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DEPARTMENT COMPLETES STATEWIDE RULEMAKING TO PROTECT SURFACE WATERS, WETLANDS

*~One statewide rule for the Environmental Resource Permit program will improve consistency
without lowering or changing environmental standards~*

TALLAHASSEE – A more than yearlong rulemaking process to provide more consistency for environmental resource permitting, which affects surface waters and wetlands, go into effect today.

The Florida Department of Environmental Protection and Florida's five water management districts previously used at least five different versions of the rules, which regulate permits designed to regulate activities that affect Florida's wetlands and surface waters. An ERP is required before beginning any construction activity or operation that would affect wetlands and other surface waters or contribute to water pollution. The permit process exists to protect Florida's lakes and streams, wetlands and other surface waters from stormwater pollution, flooding and any other environmental risk factors.

"Environmental protection is everyone's responsibility and should be everyone's goal. Having a permitting process that Florida's residents can understand will help accomplish that goal," said DEP Secretary Herschel T. Vinyard, Jr. "Creating a statewide ERP rule allowed us to make long-overdue improvements to a confusing process while maintaining our stringent environmental standards."

The Department began the rulemaking process in June 2012, following legislation signed in April by Governor Rick Scott granting the Department authority to create one statewide rule for the environmental resource permit program.

The new rule standardizes processing procedures, definitions, and forms that need to be submitted. The permit fee categories have also been standardized and the permit processing fees are now based upon the area of work activities instead of the fee being based upon the entire site or parcel of land.

The Department worked with the water management districts, local governments, citizens and businesses throughout the development of the statewide rule, hosting

more than 10 workshops, most via webinar and exceeding 150 participants at each webinar. For the first time, stakeholders were able to communicate, discuss, comment and make suggestions in an online open discussion forum and participate in workshops via webinar. This allowed interested individuals to comment on the rule drafts and offer suggestions on rule revisions. All interested parties were able to see the comments and responses during the rulemaking process.

To assist with implementation and understanding of the new statewide rule, the Department also hosted a webinar to assist the regulated community. Over 700 landowners, environmental consultants and engineers participated. Additional training opportunities are being provided this week by the Water Management Districts and the Department's local offices.

Today, the Department is also rolling out an electronic application site where applicants will be able to apply for ERP permits by submitting the application and associated materials online instead of having to submit paper copies to the Department. This new service was developed alongside the statewide ERP rulemaking process. This will save time and money for applicants and the Department.

To access information on the rule or access e-Permitting visit <http://www.dep.state.fl.us/water/wetlands/swerp/>.

About the Florida Department of Environmental Protection

The Florida Department of Environmental Protection is the state's principal environmental agency, created to protect, conserve and manage Florida's environment and natural resources. The Department enforces federal and state environmental laws, protects Florida's air and water quality, cleans up pollution, regulates solid waste management, promotes pollution prevention and acquires environmentally-sensitive lands for preservation. The agency also maintains a statewide system of parks, trails and aquatic preserves. To view the Department's website log on to www.dep.state.fl.us.

<http://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/FLDEP/bulletins/8bc597>