



SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

NEWS RELEASE

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SFWMD Opens Public Land in Okeechobee County to Youth Hunting
FWC-managed program teaches safe hunting while fostering an appreciation for Florida's natural areas



(Photo provided courtesy of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.)

West Palm Beach, FL — As part of its efforts to expand recreation on public lands, the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) will open 3,400 acres in Okeechobee County to organized hunting activities for youth beginning later this year. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) will direct the hunts on part of the SFWMD's Grassy Island property through the Youth Hunting Program of Florida.

"The hundreds of thousands of acres of land managed by the District belong to the people of South Florida, so it is only fitting to give the next generation an opportunity to appreciate them up close," said SFWMD Governing Board member Joe Collins. "By allowing these carefully monitored hunting activities for our youth at Grassy Island, we can forge a lasting bond between our young people and these natural areas."

Administered by the FWC, the Youth Hunting Program of Florida teaches young Florida residents between 12 and 17 years old how to hunt safely, legally and ethically. Among its many goals, the program seeks to foster an appreciation for Florida's natural areas while emphasizing the need for conservation. Participants learn these values through camping, outdoor and environmental education and other related activities, in addition to hunting.

Beginning in 2011, the program will hold approximately six outings at the Grassy Island site each year during established hunting seasons. As many as 10 youths will participate in each event. Under the program, each participant must be accompanied by a parent or guardian and will be partnered with an experienced volunteer certified by the FWC to assist in hunting activities.

District land managers will closely coordinate with the FWC to ensure all activities associated with the Youth Hunting Program of Florida are compatible with the ongoing management of the 3,400-acre site.

The South Florida Water Management District is steadily increasing recreational access to public lands while continuing to manage them to support environmental restoration, water supply, water quality and flood control missions. At present, the District owns 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, campsites and hiking trails.

For more information on recreational opportunities throughout the District's 16-county region, visit www.sfwmd.gov/recreation. More details on the FWC's Youth Hunting Program of Florida are available [here](#).

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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.