



SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

# NEWS RELEASE

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## **SFWMD, Lee County Partner to Improve Caloosahatchee Water Quality** *New Powell Creek Preserve Filter Marsh will help clean stormwater before it reaches the river*



*(Click on the image for a larger version.)*

**Fort Myers, FL** — Building on a shared commitment to improve water quality, the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) is partnering with Lee County to build a new wetland preserve to clean stormwater before it enters the Caloosahatchee River. The SFWMD Governing Board recently approved a \$300,000, one-year cost-share agreement with Lee County to design, construct and operate an 18-acre filter marsh on the 77-acre Powell Creek Preserve, a Conservation 2020 preserve.

“This new filter marsh is exactly the type of project that will provide important water quality benefits to the Caloosahatchee River,” said SFWMD Governing Board member Dan DeLisi. “Combined with other water quality projects and best management practices, the Powell Creek Preserve Filter Marsh furthers our joint effort with Lee County to protect this vital resource for the region.”

Situated in North Fort Myers, Powell Creek is a natural tributary of the Caloosahatchee River. The tributary watershed is home to a diversity of plant communities, including mesic flatwoods, slough, scrubby flatwoods, hydric hammock and depression marshes. Pop ash trees, buttonbush and Carolina willow are also common to the creek and its floodplain. The area provides habitat to a variety of native bird and animal species including threatened gopher tortoises.

The project involves construction of the 18-acre filter marsh located on disturbed portions of the preserve. Existing wetlands on the preserve were enhanced and incorporated in the site design. Once completed, water from the creek and associated canal will be diverted through the series of shallow and deep wetlands, allowing sediment to settle and plants to absorb nutrients that would otherwise flow to the Caloosahatchee. The water will then flow back into the creek and downstream to the river.

Benefits of the effort include:

- Improved water quality for the Caloosahatchee River;
- Increased water storage;
- Enhanced wildlife habitat;
- Additional recreational opportunities, including hiking and wildlife viewing.

The project is a part of the Caloosahatchee River Watershed Protection Plan. Developed by a variety of public and private interests, the watershed protection plan involves the evaluation of various alternatives using best available tools and scientific information to identify science-based and technologically feasible options for improving ecosystem health in the Caloosahatchee River.

To date, approximately \$31.4 million in State and SFWMD funds have been invested to implement protection plan activities and projects. In addition, \$100 million has been invested toward the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) Caloosahatchee River (C-43) West Basin Reservoir project. Moving forward, the Governing Board has committed \$19 million over the next five years for water storage and treatment within the Caloosahatchee watershed. Several projects are now under way.

The Powell Creek Preserve Filter Marsh builds on the longstanding partnership between the District and Lee County. In 2011, the SFWMD partnered with the county to restore Lakes Park to benefit water quality and natural systems in the Estero Bay watershed.

The ongoing project entails construction of 40 acres of filter marsh connecting the east lake to the west lake, resulting in a flow-way that reduces nutrients, improves oxygen content and enhances conditions for native wildlife.

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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.*