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## just the FACTs

This fact sheet is provided as a reference to encourage a greater understanding of the various issues related to managing water in South Florida.

### MEDIA QUESTIONS

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### ECOSYSTEM RESTORATION

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## Everglades Flow-way Concept & Issues

*Historically, Lake Okeechobee periodically overflowed its banks, sending a sheetflow of water south through the Everglades. Today, a regional flood control system moves water through a network of canals and pump stations. Environmental restoration studies have explored the feasibility of restoring some sheetflow to South Florida's landscape.*

### Background

- The concept of a flow-way through the Everglades Agricultural Area (EAA) was originally suggested in 1993 and raised again in 1999. Both times it was evaluated and rejected as a viable alternative in the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP).
- Ongoing concerns have revived discussion of an EAA flow-way. These include high water levels in Lake Okeechobee causing harm to shoreline habitat and the Herbert Hoover Dike and high discharges to the estuaries.

### Current Considerations

- Construction of the regional flood control system permanently changed the topography of South Florida's landscape.
- Regional flood control and drainage have reduced water storage in Lake Okeechobee by 3 million acre-feet (6 ft in depth); **inflows are the same.**
- Soil loss (subsidence) throughout the EAA has created a vast, bowl-like depression across 117,000 acres, preventing natural water flow south.
- Infrastructure changes for a flow-way would be a multi-billion-dollar effort, requiring moving roads, railroads, businesses; constructing new levees, pump stations and bridges; altering ongoing restoration projects.
- Acquisition of a minimum of 140,000 acres and as much as 650,000 acres would be needed to implement a flow-way concept.
- Water is required in a flow-way to sustain desirable wetland plants, essential for improving water quality.
- The remaining Everglades are now ½ its original size and comprised of Everglades National Park and three Water Conservation Areas, which cannot tolerate high inflows without significant environmental damage.

### Solutions

- Restoration goal is to provide additional storage of excess stormwater.
- **Upstream water storage and treatment offer the best opportunities to find permanent and sustainable solutions for Lake Okeechobee and the estuaries.**
- The *Northern Everglades and Estuaries Protection* program, established this year by the Florida legislature, provides feasible storage & treatment solutions as well as opportunities for further study of regional problems.
  - This program complements ongoing state and federal restoration activities for the lake, estuaries and southern Everglades.



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