



SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

NEWS RELEASE

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MEDIA CONTACT:

Randy Smith

South Florida Water Management District

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

www.sfwmd.gov/news

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SFWMD Awards Contract for Corkscrew Ecosystem Restoration Project
Work will restore the hydrology and ecology in a vast environmentally sensitive area



The ecosystem is famous for its wildflowers. From left to right: marsh-pink, buttonbush, pickereelweed, horned bladderwort, marsh-pink, dayflower, airplant, catesbys lily.

Fort Myers, FL – The South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) today awarded a \$2.9 million construction contract for work that will restore the hydrology and ecology on more than 1,000 acres within the Southern Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed (CREW) Project.

The SFWMD and its partners – representing businesses, environmental groups, landowners and governmental agencies – manage the watershed for its numerous benefits to water storage and wildlife preservation. The 60,000-acre watershed spanning Lee and Collier counties includes a 5,000-acre marsh at its headwaters and the famous Audubon Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary.

“This project is the essence of restoration,” said SFWMD Governing Board member Rick Barber. “Taking out roads and plugging ditches will continue a transformation back to a more natural environment while also maintaining flood control by providing water storage for nearby residents.”

The contract covers a variety of restoration work, including:

- Degrading approximately 10 miles of roads
- Removing spoil piles
- Plugging or filling ditches and canal drainage systems no longer needed
- Degrading existing berms within the project area

CREW Background

Water once flowed freely across the pristine landscape of what is now Bonita Springs in Lee County. Historic water sheetflow in the Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed was later blocked by dirt roads, agricultural ditches and several home sites. This altered the ecosystem and contributed to flooding in residential and other areas.

Floods in 1995 led the SFWMD to develop the Southern CREW Restoration Project to restore the ecosystem while protecting area residents and properties.

With work spanning more than a decade, the SFWMD acquired approximately 4,000 acres for this project, cleared exotic vegetation from more than 2,500 acres, removed roads and plugged agricultural ditches on more than 600 acres. To date, the SFWMD and State have invested more than \$32 million to conserve the lands, with the U.S. Department of the Interior contributing another \$7 million to the restoration effort.

When completed, the restoration project will provide significant benefits to the Southwest Florida ecosystem, including:

- Restoring wetlands and the historic sheetflow of water
- Improving regional flood protection and drainage
- Increasing water storage and aquifer recharge capability

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The South Florida Water Management District is a regional governmental agency that manages the water resources in the southern part of the state. It is the oldest and largest of the state's five water management districts.

Our Mission is to manage and protect water resources of the region by balancing and improving flood control, water supply, water quality and natural systems.