



SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

## NEWS RELEASE

December 8, 2008

**CONTACT:**

**Bill Graf**

SFWMD, Orlando Service Center

Office: (407) 858-6100, ext. 3837 or Cellular: (407) 908-4764

### **Meetings Set to Protect Kissimmee River Flows**

*SFWMD Board authorized rulemaking to set aside water for restoration first*

**Kissimmee, FL** – As part of a multi-year effort to identify how much water needs to be set aside to protect the Kissimmee Basin environment, a series of meetings has been scheduled to gather information and input from interested residents and businesses.

The first meeting is set for 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Thursday, December 11, at the Osceola County Board of County Commissioners meeting chambers, 1 Courthouse Square, Kissimmee.

Florida law allows for the creation of water reservations, rules that set aside water for protection of fish and wildlife or public health and safety. The South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) Governing Board agreed in June to initiate the rulemaking process as a way to reserve water needed for environmental protection of the Kissimmee River. The reservation is part of the \$620 million plan to restore more than 27,000 acres of wetlands along the Central Florida waterway.

Water is the lifeblood that makes the Kissimmee River Valley home to more than 300 fish and wildlife species.

As Central Florida and its demand for public water supply grows, the water reservation is a necessary tool for protecting the Kissimmee and other surface water systems. Based in sound science, a reservation defines a specific amount of water to set aside for protection of fish and wildlife and ensures that the environment receives the water it needs before more is allocated to other users. A reservation can be revised to fit changing conditions.

To assure that this reservation was developed as accurately as possible, scientific and technical data, methodologies and models have and will receive

independent scientific peer review at various stages throughout this effort. Along with the public rule development process, the reservation will undergo additional Governing Board consideration before it can be adopted.

The Kissimmee River Restoration is restoring miles of river and flood plain impacted by channelization in the 1960s. The SFWMD has invested more than \$300 million to purchase 105,000 acres needed for the restoration. So far, about 10 miles of the C-38 Canal have been backfilled, restoring flow to 19 miles of the historic Kissimmee River and significantly expanding its floodplain. A third phase of restoration construction underway now will backfill about four miles of the channelized Kissimmee River, also known as the C-38 Canal. The latest phase of the project will restore flow to about eight miles of the historic meandering of the river.

Several species of plants and animals, such as the ring-necked duck, American avocet and black-necked stilt, have returned to the Kissimmee after being absent for more than 40 years. When work is completed in 2012, more than 40 square miles of the river/floodplain ecosystem will be restored, including 43 miles of meandering river channel and 27,000 acres of wetlands. The reservation ensures that progress already made in restoring the Kissimmee River floodplain ecosystem will not be compromised.

###

#### **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.*