



SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

# NEWS RELEASE

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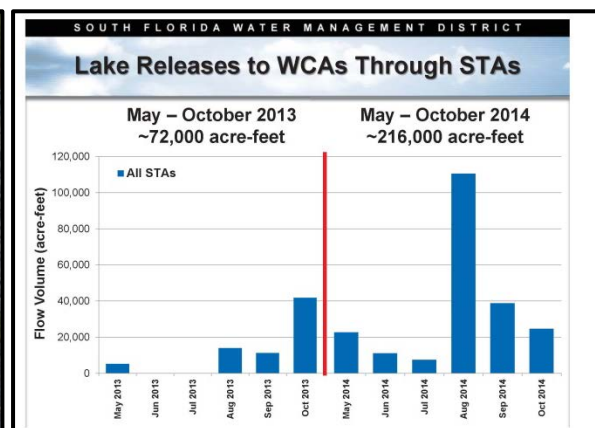
South Florida Water Management District

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## **SFWMD: Wet Season Operations Protected South Florida's Estuaries** *District water managers moved more than 70 billion gallons from Lake Okeechobee*



*Sending Lake Okeechobee water south when the lake is high and Water Conservation Areas are low has helped protect South Florida's east and west coast estuaries.*

**West Palm Beach, FL** — A new analysis of the 2014 rainy season shows that operations by the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) successfully moved south about a half foot of water depth off Lake Okeechobee, helping to prevent freshwater releases to South Florida's estuaries. The District used every operational tool practicable this summer while also taking advantage of favorable rainfall patterns across the 16-county region.

“Working within the constraints of a complicated system and variable rainfall, the District helped protect the fragile coastal estuaries this summer by moving a significant amount of water south of the lake,” said SFWMD Executive Director Blake Guillory. “Through sound science and engineering — plus exemplary collaboration — this work was accomplished while continuing to protect Everglades water quality.”

With water levels rising from wet season rainfall, District operations to move water south provided the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which manages the lake level, with increased flexibility to prevent releases to the St. Lucie Estuary. Operations also provided for water supply deliveries to the Caloosahatchee Estuary.

## Moving More Water

Several key factors allowed the District to move more water south during the 2014 wet season than in 2013, a year that saw large releases impact coastal estuaries. These included:

- Continued legislative funding for increased pumping and maintenance costs
- Suitable conditions and capacity in the Water Conservation Areas (WCAs)
- Available water-cleaning capacity in the Stormwater Treatment Areas (STAs), specifically STA-1 East, STA-1 West, STA-2 and STA-3/4
- Suitable conditions and canal levels within the Everglades Agricultural Area
- Close coordination with partners at the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

## How Water Moves South

Moving water south of the lake requires water managers at both the federal and state levels to balance a myriad of demands, challenges and complexities.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) is responsible for managing Lake Okeechobee water levels and makes operational decisions about whether to retain water or release water based on their regulation schedule release guidance (2008 LORS). The USACE decision takes into account the best available science and data provided by its staff and a variety of partners, which includes the SFWMD.

In accordance with the federal regulation schedule, and at the request of the Corps, the SFWMD is able to move water south out of the lake through four large water control structures into five major canals.

Water moves from these canals to various destinations: the Everglades Agricultural Area for water supply; to tide for flood control; and through water-cleaning Stormwater Treatment Areas (STAs) to the Everglades Water Conservation Areas for storage.

Direct rainfall and local stormwater runoff also add to these volumes of water.

## Maintaining Water Quality

A large quantity of water was moved through South Florida's Stormwater Treatment Areas, which use plants to remove excess phosphorus from Everglades-bound water. District scientists stepped up monitoring and assessment of the health of these engineered wetlands during the increase in water flow.

Efforts included additional water sample collection at 17 sites, enhanced monitoring of vegetation conditions and supplementary science team meetings. Even with highly variable inflows of phosphorus to the STAs, data show that STA performance did not appear to be negatively impacted by the additional fresh water from the lake.



*(Click the picture for larger version.)*

## Additional Benefits

Along with protecting the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee estuaries, moving additional water south netted some downstream and related benefits, including:

- Improved hydrology in the northwest portion of Water Conservation Area 3A in Broward County. This area had been historically over-drained, with a loss of muck and tree islands.
- Installation of new pumps allowed water to flow into the Holey Land Wildlife Management Area, a large natural tract adjacent to WCA 3A.
- Additional opportunities to learn from operations that moved the excess water south. This was aided, for example, by installation of water-depth sensors in STA-1 West to study impacts on emergent aquatic vegetation such as cattail.

## Public Information

In concert with a host of web tools that provide ecological, rainfall and water level data, the District is also launching a new operational “water tracker” map to tell the story of how much water SFWMD moves from Lake Okeechobee and where it goes each week starting with this year’s dry season.

Specifically, the new tracker displays pertinent information, including:

- Information, photos and weekly flow data from the four SFWMD structures that move water south from Lake Okeechobee
- Routes that water takes from the lake
- Color-coded map of storage capacity in the three Everglades Water Conservation Areas



*(Click picture to view water tracker.)*

## For More Information:

- Interactive “Moving Water South” map: [www.sfwmd.gov/movingwatersouth](http://www.sfwmd.gov/movingwatersouth)

## Words of Support for SFWMD’s 2014 Rainy Season Operations:

“The extensive collaboration and coordination this past year among the agencies has been excellent. It will play just as important a role as we continue to monitor and adjust system operations as needed in the coming year.”

*Thomas M. Greco  
Lieutenant Colonel, U.S. Army  
Deputy District Commander, South Florida  
Jacksonville District  
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers*

"The 2014 rainy season will go down in history as one of the most cooperative and effectively managed seasons in our state's history. Because of the unprecedented coordination among local, state and federal parties, our estuaries were preserved and South Florida is well positioned for the dry season before us. I commend the leadership of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the South Florida Water Management District and all of the state and local government representatives who worked together this season to ensure our success."

*Herschel T. Vinyard Jr.  
Secretary, Florida Department of Environmental Protection*

"As this year's wet season concludes, Martin County applauds the water operations of the South Florida Water Management District that moved more than 70 billion gallons of water south from Lake O this past wet season, which accounts for about a half foot of water depth off the lake. These measures helped prevent freshwater releases to the estuary that were so devastating a year earlier in the summer of 2013. We look forward to our continued dialogue with the SFWMD on options to reduce flows to the St. Lucie Estuary."

*Sarah Heard  
Chair, Martin County Board of County Commissioners*

"We were very pleased that the District, working together with the Corps, was able to move more than 6 inches of lake water south into the Everglades where it was needed, rather than to the estuaries where it would have compounded the impacts of excessive watershed runoff. We appreciate all of the efforts of the District and the Corps to move water south this year and look forward to increasing flows as new projects come online."

*Kevin Ruane  
Mayor, Sanibel*

"The SFWMD has responded to the calls for help from the citizens who suffered during last summer's crisis in our coastal estuaries. These are the types of innovations and short-term solutions that can help while we wait for restoration projects to be finished and operating."

*Jane Graham  
Everglades Policy Manager, Audubon Florida*

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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.*