



SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

NEWS RELEASE

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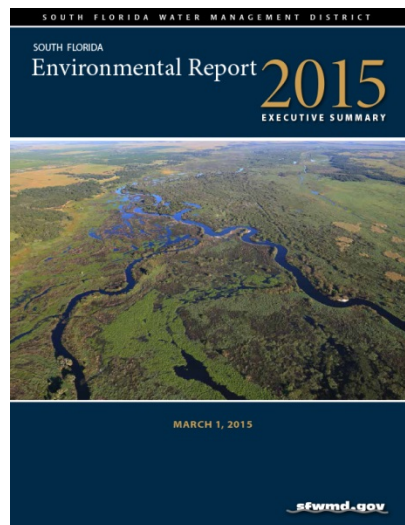
South Florida Water Management District

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**Annual Environmental Report Highlights Restoration Progress,
State of the South Florida Ecosystem**
Water quality improvements are among the 2015 highlights



On the Cover:

Kissimmee

Freshwater flows are essential to achieve restoration of about 44 meandering miles of the historic Kissimmee River and floodplain, plus more than two dozen lakes that support an array of fish and wildlife. Florida has invested nearly \$400 million in Kissimmee Basin restoration projects, including progress in 2014 on a water reservation to safeguard water to keep the ecosystem thriving.

West Palm Beach, FL – The Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) have released the [2015 South Florida Environmental Report](#) detailing a year of science, engineering and environmental restoration progress to improve the Everglades, Lake Okeechobee, the Kissimmee Basin and South Florida coastal areas. The 2015 report marks the 17th year of unified, streamlined environmental reporting by the two agencies.

“Under the leadership of Governor Rick Scott, the restoration of the Everglades and the greater South Florida ecosystem continues to be a major priority for the state of Florida,” said DEP Secretary Jon Steverson. “We are pleased to present this update on our progress over the last year, and look forward to working with Governor Scott and the Florida Legislature to focus on projects that will provide protection for the Everglades and South Florida’s estuaries.”

Spanning three volumes, the *2015 South Florida Environmental Report* unifies dozens of individual reports. The volumes, plus a 27-page executive summary, provide

extensive peer-reviewed research summaries, data analyses, financial updates and a searchable database of environmental projects.

“Project progress and measurable water quality improvements marked a highly productive year of restoration efforts,” said SFWMD Executive Director Blake Guillory. “The *2015 South Florida Environmental Report* extensively details these efforts and the path forward to sustain the momentum of project construction and the state’s Restoration Strategies initiative.”

Highlights in the 2015 report include:

- **Restoration Strategies initiative saw significant progress.** Massive flow equalization basins and associated features are beginning to take shape, and design plans are in development to expand stormwater treatment area capacity. The 57,000 acres of existing Everglades STAs treated more than 1.3 million acre-feet of water, reducing phosphorus loads by 81 percent.
- **Everglades water quality improved.** Within the extensive Everglades water quality monitoring network, this was the first year in which some of the stations previously identified as “impacted” transitioned to “unimpacted” status. A total of six stations successfully met the stringent phosphorus criterion for the change in designation based on both 5-year and annual compliance consistency.
- **Best Management Practices (BMPs) continued reducing nutrients.** Improved farming practices produced a 63-percent phosphorus reduction in the Everglades Agricultural Area when compared to baseline data, and farmers in the C-139 basin maintained nutrient discharges within allowable historic levels.
- **Kissimmee Basin restoration experienced milestones.** To provide water essential for the protection of fish and wildlife in the Kissimmee River, its vast floodplain and the Upper Chain of Lakes, in June 2014 the South Florida Water Management District authorized the next step in a public process to reserve water for the ecosystem. Rule development for the Water Reservation will bring together stakeholders to continue an ongoing public review of Kissimmee science and technical data, with the goal of adopting a final rule in 2015.
- **Water managers worked to move water south.** This reporting period reflects an above average rainfall year, marked by an aggressive start to the rainy season. In response, Lake Okeechobee rose more than two and a half feet during May, June and July 2013. Water managers, scientists and engineers from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, SFWMD, DEP and other agencies met weekly to discuss the state of the regional system and to develop operational recommendations to the Corps. Although inflows into Lake Okeechobee were above the historical average, outflows were also significantly higher. And while the east and west coast estuaries received the brunt of the freshwater discharges, extra efforts were made to move more water to the south.

These highlights and numerous other efforts featured in the *2015 South Florida Environmental Report* continue to provide the scientific foundation of agency programs

and projects that year after year are improving the entire South Florida region. The 2015 report covers environmental information for Water Year 2014 (May 1, 2013, through April 30, 2014) and project/budgetary information for Fiscal Year 2014 (October 1, 2013, through September 30, 2014).

The *2015 South Florida Environmental Report* is available to view or print at www.sfwmd.gov/sfer.

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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.