



SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

## NEWS RELEASE

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### **SFWMD to Repair Dams Along 'Wild and Scenic' Loxahatchee River** *Work will benefit the ecology of the river and improve recreational access*



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

**West Palm Beach, FL** — The South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) has begun preliminary work to repair dams along portions of the federally designated “Wild and Scenic” Northwest Fork of the Loxahatchee River. The dams help hold water at levels that benefit the diverse ecology of the river’s ecosystem.

“The District continues working to protect and restore the Loxahatchee River,” said SFWMD Executive Director Blake Guillory. “Last year’s purchase of the Mecca property for water storage, plus upgrades to these dams, will provide benefits to the river for many years to come.”

The Masten and Lainhart dams are small but essential features along the Wild and Scenic River. By holding back water and maintaining levels that benefit native plants and wildlife, the scenic river’s ecosystem can thrive. Along its floodplain are vegetation such as bald cypress and mangroves and wildlife such as alligators, turtles and otters.

Work will include resetting cypress logs that give the dams a natural look and repairs to the embankments to prevent water from flowing around the structures. Surveyors have

already begun marking trees with flags to identify their locations. This helps engineers plan and carry out the improvements in a way that protects the surrounding ecosystem.

Along with the repair work, the District will improve recreational access and safety at the canoe and kayak dockage at the dams.

Historically, canoeing has been the main recreational use of the Northwest Fork and its surrounding area. Other popular activities include kayaking, fishing, nature study, wildlife observation and photography.

### **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 Florida river to receive this designation.

Since 1985, the SFWMD has acquired more than 20,000 acres of land in the Loxahatchee River's 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.

In October 2013, the SFWMD Governing Board approved a \$26 million investment to acquire the 1,800-acre Mecca property from Palm Beach County. Located west of the Beeline Highway, the parcel will become a shallow-water storage area capable of sending water east through the C-18 canal and into the Northwest Fork of the river. Key objectives are to supplement flows during the dry season and help prevent saltwater intrusion into the lower reaches of the river.

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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.*