SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

NEWS RELEASE

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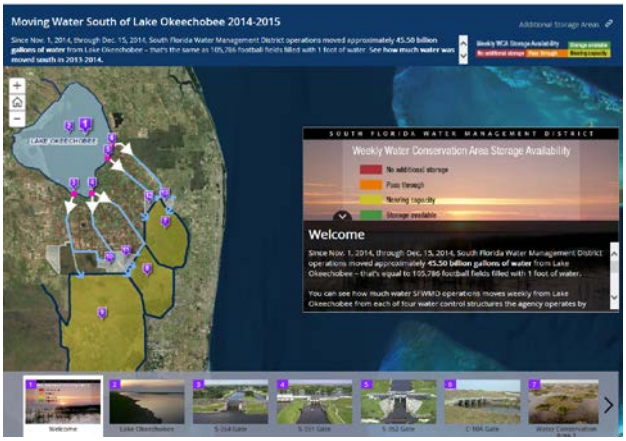
SFWMD Moving Water South to Help Position Lake Okeechobee Level

Increased chance of El Niño may mean above-average rainfall in months to come



Click on the map to see how much water is moving south.

West Palm Beach, FL — With an increased potential for above-average rainfall this winter, the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) is continuing to move water south to help achieve a desirable water level in Lake Okeechobee.

"The goal is to favorably position Lake Okeechobee's water level before the 2015 rainy season starts, balancing the needs of many water users while helping to protect the coastal estuaries next summer," said Jeff Kivett, SFWMD Division Director of Operations, Engineering and Construction. "With the likelihood of increased rainfall in the next few months, our enhanced operations are essential to this process."

The District's 16-county region averaged less than an inch of rain in December, which is historically one of South Florida's drier months. Lake levels, however, remain relatively high for this time of year. SFWMD operations successfully moved approximately 69.37 billion gallons of water from Lake Okeechobee in November and December. That's the same volume as 161,269 football fields filled with 1 foot of water.

How Water Moves South
The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) is responsible for managing Lake Okeechobee water levels based on their regulation schedule (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 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.

Advance Planning for the 2015 Rainy Season
The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Climate Prediction Center is forecasting an approximately 65 percent chance of El Niño conditions to be present through the spring of 2015. The warming of water in the equatorial Pacific tends to increase rainfall in South Florida.

If these rains arrive and the lake level remains high, SFWMD computer modeling has shown that sending water south through the canal system may not be sufficient to prepare for next summer's rainy season. This could leave the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers with less flexibility in releasing water from Lake Okeechobee.

Currently, the Corps is making regulatory releases only to the Caloosahatchee River and Estuary while making none to the St. Lucie Estuary. Water managers at the District and the Corps evaluate conditions on a weekly basis and more frequently as needed. The potential for increasing water flows out of the lake in the coming weeks will depend on rainfall, inflows to the lake and other conditions identified in the 2008 LORS regulation schedule.

Scientists at the District and partner agencies indicate that it is ecologically more beneficial to release small amounts of water over the winter, if needed, instead of large releases later in the spring. This is based on various environmental factors, including:

- Oysters are not yet spawning.
- Seagrass growing season has not begun.
- The St. Lucie Estuary is near the top end of the good range for salinity.

Public Information on SFWMD Water Management
In concert with a host of web-based tools that capture ecological, rainfall and water level data, the District provides an operational "water tracker" map to tell the story of

how much water SFWMD moves from Lake Okeechobee and where it goes. The map is updated weekly.

The online water tracker displays:

- 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

For More Information:

- Operational Planning documents & data: www.sfwmd.gov/opsreports
- Interactive "Moving Water South" map: www.sfwmd.gov/movingwatersouth

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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.