



SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

## NEWS RELEASE

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**CONTACT:**

**Linette Trabulsy**

[Martin/St. Lucie Service Center](#)

South Florida Water Management District

Office: (772) 223-2600 or Cellular: (772) 216-5981

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**State, St. Lucie Co. Partnering to Restore Indian River Lagoon Wetlands**  
*Project to improve wildlife habitat and water quality*

**Fort Pierce, FL** – The South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD), St. Lucie County and the State of Florida are working together to place in public ownership and restore approximately 209 acres of wetlands bordering the Indian River Lagoon to improve habitat and water quality.

The District is administering state funding for the project, which is part of the Indian River Lagoon Surface Water Improvement and Management (SWIM) Plan. The SFWMD Governing Board recently approved the release of \$574,600 in state funds to acquire the land. St. Lucie County is investing the same amount toward the acquisition.

“We applaud the Florida Legislature and St. Lucie County managers for their continued commitment to acquire land for water quality, restoration and conservation,” said SFWMD Governing Board member Melissa Meeker. “This restoration project falls within the boundaries of the Indian River Lagoon National Estuary Program and benefits the health of the nation’s most ecologically diverse estuary.”

The first phase of the acquisition, known as the Harbor Branch Preserve in northern St. Lucie County, will return the current tidal swamp to its historic mangrove marsh and restore its water-filtering capability to improve water quality in the lagoon. Subsequent phases of the project will involve habitat restoration, shoreline refurbishment and exotic plant removal.

Support for the project was recommended by the St. Lucie River Issues Team, initiated by Senator Ken Pruitt nine years ago. The team includes representatives of 17 different agencies and organizations. The members work together to prioritize issues, procure federal and state funding and implement “turn-dirt” projects that have quantifiable benefits to the St. Lucie Estuary and the Indian River Lagoon.

To date, the issues team has invested more than \$63.7 million from the Florida Legislature, more than \$65.7 million from local partners and an additional \$2 million from the federal government in environmental improvement projects. The program has funded more than 114 individual projects, totaling more than \$131.4 million in Martin and St. Lucie counties.

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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.*