



SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

NEWS RELEASE

October 10, 2013

MEDIA CONTACT:

Gabe Margasak

South Florida Water Management District

Office: (561) 682-2800 or Cellular: (561) 670-1245

www.sfwmd.gov/news

follow us on 

SFWMD Approves Acquisition to Restore Loxahatchee River Flows *Mecca Farms property provides a direct source of fresh water for the river*



(Click on the picture for a larger version.)

West Palm Beach, FL – The South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) today approved the acquisition from Palm Beach County of a key piece of property that will help provide vital freshwater flows to the federally designated “Wild and Scenic” Loxahatchee River.

Located on 1,800 acres west of the Beeline Highway, the Mecca Farms parcel will become a shallow-water storage area capable of sending water directly to the unique riverine ecosystem of mangroves, cypress trees, oysters and seagrasses teeming with life.

“Freshwater flows are the lifeblood of this extraordinary river,” said SFWMD Executive Director Blake Guillory. “By working with Palm Beach County, we have secured a long-term source of water that will help ensure the future health of the wild and scenic Loxahatchee.”

Significant components of the plan include:

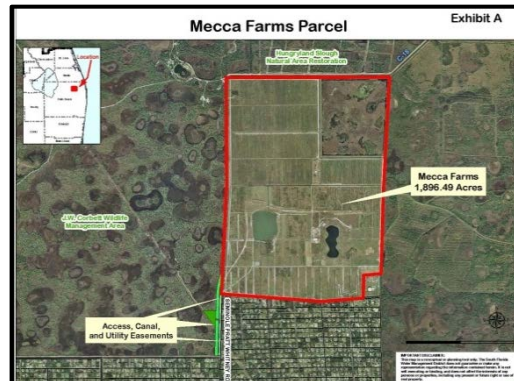
- A \$26 million investment from the Save Our Everglades Trust Fund for the District to purchase the property

- Conveyance of 150 acres of the property to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) for an Olympic-quality, state-owned shooting range to provide a public recreation benefit
- An option for the County to repurchase approximately 98.56 acres as needed for a new extension alignment of Seminole-Pratt & Whitney Road

Project Detail and Ecological Benefits

Following a closing on the property, the District will begin work to design and construct a system of pump stations to move water onto the site and earthen embankments capable of holding water up to 4 feet deep, providing 7,200 acre-feet of storage.

Control structures will allow for the gravity flow of water east through the C-18 Canal and into the Northwest Fork of the river.



(Click on the map for a larger version.)

This flow will provide significant environmental benefits, including:

- Supplementing water flow to the river during the dry season to meet its minimum flows and levels, which are defined as the minimum water levels and/or flows required to prevent significant harm to the water resources.
- Helping to prevent saltwater intrusion in the lower reaches of the Loxahatchee. This keeps mangroves from encroaching on the cypress slough portion of the river.
- Repurposing the L-8 Reservoir, originally slated to provide water for the Loxahatchee, to serve as a key component of the Governor's Restoration Strategies plan to improve water quality in the Everglades.

Loxahatchee History

On May 17, 1985, 7.6 miles of the Northwest Fork of the Loxahatchee River were designated as a national Wild and Scenic River. Under the National Wild and Scenic River Act of 1968, free-flowing rivers with outstanding scenic, recreational, fish and wildlife, historic and cultural values are designated for preservation for the enjoyment and benefit of present and future generations.

The Northwest Fork of the Loxahatchee River – from Riverbend Park in Jupiter downstream to Jonathan Dickinson State Park in Martin County – was the first river in Florida to receive such a designation.

Since 1985, the SFWMD has acquired more than 20,000 acres of land in the river corridor and tributary watersheds for preservation and restoration. Through the Loxahatchee River Preservation Initiative, numerous agencies and local governments have worked together on 65 habitat and water quality restoration projects, most of

which have been completed. Nearly \$18 million in legislative appropriations have been matched by more than \$23 million in local funds to accomplish this work.

#

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.