



SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

NEWS RELEASE

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Everglades Water Quality Improvement Program Marks 20 Years of Success *Everglades Agricultural Area consistently achieves phosphorus reduction goals*

West Palm Beach, FL – For a milestone 20th year, water flowing from farmlands in the Everglades Agricultural Area (EAA) achieved phosphorus reductions that significantly exceed those required by law.

Implementation of improved farming techniques, known as Best Management Practices (BMPs), produced a 79-percent phosphorus reduction in the 470,000-acre EAA farming region south of Lake Okeechobee for the Water Year 2015 monitoring period (May 1, 2014 – April 30, 2015). The requirement is a 25-percent phosphorus reduction.

Over the program's 20-year compliance history, the overall average annual reduction from the implementation of BMPs is 56 percent, more than twice the required amount.

"Two decades of successfully meeting and exceeding phosphorus reductions to improve Everglades water quality is a great accomplishment," said Daniel O'Keefe, Chairman of the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) Governing Board. "South Florida's agricultural communities are clearly demonstrating a long-term commitment to restoration efforts."

Examples of BMPs include refined stormwater management practices, on-farm erosion controls and more precise fertilizer application methods. These and other management practices by agricultural growers reduce the amount of phosphorus transported in stormwater runoff that reaches the Everglades and its connected water bodies.

BMP Program Delivering Successful Results

To meet the requirements of Florida's Everglades Forever Act, the amount of phosphorus leaving the EAA must be 25 percent less than before reduction efforts started. A science-based model is used to compute the reductions and make adjustments that account for variable rainfall.

When measured in actual mass, 147 metric tons of phosphorus were prevented from leaving the EAA and entering the regional canal system, which sends water into the

Everglades, during the Water Year 2015 monitoring period. Over the past 20 years, the BMP program has prevented 3,001 metric tons of phosphorus from leaving the EAA.

Just west of the EAA, in the 170,000-acre C-139 Basin, a BMP program has been in place for the past 11 years. In November 2010, the program requirements were enhanced to better control the nutrient runoff. For the Water Year 2015 monitoring period, data show the actual mass of phosphorus discharged from the basin during that time was 27 metric tons. Ongoing work continues to focus on improving phosphorus reductions in this basin, which historically has reported elevated nutrient levels in its soils and runoff.

Stormwater Treatment Areas Provide Additional Improvements

Water leaving the EAA and C-139 Basin receives additional treatment in one of several Stormwater Treatment Areas (STAs) before entering the Everglades. These constructed wetlands are filled with native vegetation that serve as “green technology” to further reduce phosphorus levels.

Since 1994, the network of five STAs south of Lake Okeechobee – currently with 57,000 acres of effective treatment area – have treated more than 16 million acre-feet of water and retained approximately 2,012 metric tons of phosphorus that would have otherwise entered the Everglades. Last year, the STAs treated approximately 1.4 million acre-feet of water, retaining 83 percent of phosphorus from water flowing through the treatment cells.

Through the end of April 2015, more than 4,860 metric tons of phosphorus have been prevented from entering the Everglades through treatment wetlands and the BMP program combined. Overall, Florida has invested more than \$1.8 billion to improve Everglades water quality since 1994. Additional improvements in Everglades water quality are being achieved by Governor Scott’s Restoration Strategies initiative, which includes more than 6,500 acres of STA expansions and construction of 116,000 acre-feet of additional water storage.

For more information:

- [BMPs and Source Controls](#)
- [Improving Water Quality](#)
- [Restoration Strategies for Clean Water for the Everglades](#)

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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.