



Florida Department of Environmental Protection



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## **FLORIDA MOVING FORWARD WITH PLAN TO IMPROVE WATER QUALITY IN AMERICA'S EVERGLADES**

*~ Collaboration and cooperation between state and EPA lead to historic next step in  
Everglades restoration ~*



**A scenic view of America's River of Grass.**

**TALLAHASSEE** – The Florida Department of Environmental Protection today received notification from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency that the permit and associated projects the Department submitted on June 6, 2012, satisfy all of EPA's previous objections and are sufficient to achieve the stringent water quality requirements for the Everglades. This action paves the way for the Department to move forward with the state's permitting process to implement a historic plan — including an achievable strategy and enforceable schedule for constructing an array of

treatment projects and associated water storage — to improve water quality in the Everglades.

Last October, Governor Rick Scott directed DEP Secretary Herschel T. Vinyard Jr., and South Florida Water Management District Executive Director Melissa L. Meeker to work collaboratively with EPA to expand water quality improvement projects and achieve the ultra-low state water quality standard established for the Everglades. Months of scientific and technical discussions led to the comprehensive plan, which the Department will enforce through state-issued permits and consent orders that include milestones for project completion, as well as enforcement mechanisms to ensure the milestones are met. The plan calls for the District to construct approximately 6,500 acres of additional state-of-the-art stormwater treatment areas and close to 110,000 acre-feet of associated water storage. Many core project components will be designed, constructed and operational within six years.

“Governor Scott recognizes both the environmental and economic importance of a healthy Everglades, which is why he made Everglades restoration a top priority for the state,” said Secretary Vinyard. “Thanks to EPA’s expeditious review of our revised permit, we are moving forward on a comprehensive plan that is in the best interest of the Everglades and Florida’s taxpayers.”

As part of the implementation process, the Department last week submitted to EPA a revised National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permit, along with an associated consent order, that authorizes the operation of 57,000 acres of existing Stormwater Treatment Areas south of Lake Okeechobee. Because EPA reviewed and agreed the revised permit meets the previous objections, the state will continue to move forward with its open and transparent permitting process. Next, the Department will issue a Notice of Draft, followed by Notice of Intent to Issue the Clean Water Act National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permit and state-issued Everglades Forever Act permit and associated consent orders, which are subject to administrative review under state law.

“This integrated plan will clean up water to protect the unique wetland system that makes up the Everglades Protection Area,” said District Executive Director Meeker. “With a firm commitment to design, construct and operate a comprehensive and science-based suite of remedies, the District is taking a landmark step toward meeting the water quality needs of America’s Everglades. We will continue to work closely with our federal partners to finalize and implement these important projects.”

Highlights of the strategies include:

- Design, construction and completion of 90 percent (99,000 acre-feet) of the required associated storage within four years. Capable of storing 32 billion gallons of water, the Flow Equalization Basins will be located adjacent to existing stormwater treatment areas in the Everglades. This advanced combination of “green” technologies will better optimize water deliveries to new and existing treatment facilities, allowing water managers to treat runoff to extremely low levels of phosphorus for the first time in the state’s environmental history.
- Doubling the size of Stormwater Treatment Area 1-West adjacent to the Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge. The District will construct 4,700 acres of

additional treatment by 2018 and start construction on another 1,800 acres that same year. This expansion spanning ten square miles will increase by 50 percent the treatment capacity of water quality facilities currently discharging into the Refuge.

- Improving treatment in the western Everglades by adding 11,000 acre-feet of associated storage in the C-139 Basin that is capable of storing 3.5 billion gallons.
- Improving the operation of existing treatment wetlands in the western Everglades by retrofitting 800 acres of constructed wetlands in Stormwater Treatment Area 5.
- State-issued and enforceable Everglades Forever Act and Clean Water Act permits, including stringent discharge limits, for each of the District's stormwater treatment areas.
- A robust science plan to ensure continued biological, ecological and operational research to improve and optimize the performance of water quality treatment technologies. The District's constructed wetlands and flow equalization basins utilize cutting-edge science and engineering and are the largest of their kind in the nation.
- Utilizing thousands of acres of land already in public ownership, which minimizes impacts to Florida's agricultural-based economy and accelerating construction of new projects.
- Regional source controls in areas of the eastern Everglades where phosphorus levels in runoff has been historically higher.
- Creation of approximately 1,550 direct jobs and 15,350 indirect jobs through construction of these facilities.

To protect the Everglades' unique makeup of flora and fauna, the Department established a stringent phosphorus water quality standard of 10 parts per billion (ppb). This ultra-low phosphorus limit for the Everglades is six times cleaner than rainfall and 100 times lower than limits established for discharges from industrial facilities.

To reduce nutrient pollution to the Everglades and achieve state and federal water quality requirements, the District constructed massive treatment wetlands known as Stormwater Treatment Areas that use plants to naturally remove phosphorus from water flowing into the Everglades. State law also requires best management practices on the 640,000 acres of agricultural land south of Lake Okeechobee.

More than 45,000 acres—or 70 square miles—of treatment area are today operational and treating water to average phosphorus levels of less than 40 ppb and as low as 12 ppb. The District is completing construction of an additional 11,500 acres this month. Together with best farming practices, stormwater treatment areas have prevented more than 3,800 tons of phosphorus from entering the Everglades since 1994. This past year, the treatment wetlands treated 735,000 acre-feet of water and reduced the total phosphorus loads to the Everglades Protection Area by 79 percent.

This plan to improve water quality builds upon Florida's \$1.8 billion investment in Everglades water quality improvements to ensure achievement of the 10 ppb ambient water quality standard for the Everglades Protection Area. The schedule for implementing new projects balances economic realities with engineering, permitting, science and construction limitations. The plan proposes to utilize a combination of state and district revenues to complete the projects.

The following documents are available on [DEP's online newsroom](#):

- [Letter](#) from U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Region IV Administrator Gwendolyn Keyes Fleming to Florida Department of Environmental Protection Secretary Herschel T. Vinyard Jr., received June 13, 2012.
- [Letter](#) from Florida Department of Environmental Protection Secretary Herschel T. Vinyard Jr. to U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Region IV Administrator Gwendolyn Keyes Fleming, sent June 6, 2012.
- [Questions and Answers](#): Everglades Water Quality Improvements.
- [Presentation](#) to the South Florida Water Management District Governing Board, June 4, 2012.
- [Clean Water Act National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permit](#) with accompanying consent order.
- [Supporting Information](#).

#### **About the Florida Department of Environmental Protection**

The Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) is the state's principal environmental agency, created to protect, conserve and manage Florida's environment and natural resources. DEP 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 DEP's Web site log on to [www.dep.state.fl.us](http://www.dep.state.fl.us).

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