



SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

NEWS RELEASE

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Rainfall Scarce Through First Half of Dry Season

Fourth-driest start to dry season underscores need for water conservation

[January 2009 Rainfall](#) | [2008-2009 Dry Season Rainfall](#) | [2008 Rainfall](#)

West Palm Beach, FL — Following an above-average 2008 wet season that lifted South Florida out of a prolonged water shortage, the region is once again experiencing near-record rainfall deficits, underscoring the need for continued water conservation.

Meteorologists at the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) reported District-wide rainfall of only 2.03 inches for November, December and January, which is 29 percent of the historical average for this period. The figure marks the fourth-driest start to the South Florida dry season since rainfall recordkeeping began in 1932.

During the past three months, all of the District's major basins received less than half the normal rainfall, leading to deficits of at least 3.5 inches in each basin. Some of the largest deficits occurred in eastern areas of Palm Beach, Broward and Miami-Dade counties, with rainfall totals as much as 8.69 inches below average in eastern Palm Beach County.

Conservation is Key

Recognizing that water conservation is the most efficient strategy to ensure adequate water in the driest of times — and to meet growing demands on the region's limited supplies — the District is continuing rule development for 2-day-a-week, year-round landscape irrigation measures as part of its broad Comprehensive Water Conservation Program. Eight public workshops have provided residents, utilities and other stakeholders the opportunity to be involved in discussions on these important water-saving measures.

Key components of the measures now being considered would allow for watering lawns and landscapes:

- Two-days-a-week for all landscape irrigation, before 10 a.m. and after 4 p.m.

- No limits on watering using reclaimed water.
- Extended days for new plantings.
- Local governments that have made significant capital investments in alternative water supply may establish 3-day-a-week irrigation for utility users.

Water Levels and Dry Season Outlook

Water levels are currently declining throughout the District, as would be expected by the drier-than-normal weather, and water managers continue to monitor overall conditions. One particular concern is the potential for fire in the natural areas if the rainfall deficit persists.

Lake Okeechobee's water level was 13.17 feet NGVD as of February 11. The water level stands more than a foot below the historical average for the date but remains more than 3 feet higher than what was reported in 2008, when drought conditions were affecting water supply throughout the District.

Federal meteorologists are forecasting that drier-than-average rainfall conditions may continue at least through mid-April due to the likely development of La Niña conditions. This weather phenomenon occurs when equatorial waters in the Pacific Ocean are cooler than normal, which often leads to below-average rainfall in Florida.

To manage South Florida's water supply throughout this dry season, modified restrictions allowing twice-weekly irrigation remain in place. For details on current water restrictions, visit www.sfwmd.gov/consERVE. Read more about the District's water conservation plan and get tips on saving water at www.savewaterfl.com.

2008 Rainfall Review

For 2008, SFWMD meteorologists reported District-wide rainfall of 53.43 inches, or 3 percent above the historical average. Over the previous two years, a combined 83.63 inches of rain fell over the region, making 2006 and 2007 the driest back-to-back calendar years in South Florida since recordkeeping began.

An above-average wet season, highlighted by Tropical Storm Fay, lifted the region out of its two-year drought. From June through November, District-wide rainfall measured 38.93 inches, or 17 percent above the historical average.

Fay alone dropped an average of 7.5 inches of rain across the District over six days in August, with some locations receiving as much as 15 inches. The storm caused Lake Okeechobee to rise from 11.34 feet on August 19 to 13.63 feet on August 26, the first time in recorded history that the lake level increased more than 2 feet in a single week.

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About the South Florida Water Management District – [Celebrating 60 Years \(1949-2009\)](#)

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.