



SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

## NEWS RELEASE

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**SFWMD Highlights a Year of Significant Restoration Progress**  
*2009 accomplishments helped protect water resources for residents, environment*

**West Palm Beach, FL** – Marking 60 years of service to Central and South Florida’s residents and environment, the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) documented significant progress in environmental restoration and water resource protection initiatives in 2009.

Initially 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.

"Because of the Governing Board’s commitment to sound fiscal management, we successfully carried out our core water management responsibilities for South Florida residents, while moving forward with unprecedented environmental projects and opportunities this past year," said Executive Director Carol Ann Wehle. "There is a proud history of success at the District that we continue to build on year after year."

**Ecosystem Restoration / Water Quality Improvements**

The agency is poised to vastly expand Everglades restoration opportunities with the approval of a contract to acquire an initial 73,000 acres of strategic lands south of Lake Okeechobee. The pending purchase will be financed with Certificates of Participation, and the *River of Grass* Phase II public planning process to develop restoration configurations is under way.

In a step that lays critical groundwork for Everglades restoration in the decades ahead, the District Governing Board and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers approved a Master Agreement to establish uniform terms and conditions for all construction, maintenance and operation of future Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) projects. An infusion of Congressional appropriations for federal project construction can now be used. The Master Agreement also allows crediting of CERP land acquisition at appraised value (vs. purchase price), saving Florida taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars in expenditures.

To improve Everglades water quality, the District initiated construction on another 12,000 acres of water quality treatment marsh. More than 52,000 acres of land south of Lake Okeechobee have already been converted to Stormwater Treatment Areas (STAs), yielding 45,000 acres of treatment wetlands. Since 1994, STAs and agricultural “Best Management Practices” have together prevented more than 3,200 metric tons of phosphorus from entering the Everglades.

The District construction department is currently overseeing \$346.2 million in construction to support Everglades restoration as well as operations and maintenance of capital projects.

### **Flood Control Operations / Public Lands**

In keeping with its commitment to ensuring public access to public lands, the District expanded recreational opportunities and access to an additional 21,000 acres of District land. An equestrian trailhead and 5 miles of trails were opened at Allapattah Flats in Martin County, and a duck-hunting and bird-watching blind that meets Americans with Disabilities Act standards was opened at STA-5 in Hendry County.

More than 25 million acre-feet of water moved through the network of canals and structures operated and maintained by the District to support flood control and water supply capabilities. Each year, the District inspects hundreds of levees and structures to ensure peak performance of the interconnected system.

To ensure water flow through the regional system, more than 50,000 acres of exotic vegetation were treated. In the on-going battle against other invasive species, the 300<sup>th</sup> Burmese python was captured and removed from District lands.

## **Water Supply / Regulation**

Work continued with local governments to conscientiously manage shared water resources during water shortage conditions that impacted the 16-county region.

Recognizing the need to consistently conserve water and increase protection of limited resources, the District began implementing measures outlined in the District's Comprehensive Water Conservation Program. To help ensure a sustainable supply of water for South Florida's communities and environment, the District Governing Board approved sweeping year-round water conservation measures that place permanent limits on landscape irrigation throughout the region.

Also in 2009, the District funded 38 Alternative Water Supply projects that will produce 27 million gallons of additional water a day, and 44 WaterSIP grant projects that will generate another 457 million gallons of additional water a year.

The District's ePermitting database was extended, increasing online public access to historic permit documents. To date, more than 9.1 million older documents have been converted into electronic format. In addition, key provisions of Senate Bill 2080 were implemented that delegated some permit application approvals to the Executive Director. As part of this effort, the District enhanced opportunities for public comment on permit applications.

## **Public Affairs / Mission Support**

The first phase of a completely redesigned and re-engineered District Web site ([www.sfwmd.gov](http://www.sfwmd.gov)) was successfully launched. It features easier navigation, exciting multimedia, powerful search tools and a host of high-tech improvements to make the site more useful to the public.

In an on-going commitment to open government and transparency, the agency fulfilled more than 600 public records requests.

The District also produced more than \$2.4 million in savings through belt-tightening efforts, shifting some contract work to full-time employees and reducing off-site training, aviation fuel and purchasing expenses.

Energy/water efficiency building improvement projects were completed that saved more than 760,000 gallons of water and 419,000 kWh of energy. The District received a \$20,000 FPL rebate for installing energy-efficient roofing at its headquarters facility.

During the year, the District was once again recognized by professional organizations for excellence in financial reporting, budget presentation and procurement.

*A fact sheet with more highlights on the South Florida Water Management District's 2009 accomplishments is [available here](#).*

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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.*