



SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

## NEWS RELEASE

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### **Dry Conditions Sprout Everglades Restoration Opportunity** *Low water levels allow SFWMD scientists to plant 6,000 trees to benefit ecosystems*



*Crews planted pond apple trees on an island in Lake Okeechobee during dry conditions in 2007. Wading birds use pond apple and cypress trees as prime habitat.  
(Click on the pictures for a larger version.)*

**West Palm Beach, FL** – Taking advantage of dry conditions, the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) will plant 6,000 pond apple, cypress and red maple trees to enhance wading bird habitat and restore ecosystems within Lake Okeechobee and Lake Istokpoga.

“Planting trees when water levels are low is a perfect example of turning the challenge of record dry conditions into a positive opportunity for restoration,” said Ken Ammon, P.E., SFWMD Deputy Executive Director – Everglades Restoration and Capital Projects. “The trees will greatly benefit the lakes’ ecosystems and attract wading birds, which are an indicator of restoration success, while also enhancing recreational opportunities.”

As part of environmental restoration for South Florida, crews are adding to thousands of trees that the District has planted to benefit the environment and wildlife. Such efforts are also a significant investment in the region’s economic health, as many of the

restored areas serve as havens for recreational opportunities such as airboating, hunting and bird watching.

Following the driest October-through-December period since at least 1932, crews are set to start planting approximately 6-foot-tall pond apple trees along Ritta Island on the south end of Lake Okeechobee to enhance an existing native pond apple forest.

Pond apples can stand immense flooding, spending weeks at a time with their roots under water. They require rich organic soils for optimal growth while providing a resting location for wading birds such as endangered wood storks, endangered Everglades snail kites, egrets and herons. The trees can grow up to 30 feet tall and provide desirable habitat for raccoons, squirrels, birds and the endangered Okeechobee gourd. The deciduous pond apple produces an avocado-sized fruit that is sometimes called an alligator pear or alligator apple because of its rough skin.

Another planting will take place near Big Island in Lake Istokpoga, adding to the 800 trees the District planted during low water levels in 2007. An additional 600 cypress, red maple and pond apple trees will be planted on spoil islands and along the western shoreline of Lake Istokpoga.

Planting will also be done near the S-77 structure on the Caloosahatchee River by Moore Haven. The District will plant cypress trees, adding to previously planted trees in the area. Cypress trees, also capable of growing in standing water, provide desirable habitat for wading birds and the endangered snail kite.

The new tree planting effort is the latest of several similar projects across the District. Staff and volunteers previously planted more than 18,000 bald cypress, pond apple and red maple trees around Lake Okeechobee.

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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.*