

December 2013

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## Chairman's Message

**Daniel O'Keefe, Governing Board Chairman**



As the calendar year comes to a close, the Governing Board has continued pressing forward with projects to manage water resources across South Florida's 16 counties. Without question, 2013 was a busy and productive year.

One of our most significant achievements is progress in implementing Restoration Strategies for improving Everglades water quality, with seven of the ten projects now underway. A key component of this effort are three flow equalization basins, which will help reduce nutrients by improving the timing of water flowing into our stormwater treatment areas. Construction is underway on the L-8 Flow Equalization Basin, and we look forward to breaking ground on the A-1 Flow Equalization Basin in January.

Even without a named storm this year, South Florida had an extremely busy wet season that prompted the agency to take emergency actions. In addition to extensive operational adjustments, the District excavated a flood control channel through the Old Tamiami Trail, worked with local drainage districts and private landowners to retain excess water and stored water on fallow citrus lands via the first water farming project. Together, these efforts helped move excess water south and reduced negative impacts to the Caloosahatchee and St. Lucie estuaries.

Another significant accomplishment this year involved the comprehensive analysis of District lands to ensure they are being used for the core goals of flood protection and ecosystem restoration. In 2013, the District formally assessed 750,000 acres of land for which the agency has full or shared ownership rights. This was done in a transparent process that included 12 public workshops and garnered nearly 1,500 comments from stakeholders.

Other important work in 2013 included completing upgrades to the East Coast Protective Levee for flood control along the east coast and working with partners to complete draft reports for the Central Everglades Planning Project and the Central Florida Water Initiative water supply plan.

We also welcomed a new executive director, Blake Guillory, to the District in 2013. Blake leads an executive team that is dedicated to carrying out the Board's priorities and to efficiently managing South Florida's water resources. I look forward to our continued success and progress in 2014. Happy Holidays!

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## SFWMD Highlights Restoration Strategies, Flood Control in 2013

Progress on key projects to restore America's Everglades — plus storing and moving water south from above-average summer rainfall — marked the highlights of 2013 for the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD). The agency oversees water resources for 7.9 million residents and an environment that spans 16 counties.

"A significant amount of mission critical work was completed in 2013, and 2014 is shaping up to be an even more productive year," said SFWMD Executive Director Blake Guillory. "Our focus will be on completing projects while continuing to operate a fiscally responsible organization."

### **Improving Water Quality and Protecting Natural Systems**

Among the most significant achievements of 2013 was progress on the State's Restoration



Strategies plan for improving water quality in the Everglades. To date, 7 of 10 projects are underway to create more than 6,500 acres of new Stormwater Treatment Areas (STAs) and 116,000 acre-feet of additional water storage.

Significant progress has been made on plan components, including:

- Construction is underway on the 15 billion-gallon L-8 Reservoir in Palm Beach County. With enough water to fill 34,000 football fields one foot deep, the project will deliver consistent flows needed to optimize STAs that clean Everglades-bound water.
- A contract was approved to start construction on the A-1 Flow Equalization Basin south of Lake Okeechobee. With the capacity to hold 60,000 acre-feet of water, the project is designed to capture and store peak stormwater flows during the wet season or heavy rainfall events and deliver consistent flows to the STAs.
- A science plan has been completed, with nine key studies initiated.

Also in 2013, the District Governing Board voted to move forward the Central Everglades Planning Project (CEPP) by supporting the release of a draft report for public and agency review by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. This step signals the District's continued partnership with the Corps in developing plans for restoration projects that will direct more water south into the heart of the Everglades.

The Board approved the acquisition from Palm Beach County of a key piece of property that will help provide vital freshwater flows to the federally designated "Wild and Scenic" Loxahatchee River. The Mecca parcel will become a shallow-water storage area capable of sending water directly to the Loxahatchee's unique riverine ecosystem of mangroves, cypress trees, oysters and seagrasses.

Scientific monitoring remains a key component of the District's restoration work. In 2013, the agency collected 38,113 water quality samples supporting 74 projects and studies and conducted 266,364 water quality data analyses.

### **Managing Water During a Record Wet Period**

Above-average rainfall from South Florida's 2013 wet season produced the wettest April-through-July period on record since 1932 and the wettest July since 2001. This greatly increased volumes of water during the summer, leading the District to implement emergency operations that moved a total of 311,428 acre-feet of water.

During the course of the entire year, District pump stations moved a combined 1.5 trillion gallons, or 4.6 million acre-feet of water in 2013.

Operations included:

- Relieving critically high water levels by deploying heavy equipment to excavate a flood control channel through the Old Tamiami Trail. The emergency project moved additional water south from Water Conservation Area 3 (WCA-3) in Miami-Dade and Broward counties, where months of above-average regional rainfall raised water levels and impacted wildlife such as deer.
- Approving a water farming pilot project in Martin County as part of the broad effort to restore and protect the St. Lucie River and Estuary. The project can capture an average of 6,780 acre-feet of water a year that would otherwise flow along the canal from Lake Okeechobee and surrounding basins into estuary.

### **Ensuring Land Resources Meet Public Needs**

As part of a broad effort to maximize its resources, the District conducted a comprehensive assessment of land on which the agency has full or shared ownership rights. The transparent process included:

- Assessment of 750,000 acres
- 12 public workshops
- Nearly 1,500 comments from stakeholders

In 2014, the District will continue the assessment by reviewing acres for which the District has conservation and flowage easements.

### Addressing Future Water Demands

The District collaborated with its partners in the Central Florida Water Initiative (CFWI) to draft a Regional Water Supply Plan currently available for public review at [www.cfwewater.com](http://www.cfwewater.com).

The CFWI is a collaboration of the St. Johns River, South Florida and Southwest Florida water management districts to address near- and long-term water supply needs in Central Florida, where all three agencies have jurisdiction. This area includes Orange, Osceola, Polk, Seminole and southern Lake counties.

Other highlights of the year include:

- The 2013 Lower East Coast (LEC) Water Supply Plan Update was completed and approved by the Governing Board. The planning area includes Palm Beach, Broward and Miami-Dade counties and parts of Monroe, Collier and Hendry counties.
- Guided by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), rulemaking was completed on a new statewide Environmental Resource Permit process and fee schedule. The new rule standardizes processing procedures, definitions, forms and fees without lowering or changing environmental standards to protect surface waters and wetlands.
- Launched by DEP and all five water management districts, a new online water permitting portal now provides one-stop access to all water resource permitting information. The partner agencies have integrated existing online services with the portal, providing one place for residents and businesses to go to determine what permits may be needed and from which agency.

### Recreational Access to Public Lands

In a continuing effort to increase access to public lands, the District provided new recreational opportunities for outdoor enthusiasts on its 600,000 acres of land open to the public. Highlights in 2013 included:

- Expanded hiking, biking wildlife viewing at the popular Stormwater Treatment Area 5/6 in Hendry County, including a new parking area, trailhead, restrooms and picnic shelter
- With a complete overhaul to ensure decades of continued service, the S-193 Navigation Lock was reopened to boat traffic, providing access to Lake Okeechobee.
- A new season of SFWMD/Audubon bird-watching tours. To date, Audubon volunteers, in coordination with the District, have hosted thousands of bird watchers, including new tours at the Lakeside Ranch STA in Martin County.

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## DEP: New Water Permitting Portal Provides One-Stop Access to All Water Resource Permitting Information

### Access and education key to helping Florida residents and businesses



The Florida Department of Environmental Protection, along with the state's five water management districts, recently launched [Florida's Water Permitting Portal](#). This portal provides information about all water resource permitting in Florida in one place. The agencies have integrated existing online services with the portal, providing one place for residents and businesses to go to determine what permits may be needed and from which agency. The website will continue to add new features to enhance and simplify online access and make the work more transparent.

Governor Rick Scott said, "Our number one priority is growing more jobs and opportunities for Florida families, and DEP's portal will help streamline the permitting process for businesses so we can create more jobs and be better stewards of our natural resources."

This new online system is an open door for residents, local governments and the private sector to find information and assistance from the Department and water management districts. The water permitting portal enables users to apply for commonly issued authorizations, permits, certifications and renewals; pay fees; and submit monitoring reports and other compliance documentation. It's also a great place to get information about compliance and other water program information.

"The Department of Environmental Protection and the water management districts are focused on creating an effective regulatory process for all Florida citizens," said DEP Secretary Herschel T. Vinyard Jr. "Educating Floridians on the regulatory process is key to the success of these efforts."

The portal allows visitors to electronically apply for permits and other authorizations including:

- Environmental Resource Permits (and authorizations to use state-owned submerged lands, where applicable)
- Consumptive and Water Use Permits
- Well Construction Permits
- Works of the District Permits

"By helping Florida's businesses and residents understand when and how to apply for permits, the Water Permitting Portal serves as a great tool for continually providing excellent customer service — which is an important priority of the District," said Jon Steverson, Executive Director of the Northwest Florida Water Management District. "Through our continued focus on improving service and efficiencies, the District has reduced our processing time by more than 40 percent for consumptive use and 80 percent for environmental resource permits over the last two years."

"The website provides easy format for the public to determine basic permitting information," said Ann Shortelle, Executive Director of the Suwannee River Water Management District. "This website is very helpful and allows anyone with a computer to search a single website for consumptive use and environmental resource permit information."

"Online access to permitting provides an important benefit to citizens looking to manage different types of applications from the comfort of their business or home," said Robert Beltran, Executive Director for the Southwest Florida Water Management District. "It's important to provide citizens efficient and effective access to these services to make it easier for the public to interact with water management districts."

"The statewide e-permitting site makes accessing water resources permitting information far more convenient for the public," said Hans Tanzler III, Executive Director of the St. Johns River Water Management District. "This is one more step in our work to add transparency to our permits and data."

"The new permitting portal exemplifies our shared focus on excellent customer service," said Blake Guillory, Executive Director of the South Florida Water Management District. "It also supports the significant progress we've made in achieving statewide consistencies in the entire regulatory process. The process recognizes regional technical differences while streamlining and simplifying the administrative application and process."

This new service is provided in keeping with efforts to conduct more paperless business. Applicants are able to apply for permits by submitting the application and associated materials online instead of having to submit paper copies to the Department. This will save time and money for applicants as well as staff. In addition to eliminating the cost of printing and mailing permit application documents, application fees for online submittals are reduced, and are entirely eliminated for self-certifications.

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## SFWMD Expands Recreation at Everglades Water-Cleaning Wetland

### *Hiking, biking and wildlife viewing are popular attractions at Hendry County site*



In a continuing effort to increase access to public lands, the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) has opened Stormwater Treatment Area 5/6 (STA-5/6) in Hendry County to the public for expanded recreation. Visitors to the wetland will arrive to a new parking area and trailhead with restrooms and an educational kiosk and a picnic shelter farther into the site.

The vast wetland that cleans Everglades-bound water is already popular with bird watchers and hunters during organized activities with District partners such as the Hendry-Glades Audubon Society. Now, large portions of the approximately 16,000-acre area will be open to the general public for activities such as hiking, biking and wildlife viewing.

"A remarkable diversity of birds has already made this water quality facility a renowned recreational area," said SFWMD Executive Director Blake Guillory. "Increasing access provides new opportunities for the public to enjoy South Florida's unique slice of nature."

Outdoor enthusiasts can walk or ride bicycles along levees in the STA, framed by an array of wading birds, alligators and aquatic life. Existing features at the site include a boardwalk built for disabled veterans and residents.

"This is something that has been needed for years, and to see it come together is wonderful," said Hendry County Commission Chairman Karson Turner, who also serves on the SFWMD Water Resources Advisory Commission (WRAC). "Now, not only will the thousands of visitors we have come to this area be able to experience STA-5/6 in a more comfortable manner, but it will allow our local population to become more acquainted with this area and experience this facility in a more tangible way."

The District has steadily increased access to the site south of Clewiston, with the first organized bird-watching program beginning in 2005 with a partnership with the Hendry-Glades Audubon Society. To date, Audubon volunteers, in coordination with the District, have hosted more than 6,700 bird watchers and photographers from across the globe on 183 individual tours at the site.

Since 2002, the District's partners at the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission have led a series of organized waterfowl and alligator hunts at this wetland.

#### **New Hours of Operation**

- Sunrise to sunset on Friday, Saturday, Sunday and Monday.
- The area will be closed to the general public on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday for wetland management purposes.
- The area will be closed on Sundays starting the Sunday before Thanksgiving until the first Sunday in February to allow for hunting activities.

Throughout South Florida, the District provides recreational access to its public lands while continuing to manage them to support environmental restoration, water supply, water quality and flood control missions.

At present, the District owns approximately 621,000 acres of land that are open to the public. Many of these properties are in their natural state or have enhancements such as picnic tables, informational kiosks, primitive campsites and hiking trails.

For more information on recreational opportunities throughout the District's 16-county region, visit [www.sfwmd.gov/recreation](http://www.sfwmd.gov/recreation).

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