



SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

## NEWS RELEASE

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### **SFWMD Approves Investment in Indian River Lagoon National Estuary Program**

*Revised program will increase community participation, opportunities*

**West Palm Beach, FL** — With the goal of expanding opportunities and partnerships to restore and protect a unique Florida waterway, the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) Governing Board today approved a \$500,000 investment in the Indian River Lagoon National Estuary Program (IRL NEP).

Just two days ago, the St. Johns River Water Management District Governing Board also approved a \$500,000 investment in the program. These actions follow Governor Rick Scott's direction to the Florida Department of Environmental Protection to participate as well, by dedicating \$250,000 a year in funding for the IRL NEP effort.

"The Indian River Lagoon helps define the quality of life along a vast stretch of Florida's east coast, including Martin and St. Lucie counties," said SFWMD Governing Board Vice-Chair Kevin Powers, a long-time resident of Martin County. "We are proud to join Governor Rick Scott and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection in dedicating funds to protect this valuable resource."

SFWMD funding for the program comes a month after the Governing Board was briefed on proposed organizational changes designed to increase community participation and expand project opportunities. These enhancements include:

- Reigniting community engagement,
- Targeting the IRL for increased project funding at local, state and federal levels, and
- Highlighting the importance of the IRL through outreach and education.

The IRL NEP was established in 1990 through the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's designation of the IRL as an "estuary of national significance." The IRL NEP provides a non-regulatory, stakeholder-driven, collaborative approach to coastal watershed restoration and protection.

The IRL is a diverse, shallow-water estuary stretching across 40 percent of Florida's east coast from Ponce de Leon Inlet in Volusia County to the southern boundary of Martin County. The lagoon is a critical water body in the state and has experienced excess nutrient pollution in addition to excess freshwater flows for many decades. Widespread algal blooms appeared in the lagoon in 2011 followed by brown tide blooms in 2012 and 2013. Approximately 47,000 acres of seagrasses were lost, a reduction of about 60 percent of the lagoon's total seagrass coverage.

The lagoon supports a multitude of industries and activities, from fishing and recreation to tourism and agriculture. A study concluded that the economic benefits of the Indian River Lagoon totaled more than \$3.7 billion in 2007 alone and accounts for 15,000 jobs.

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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.*