



SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

## NEWS RELEASE

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### **South Florida Marks 60 Years of Water Management**

**West Palm Beach, FL** – In 2009, the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) will mark 60 years of serving the public by managing and protecting the water resources of South Florida.

Created in 1949 as the Central and Southern Florida Flood Control District, the agency has evolved at the direction of the Florida Legislature into the multi-faceted SFWMD, the largest and oldest of the state's five water management districts. Today, the District continues its original mission of providing regional flood protection while also managing water supplies for a population of approximately 7.5 million, improving water quality and leading the restoration of America's Everglades – the largest environmental project in the nation's history.

"Over the last 60 years, the District has developed a reputation as one of the leading water management agencies in the world," said SFWMD Governing Board Chair Eric Buermann. "Looking ahead to the next 60 years, we face many challenges, from providing a growing population with flood protection and a quality water supply to restoring our natural systems. With its long history and experience, this agency has demonstrated its ability to adapt and evolve to best meet the needs of South Florida's environment and citizens."

To mark the District's 60th anniversary, informational panels tracing the history of water management in South Florida have been set up in the lobby of District headquarters. During today's Governing Board meeting, Executive Director Carol Ann Wehle also introduced the first in a series of presentations that each month will highlight aspects of the District's past, present and future.

"The history of South Florida cannot be written without discussing water," said Wehle, the District's first female executive director. "Decisions made more than a century ago continue to strongly influence how we are able to effectively manage water and related resources for the benefit of both people and the environment."

The first historical presentation focused on early efforts to drain the swamp lands of South Florida and temper the weather extremes of the region. Beginning with the Swamp and Overflowed Land Act of 1850, the State of Florida and real estate developers built canals to drain wetlands and connect Lake Okeechobee to both coasts. Over the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, hardy residents dealt with a cycle of heavy rains and prolonged drought. The Storm of 1928 resulted in thousands of deaths and was the impetus for construction of a dike around Lake Okeechobee, and the Hurricanes of 1947 flooded more than 90 percent of southeastern Florida. Stunned by the damage and duration of the 1947 flooding despite earlier flood control actions, Floridians demanded federal help.

The U.S. Congress responded in 1948 by adopting the Central and Southern Florida Project, a massive system of flood control works designed to cover a 16,000-square-mile area. A year later, the Florida Legislature created the Central and Southern Florida Flood Control District to serve as the local sponsor for the project.

For more information on the history of the District, please visit [www.sfwmd.gov](http://www.sfwmd.gov) throughout the year.

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**About the South Florida Water Management District – [Celebrating 60 Years \(1949-2009\)](#)**

*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.*