



SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

NEWS RELEASE

August 3, 2012

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SFWMD, FWC Expand Kissimmee River Recreation Area

Opening 60 acres to outdoor activities is the latest effort to provide access to public conservation lands



(Click on the map for a larger version or the Recreation Guide for an interactive listing of activities and locations.)

Okeechobee, FL – Outdoor enthusiasts have a newly expanded area for a variety of outdoor activities near the restored Kissimmee River as part of the South Florida Water Management District's (SFWMD) effort to expand public access for recreation on conservation lands.

Working with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), the District is adding an additional 60 acres to the expansive Kissimmee River Public Use Area. Hiking, hunting and wildlife viewing are among the activities allowed in the new section.

“One of the most inspiring locations to view successful restoration and a healthy ecosystem is along the Kissimmee River,” said SFWMD Governing Board Vice-Chairman Kevin Powers. “Opening more of these restored lands for compatible recreation provides an opportunity for the public to really get out and enjoy the natural South Florida landscape.”

Comprised of more than 30,000 acres, the Kissimmee River Public Use Area stretches along the Kissimmee River from State Road 60 south to Lake Okeechobee. Access is primarily by boat and is facilitated by a number of boat ramps within an area that spans portions of Glades, Highlands, Okeechobee, Osceola and Polk counties.

From camping and bike riding to hunting and horseback riding, the area offers a variety of outdoor experiences. A portion of the Florida Trail traverses the area, where hikers may see wildlife including white-tailed deer, alligators, wild turkeys, gopher tortoises and many species of wading birds. (Special-use licenses available from the District may be required for some activities, and FWC rules apply.)

This is the second time in recent years the District has worked with FWC to expand the Kissimmee River Public Use Area. In 2008, the SFWMD Governing Board passed a resolution requesting coordination with the FWC to add the 3,722-acre Chandler Slough to the public use area.

Inclusion of conservation lands into the public use area was inspired by the effort to restore the Kissimmee River, which once meandered for 103 miles through central Florida. The Kissimmee River Restoration Project will return flow to 40 miles of the river's historic channel and restore about 40 square miles of river/floodplain ecosystem. The restoration project – a 50-50 partnership with the District and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers – is projected to be complete by 2015.

Throughout South Florida, the District provides recreational access to its public lands while continuing to manage them to support environmental restoration, water supply, water quality and flood control missions. At present, the District owns 621,000 acres of land that are open to the public. Many of these properties are in their natural state or have enhancements such as picnic tables, informational kiosks, primitive campsites and hiking trails.

For more information on recreational opportunities throughout the District's 16-county region, visit www.sfwmd.gov/recreation.

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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.