

EVERGLADES

...reviving an American treasure



A walk on the boardwalk through Everglades National Park.

Lifeline for the Everglades

Once a vibrant and free-flowing river of grass extending from the Kissimmee Chain of Lakes near Orlando south to Florida Bay, the Everglades became an ecosystem in distress due to increased population and development. The Everglades shrank in size, losing 50 percent of wetlands and floodplains. A number of initiatives and construction projects are under way to help restore the ecosystem, including massive reservoirs, water preserve areas and stormwater treatment areas.

Stormwater Treatment Area 3/4 in Palm Beach County



Harold A. Campbell public use facility at Stormwater Treatment Area 3/4 in Palm Beach County.



Osprey live and breed side by side with the many heron and egret species found in the tropical climate of the Everglades.

Cleaning up the water

At 17,000 acres, stormwater treatment area 3/4 is the largest constructed wetland in the world. By 2008, more than 52,000 acres of land south of Lake Okeechobee had been converted to six constructed wetlands whose plants absorb nutrients so cleaner water flows into the Everglades. These giant treatment areas, along with better farming practices, have so far prevented nearly 2,800 tons of phosphorus from entering the Everglades, including the Arthur R. Marshall Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge and Everglades National Park.



Water treatment area is birder's paradise

Though the primary purpose of constructed wetlands is to absorb nutrients before the water flows into the Everglades, function does not rule out recreation. At Stormwater Treatment Area (STA) 5 (below) in western Palm Beach County, bird-watchers flock to watch an array of birds that include wood storks, roseate spoonbills, American white pelicans and Caspian terns. Vegetation planted in the treatment areas attracts migratory and resident birds alike. Trails along sections of the levees surrounding acres of STAs offer hikers, bicyclists, photographers and bird-watchers vast views of nature and wildlife.



Florida's commitment to restoration

Between 2000 and 2008, the state and the South Florida Water Management District invested more than \$2.4 billion toward Everglades restoration, including \$325 million in construction either under way or completed. This funding was in addition to the \$1.8 billion invested in Everglades water quality improvements. To begin expediting construction of key restoration projects, the South Florida Water Management District became the first agency in the nation to utilize Certificates of Participation to fund environmental restoration and was recognized nationally for its innovation in financing.



Numbers of roseate spoonbills are soaring again in water conservation areas (managed areas where overland water once flowed freely) and in the stormwater treatment areas. Loss of Everglades habitat resulted in reductions of wading bird populations. The declining health of the ecosystem was due to the disrupted timing of water flows and deterioration of water quality as nutrient-rich water flowed into the Everglades from agricultural lands.

Broward County urban areas border an Everglades water conservation area.



Reconnecting a fragmented Everglades ecosystem

Much of the Everglades' water, once slowly ebbing and flowing down Florida's southern peninsula, is now managed in water conservation areas to provide water supply to the heavily populated lower east coast.



Many visitors experience and enjoy water management public lands that include stormwater treatment areas in remote and wild places. Passive recreation compatible with the land includes kayaking, canoeing, hiking, bird-watching, biking and fishing.

A comprehensive restoration plan progresses

A key focus of Everglades restoration is implementation of the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP), a state-federal partnership to improve water quality, quantity, timing and delivery. By the end of 2008, more than 230,000 acres – or 59 percent of the lands needed to implement projects – had been acquired for CERP. More than 54,000 acres alone were purchased to complete the Picayune Strand restoration in southwest Florida, which is reestablishing natural sheet flow to improve wetlands and regulate freshwater inflow to the Ten Thousand Islands Estuary.



Wildlife enjoy the Everglades' good nature

The osprey and 300 other bird species nest throughout Everglades National Park. Covering more than 2,000 square miles, it is the third largest national park in the lower 48 states. Birds are quite at home in this nature lover's paradise nesting among the hardwood hammock and cypress swamps. The Everglades' rich, diverse terrain is also home to the American alligator, American crocodile, the Florida panther, colorful tree snails and wild orchids. Water managers are working to protect and preserve this national jewel that is the fragile Everglades ecosystem.