



SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

NEWS RELEASE

December 11, 2014

MEDIA CONTACT:

Randy Smith

South Florida Water Management District

Office: (561) 682-2800 or Cellular: (561) 389-3386

www.sfwmd.gov/news

follow us on 

SFWMD Approves Major Expansion of Water Storage Program *New partnerships more than double the current storage capacity*

West Palm Beach, FL – In an ongoing effort to increase water storage to protect South Florida’s coastal estuaries and natural systems, the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) Governing Board today approved agreements that more than double the overall water retention capacity in its Dispersed Water Management program.

The approved contracts will add a total potential of 95,812 acre-feet of storage to the program, or about 36 billion gallons annually. This is the equivalent of 1.5 inches of water in Lake Okeechobee, a 730-square-mile lake at the heart of South Florida’s water management system. The program currently has a retention capacity of 93,342 acre-feet across 43 sites.

“Storing water on ranchlands has proven to be an effective tool in the District’s ongoing effort to protect the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee estuaries,” said SFWMD Governing Board Chairman Daniel O’Keefe. “Today’s action shows this agency’s commitment to the Dispersed Water Management Program, and we support its continued expansion to protect South Florida’s natural systems.”

In the largest storage contract, the District reached an agreement with Alico, Inc., on 35,192 acres of rangeland that will retain an annual average of 91,944 acre-feet of water from the Caloosahatchee River Watershed. This is an amount equal to approximately 34.5 billion gallons of water. This property also has the potential of sending water back into the Caloosahatchee River during the dry season.

Along with the Alico property in Hendry County, the District also signed separate agreements for water storage and nutrient removal:

- Rafter T, in Highlands County, for 1,298 acre-feet per year
- Babcock Property Holdings, at the border of Charlotte and Lee counties, for 1,214 acre-feet a year
- MacArthur Agro Research Center Component 1, in Glades County, for 620 acre-feet per year

- MacArthur Agro Research Center Component 2, in Glades County, for 1,567 pounds of phosphorus removal per year
- Adams and Russakis Ranch, at the border of St. Lucie and Okeechobee counties, for retention of 508 acre-feet per year
- Bull Hammock Ranch, at the border of Martin and St. Lucie counties, for 288 acre-feet per year

Dispersed Water Management Program

The District's Dispersed Water Management program encourages private property owners to retain water on their land rather than drain it or to accept and detain regional runoff for storage, or do both. Landowners typically join the program through cost-share cooperative projects, easements or payment for environmental services.

Since 2005, the District has been working with a coalition of agencies, environmental organizations, ranchers and researchers to enhance opportunities for storing excess surface water on private and public lands. These partnerships have made thousands of acre-feet of water retention and storage available throughout the greater Everglades system.

When water levels in South Florida are higher than normal during the annual rainy season, the District can utilize this storage while taking further actions to capture and store water throughout the regional water management system. Holding water on these lands is one tool to help reduce the amount of water flowing into Lake Okeechobee and/or discharged to the Caloosahatchee and St. Lucie estuaries during high water conditions.

Managing water on these lands is one tool to reduce the amount of water delivered into Lake Okeechobee during the wet season and discharged to coastal estuaries for flood protection. Dispersed water management offers many other environmental and economic benefits to the region, including:

- Providing valuable groundwater recharge for water supply
- Improving water quality and rehydration of drained systems
- Enhancing plant and wildlife habitat

#

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.