

Questions and Answers

SFWMD Land Assessment Process

Why does the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) need land?

Land is a key component in providing regional flood protection as well as in restoring and sustaining ecosystems from central Florida to the Florida Keys. Water stored on land also seeps into groundwater aquifers, replenishing our drinking water supply. Throughout its six-decade history, the SFWMD has acquired and managed lands for distinct and diverse purposes, including: to build and operate flood control infrastructure and provide for associated system maintenance; to conserve and preserve natural floodplains and environmentally sensitive areas; and to construct large-scale water quality improvement and natural systems restoration projects to restore impaired ecosystems.

How much land does the SFWMD own?

Since its creation in 1949, the District has received or acquired real estate interest in nearly [1.5 million acres](#) of land within its 16-county jurisdiction. Of this total, approximately 750,000 acres are fee-owned, meaning the agency has full or shared ownership rights. The remaining acreage was acquired as non-fee conservation and flowage easements.

Why is the SFWMD assessing its public lands?

As part of a broader effort to review and continually improve its business, administration and operational practices, the SFWMD is conducting a comprehensive land assessment to ensure that each parcel is being put to its most effective use for South Florida's taxpayers. The comprehensive land resources assessment is similar to efforts by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection and the state's four other water management districts.

How will the SFWMD assess its public lands?

Aided by an extensive land inventory database, the SFWMD will thoroughly analyze its publicly owned lands to determine how each parcel's current and potential alternative uses contribute to the agency's core mission of balancing and improving water quality, flood control, natural systems and water supply. Internal and external input will be solicited as part of the review process. Now under way, the first phase of the SFWMD land assessment is a review of fee-owned lands – approximately [750,000 acres](#).

Is this land assessment really a land surplusing process?

No. The land assessment is a self-evaluation tool to study how SFWMD public lands are currently being used. While the assessment process may result in some properties being considered for alternative uses or possible surplus, the ultimate goal is to ensure that all SFWMD lands are supporting the agency's core mission to the greatest extent possible. (See [below](#) for more details on potential outcomes of the land assessment process.)

What criteria will the SFWMD use to analyze its lands?

The District is utilizing a variety of criteria to evaluate its lands, including:

- Analyzing statewide and SFWMD-specific geographic information system (GIS) mapping layers to identify each parcel's environmental value and its value related to water resource management
- Examining the intended uses of the parcels when they were acquired
- Soliciting input from SFWMD subject matter experts with direct knowledge of individual lands
- Receiving [feedback and recommendations](#) from stakeholders, nearby landowners, local governments and members of the public

What lands will be evaluated first?

For the land assessment process, the SFWMD's 16-county jurisdiction has been divided into [five geographic regions](#). Fee-owned lands within the Upper Lakes Assessment Region will be assessed first. The remaining assessment regions will be evaluated in this order: Kissimmee/Okeechobee, East Coast, West Coast and Everglades.

Will the public have an opportunity to participate in the process?

The SFWMD is committed to ensuring the land assessment is transparent and the process includes multiple opportunities for public involvement. The public can [review detailed regional portfolios](#) and submit comments on specific properties using [an online form](#) during a 30-day comment period for each region. Regional public meetings will also be held to gather public input on the assessment process and specific parcels. In addition, the Governing Board's [Water Resources Advisory Commission](#) (WRAC), its Projects and Lands Committee and the full Governing Board will receive periodic updates on the process, including opportunities for public comment.

What will be included in the regional land portfolios?

The first step of the assessment process is the development of detailed land resources portfolios by region. Each portfolio will contain factual data on each major project area within the region such as size, location, acquisition date and funding source(s), intended purpose, land use to-date, water resource and ecological characteristics, public access/recreation, maps, photos and any issues of concern. As appropriate, the portfolio will also drill down to the unit and/or parcel-level on some properties that merit a distinct analysis.

Why are recommendations for each property not included in the regional land portfolios?

Before making any recommendations on specific properties, SFWMD staff is seeking as much input as possible on all of its fee-owned lands from members of the public, stakeholders and internal subject matter experts. Recommendations incorporating this input will be made at a [later step](#) in the land assessment process for each region.

How long is the online public comment period?

As each regional portfolio is completed, it will be posted on the SFWMD's dedicated webpage (www.sfwmd.gov/landassessment) to simultaneously solicit internal (subject matter experts) and external comments and feedback. The open comment period is approximately 30 days per region. An online form will allow direct input on

the projects, units and parcels presented in each portfolio. Comments are specifically requested regarding current use of the land as it relates to the water management core mission and suggestions for future use. At the close of the comment period, all suggestions and concerns received will be compiled and posted on the webpage.

What is the next step in the land assessment process?

Based on the detailed portfolio evaluations, internal subject matter input and external public comments, SFWMD land managers will develop appropriate recommendations and proposals regarding the identified properties within each region. For each region, the public will be able to submit comments on draft recommendations using [an online form](#), and a second round of public workshops will be held to gather further public input. The draft recommendations will also be presented to the WRAC, the Project and Lands Committee and the full Governing Board for discussion and consideration, including opportunities for public comment. Meeting agendas are posted online in advance at www.sfwmd.gov.

What are the potential outcomes of this land assessment process?

The water resource benefits and documented uses of some lands may stay the same, while temporary or permanent changes may be recommended for others.

Current land uses will remain in place for parcels that are determined to contribute fully to the agency's core mission. To provide optimal taxpayer value, lands that do not directly support the core mission may be considered for alternative uses or recommended for possible surplus. Alternative uses may include a temporary change in land use until a property can fully contribute to the core mission or a permanent change in land use that could potentially fit better with the core mission than the original intended use. The [surplus process](#) may result in lands being swapped for more needed properties or offered for public bid to raise revenue that could support ecosystem restoration projects, which may include acquisition of additional lands.

Are properties in which the SFWMD shares ownership with another entity being assessed in this process?

Yes. If the District determines through the assessment that a jointly owned property could better support the core mission by modifying its existing use, the SFWMD would coordinate with the partnering local government, agency or organization to seek cooperative efforts to that end.

What about existing land parcels already identified as surplus?

Prior to this comprehensive assessment, the SFWMD had a surplus lands program in place, which periodically identified properties no longer needed for mission-related projects. The sale or exchange of those particular lands is on hold, and reassessment of the properties will be included in the development of the regional portfolios and public comment process.

What about existing land leases? Will they be affected by this assessment process?

This comprehensive assessment includes fee-owned public lands with current lease agreements. Leaseholders will be provided adequate notice if and/or when any potential land changes are recommended or approved.

**What about SFWMD rights-of-way along regional canals and levees?
Will permit holders be affected by this assessment process?**

District rights-of-way are excluded from this particular land assessment process.

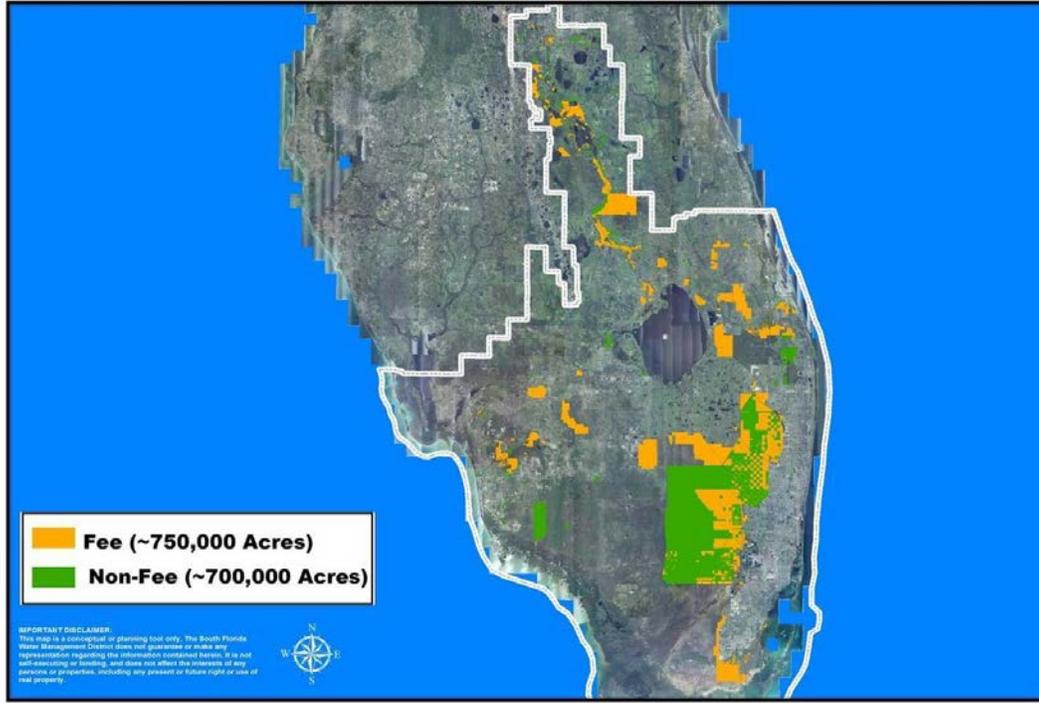
What is the planned schedule to complete the land assessments?

Results from the first region are scheduled for presentation to the Governing Board in April 2013, with the entire fee-owned lands assessment process scheduled for completion by September 2013. A review of non-fee-owned lands is planned to begin in late 2013. Reassessments of District lands will be conducted as needed, likely every 3 to 5 years.

Where can I find more information?

Please visit the SFWMD website, where a designated webpage was created for the Land Assessment Process: www.sfwmd.gov/landassessment

SFWMD Ownership



Geographic Regions for SFWMD Land Assessment

