



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

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### **Annual Report Highlights Everglades Water Quality Improvement, State of the South Florida Ecosystem** *Construction progress, managing excess rainfall are among the 2016 highlights*



**On the Cover: Pine Lake in  
Everglades National Park**

This "River of Grass" is a mosaic of sawgrass marshes, freshwater ponds, prairies and forested uplands that supports a rich plant and wildlife community. Renowned for its wading birds and wildlife, the Everglades is home to dozens of federally threatened and endangered species, including the Florida panther, crocodile, snail kite and wood stork. (Click on the photo to view the report.)

**West Palm Beach, FL** — The South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) this week released the [2016 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 2016 report marks the 18<sup>th</sup> year of unified, streamlined environmental reporting by the two agencies.

“Water in the Everglades is cleaner today than it has been in our lifetimes,” said SFWMD Governing Board Chairman Daniel O’Keefe. “The *2016 South Florida Environmental Report* takes the public through restoration work that helped accomplish this goal, and it details the plans to continue making progress to improve South Florida’s environment.”

The 2016 report was released as the SFWMD is implementing several unprecedented actions to move water and provide flooding relief from record South Florida dry-season rainfall. These actions will be captured in next year’s report.

Spanning three volumes, the *2016 South Florida Environmental Report* unifies dozens of individual reports. The volumes, plus an 8-page summary and highlights, provide extensive peer-reviewed research summaries, data analyses, financial updates and a searchable database of environmental projects.

Highlights in the 2016 report include:

- **Everglades water quality continues to show signs of improvement.** In 2015, overall, 90 percent of the Everglades is at or below 10 parts per billion of phosphorus.
- **Over their 21-year operational period, Everglades Stormwater Treatment Areas have treated more than 16 million acre-feet of water and have retained approximately 2,000 metric tons of total phosphorus (TP).** In Water Year 2015, with 57,000 acres of treatment area, the STAs treated 1.4 million acre-feet of water. They reduced both inflow TP load and concentration by 83 percent, and prevented 138 metric tons of TP from entering the Everglades Protection Area.
- **Best management practices (BMPs) continue to reduce nutrients.** BMPs implemented under the SFWMD's regulatory source control program reduced TP in agricultural runoff from 470,000 acres south of Lake Okeechobee by 79 percent in Water Year 2015, three times the amount required by state law. Source reductions through BMPs lessen the amount that must be captured in downstream STAs and improves the cost-effectiveness of capital projects to further decrease total phosphorus levels. The regulatory BMP program and Everglades STAs have prevented more than 4,860 metric tons of total phosphorus from entering the Everglades Protection Area since 1996.
- **Implementation of the Governor's Restoration Strategies initiative advanced in Water Year 2015.** Work is proceeding on two of three massive flow equalization basins (FEBs), which will provide 105,000 acre-feet of additional water storage and are designed to attenuate peak stormwater flows prior to delivery to the Everglades STAs. Construction has started on several conveyance improvement features, as well as the first phase of expansion to STA-1 West.
  - A-1 Flow Equalization Basin (a 60,000 acre-foot shallow storage impoundment west of U.S. Highway 27 in southern Palm Beach County) construction was completed in November 2015 (roughly one year ahead of its deadline), and operations have commenced.
  - L-8 Flow Equalization Basin (a 45,000 acre-foot deep storage impoundment in Palm Beach County near Wellington) is completing construction and is now in operational testing.
  - STA-1 West Expansion #1 (an additional 4,200 acres of treatment area in Palm Beach County near Wellington) design was completed in June 2015, and construction began in November 2015.
  - Conveyance improvements (modifications to Structure S-5AS and construction of the new L-8 Divide Structure in Palm Beach County) are ongoing, with completion dates of September 2016 and September 2018, respectively.

- Mecca Shallow Impoundment in Palm Beach County is in design.
- **Water managers moved excess water southward.** In Water Year 2015, an uneven distribution of rainfall across the region left the Everglades STAs with available treatment capacity, and a concerted effort was made to send regulatory lake releases south from Lake Okeechobee. During that time period, roughly 585,000 acre-feet of water from the lake was released to the Everglades STAs. Importantly, this unprecedented amount — 43 percent of total annual flow to the STAs — helped manage lake levels and reduce freshwater discharges to the Caloosahatchee and St. Lucie estuaries. Efforts are underway to evaluate the effects of this management action on STA conditions and long-term performance.

These highlights and numerous other efforts featured in the **2016 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 2016 report covers environmental information for Water Year 2015 (May 1, 2014, through April 30, 2015) and project/budgetary information for Fiscal Year 2014-2015 (October 1, 2014, through September 30, 2015).

The **2016 South Florida Environmental Report** is available to view or print at [www.sfwmd.gov/sfer](http://www.sfwmd.gov/sfer).

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*The South Florida Water Management District is a regional governmental agency that manages 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 protect South Florida's water resources by balancing and improving flood control, water supply, water quality and natural systems.*