



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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**Fish Health Study Tracks Progress of St. Lucie Estuary Restoration**  
*SFWMD partnering with State, St. Lucie River Issues Team, NOAA to continue  
multiyear study*

**Fort Pierce, FL** – The South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) Governing Board last week approved another year of partnership with the State of Florida, the St. Lucie River Issues Team and federal researchers on a project to track fish health as an indicator of the progress of restoration efforts in the St. Lucie Estuary. The project is part of a 15-year study by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) that began in 1996.

“Evaluating fish health as an environmental indicator may provide important insight into the condition of the St. Lucie Estuary and our restoration goals,” said SFWMD Governing Board member Melissa Meeker. “We appreciate our partnership with NOAA, the State and the St. Lucie River Issues Team and look forward to our continued work together to address the health of the Estuary.”

The study is analyzing the potential effects of water quality and environmental stressors, such as freshwater discharges, on the health of fish communities in the St. Lucie Estuary. The results are used to help set performance measures for restoration efforts.

Study results showed a spike in the prevalence of abnormalities in the Estuary’s fish populations after the hurricanes of 2004 and 2005. However, since mid-2006, the prevalence of abnormalities has sharply decreased. This year, the study will track the effects of restoration projects, agricultural best management projects and urban and agricultural stormwater retrofit projects on fish health, testing to find out if the abnormalities are environmental in nature.

The St. Lucie River Issues Team, initiated by State Senator Ken Pruitt nine years ago, comprises 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. With local, state and federal funding, 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.*