lease District land and by clarifying conditions for public noticing and competition for leases.

Key highlights of the updated land leasing program, approved by the Governing Board, include:

- Competitive bidding with public noticing for all leases, unless the Governing Board approves a waiver of competition (no automatic renewals)
- Minimum bids established at an appraised market rent
- Annual rent adjustments based on standard economic indices
- For agricultural leases:
 - Maximum 10-year lease term; lessee may terminate after 5 years
 - District retains 6-month termination option
 - No automatic lease renewals
 - To transition existing tenants to the updated policy, current lessees in good standing (as of April 2012) may renew for up to 5 years, provided the overall term does not exceed the 10-year limit
 - When multiple competitive bids are received, existing tenants in good standing may exercise a first right of refusal, provided they submit a responsive and responsible bid during the competitive process and pay 10 percent above the highest responsive bid
- Third-party leases assumed by the District in a land acquisition terminate within 1 year of the date of closing; leases in place less than 6 months before a purchase and sale agreement terminate at closing

Benefits of Leasing Public Land

The District's lease program assists the agency in managing lands acquired for water management purposes or for ecosystem restoration prior to project implementation. In

addition, lease holders temporarily keep public lands in production, pay taxes and local assessments, control exotic vegetation and implement best management practices for nutrient management and other water quality improvements. Revenues generated by the leases are used to support land management activities throughout the District.

Currently, the District has more than 100 leases, totaling 129,011 acres, or 9 percent of fee total lands held by the District. Current leases for cattle total 73,214 acres; row crop leases cover 27,010 acres; citrus leases are on 23,323 acres; and 5,464 acres are leased for other uses, such as cell towers or parking facilities. These leases generate approximately \$4 million annually for land management purposes.

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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.