



SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

## NEWS RELEASE

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### **SFWMD Highlights Restoration Strategies, Flood Control in 2013**

**West Palm Beach, FL** – Progress on key projects to restore America’s Everglades – plus storing and moving water south from above-average summer rainfall – marked the highlights of 2013 for the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD). The agency oversees water resources for 7.9 million residents and an environment that spans 16 counties.

“A significant amount of mission critical work was completed in 2013, and 2014 is shaping up to be an even more productive year,” said SFWMD Executive Director Blake Guillory. “Our focus will be on completing projects while continuing to operate a fiscally responsible organization.”

#### **Improving Water Quality and Protecting Natural Systems**

Among the most significant achievements of 2013 was progress on the State’s Restoration Strategies plan for improving water quality in the Everglades. To date, 7 of 10 projects are underway to create more than 6,500 acres of new Stormwater Treatment Areas (STAs) and 116,000 acre-feet of additional water storage.

Significant progress has been made on plan components, including:

- Construction is underway on the 15 billion-gallon L-8 Reservoir in Palm Beach County. With enough water to fill 34,000 football fields one foot deep, the project will deliver consistent flows needed to optimize STAs that clean Everglades-bound water.
- A contract was approved to start construction on the A-1 Flow Equalization Basin south of Lake Okeechobee. With the capacity to hold 60,000 acre-feet of water, the project is designed to capture and store peak stormwater flows during the wet season or heavy rainfall events and deliver consistent flows to the STAs.
- A science plan has been completed, with nine key studies initiated.

Also in 2013, the District Governing Board voted to move forward the Central Everglades Planning Project (CEPP) by supporting the release of a draft report for public and agency review by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. This step signaled the

District's continued partnership with the Corps in developing plans for restoration projects that will direct more water south into the heart of the Everglades.

The Board 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. The Mecca parcel will become a shallow-water storage area capable of sending water directly to the Loxahatchee's unique riverine ecosystem of mangroves, cypress trees, oysters and seagrasses.

Scientific monitoring remains a key component of the District's restoration work. In 2013, the agency collected 38,113 water quality samples supporting 74 projects and studies and conducted 266,364 water quality data analyses.

### **Managing Water During a Record Wet Period**

Above-average rainfall from South Florida's 2013 wet season produced the wettest April-through-July period on record since 1932 and the wettest July since 2001. This greatly increased volumes of water during the summer, leading the District to implement emergency operations that moved a total of 311,428 acre-feet of water.

During the course of the entire year, District pump stations moved a combined 1.5 trillion gallons, or 4.6 million acre-feet of water in 2013.

Operations included:

- Relieving critically high water levels by deploying heavy equipment to excavate a flood control channel through the Old Tamiami Trail. The emergency project moved additional water south from Water Conservation Area 3 (WCA-3) in Miami-Dade and Broward counties, where months of above-average regional rainfall raised water levels and impacted wildlife such as deer.
- Approving a water farming pilot project in Martin County as part of the broad effort to restore and protect the St. Lucie River and Estuary. The project can capture an average of 6,780 acre-feet of water a year that would otherwise flow along the canal from Lake Okeechobee and surrounding basins into the estuary.

### **Ensuring Land Resources Meet Public Needs**

As part of a broad effort to maximize its resources, the District conducted a comprehensive assessment of land on which the agency has full or shared ownership rights. The transparent process included:

- Assessment of 750,000 acres
- 12 public workshops
- Nearly 1,500 comments from stakeholders

In 2014, the District will continue the assessment by reviewing acres for which the District has conservation and flowage easements.

## **Addressing Future Water Demands**

The District collaborated with its partners in the Central Florida Water Initiative (CFWI) to draft a Regional Water Supply Plan currently available for public review at [www.cfwewater.com](http://www.cfwewater.com).

The CFWI is a collaboration of the St. Johns River, South Florida and Southwest Florida water management districts to address near- and long-term water supply needs in Central Florida, where all three agencies have jurisdiction. This area includes Orange, Osceola, Polk, Seminole and southern Lake counties.

Other highlights of the year include:

- The 2013 Lower East Coast (LEC) Water Supply Plan Update was completed and approved by the Governing Board. The planning area includes Palm Beach, Broward and Miami-Dade counties and parts of Monroe, Collier and Hendry counties.
- Guided by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), rulemaking was completed on a new statewide Environmental Resource Permit process and fee schedule. The new rule standardizes processing procedures, definitions, forms and fees without lowering or changing environmental standards to protect surface waters and wetlands.
- Launched by DEP and all five water management districts, a new online water permitting portal now provides one-stop access to all water resource permitting information. The partner agencies have integrated existing online services with the portal, providing one place for residents and businesses to go to determine what permits may be needed and from which agency.

## **Recreational Access to Public Lands**

In a continuing effort to increase access to public lands, the District provided new recreational opportunities for outdoor enthusiasts on its 600,000 acres of land open to the public. Highlights in 2013 included:

- Hiking, biking wildlife viewing was expanded at the popular Stormwater Treatment Area 5/6 in Hendry County, including a new parking area, trailhead, restrooms and picnic shelter.
- With a complete overhaul to ensure decades of continued service, the S-193 Navigation Lock was reopened to boat traffic, providing access to Lake Okeechobee.
- A new season of SFWMD/ Audubon bird-watching tours took flight. To date, Audubon volunteers, in coordination with the District, have hosted thousands of bird watchers, including new tours at the Lakeside Ranch STA in Martin County.

For more information, see *Just the Facts*: [SFWMD 2013 Accomplishment Highlights](#).

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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.*