



SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

## NEWS RELEASE

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### **Bird-Watching, Photography Tours Take Flight in Martin County** *SFWMD, Audubon of Martin County partner to feature wildlife, restoration*



*This bald eagle, brown pelican and osprey were spotted at the Lakeside Ranch restoration project.*

*(Click on the pictures for larger versions.)*

**West Palm Beach, FL** — The South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) is partnering with Audubon of Martin County to host birders and photographers on tours at a wetland that cleans water before it enters Lake Okeechobee.

The partnership expands on similar programs in Hendry and Palm Beach counties to offer bird watchers access to District wetlands where more than 200 different avian species have been spotted.

This Saturday, District and Audubon wildlife experts will lead the inaugural tour at the 2,600-acre Lakeside Ranch Stormwater Treatment Area (STA) in western Martin County. These wetlands are the water-cleaning workhorses of Everglades restoration, using aquatic plants to remove excess nutrients from water flowing into the natural system.

Each year, a vast array of bird species travel through South Florida and the District's network of STAs during the winter migration. Saturday's tour at Lakeside Ranch STA will feature:

- A guided drive around water impoundment areas
- Stops for viewing with scopes, plus information from tour leaders about the birds and their behaviors
- Possibility of sighting white pelicans, short-tailed hawks, burrowing owls and endangered Everglade snail kites
- Viewing of two established eagle nests

Birding tours at Lakeside Ranch STA are free and planned through April 2014. [Click here for the full schedule and sign-up information.](#)

### Bird Tour Partnerships

The District now supports three free, organized tour programs at its water-cleaning wetlands:

- **STA-5 (Hendry County)** – The District's first organized bird-watching program began in 2005 with a partnership with the Hendry-Glades Audubon Society. To date, Audubon volunteers, in coordination with the District, have served more than 5,100 bird watchers and photographers from across the globe on 135 individual tours at the site. [Click here for the current schedule.](#)
- **STA-1 East (Palm Beach County)** – In January 2012, the District partnered with the Audubon Society of the Everglades to host tours at STA-1 East in western Palm Beach County. To date, Audubon volunteers have hosted approximately 400 visitors on 20 tours. [Click here for the current schedule.](#)
- **Lakeside Ranch STA (Martin County)** – Beginning in this month, tours at the site will feature diverse wildlife for viewing and photography. A number of tours will be specifically designed each year for photographers. [Click here for the current schedule.](#)

### Lakeside Ranch STA

This treatment wetland uses aquatic vegetation to remove nutrients from stormwater runoff in the Taylor Creek/Nubbin Slough basins before it reaches Lake Okeechobee.

The District operates a network of five STAs south of Lake Okeechobee with an effective treatment area of 57,000 acres. Since 1994, the treatment areas have retained more than 1,707 metric tons of total phosphorus that would have otherwise entered the Everglades.



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

**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.*