



SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

NEWS RELEASE

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Seagrass Monitoring Benefits Florida Bay

SFWMD, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission partner for continuing study

West Palm Beach, FL — The South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) has entered into a three-year cooperative agreement with the Florida Wildlife Research Institute of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) to continue support for monitoring seagrasses and fish habitat in Florida Bay. The effort within the coastal waters of Everglades National Park documents restoration progress in Florida Bay.

“Science and restoration always go hand-in-hand, especially in a complex ecosystem like Florida Bay,” said Michael Collins, SFWMD Governing Board member and resident of the Florida Keys. “Long-term monitoring is one of our best tools to evaluate the health of the bay and seagrass habitat.”

Successful restoration will have a positive economic impact on Florida Bay. The area already attracts \$1.6 billion in annual tourism and travel dollars, according to a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration study.

Healthy seagrass beds perform an important function in the estuarine environment, providing the foundation for the bay’s food web and critical habitat for fish and crustaceans. The beds also improve water quality by stabilizing sediments and taking up potentially harmful nutrients, such as phosphorus and nitrogen.

The Florida Bay monitoring program, known as the South Florida Fisheries Habitat Assessment Program, is conducted by FWC’s Fish and Wildlife Research Institute. The institute’s scientists monitor 17 basins in Florida Bay’s 770-square-mile area, directly observing and documenting the amount of seagrass covering the bay bottom, identifying species composition of seagrass beds and collecting samples to determine seagrass health.

Monitoring data are used to establish a baseline that helps assess estuarine restoration success. Monitoring results over the last three years have demonstrated the continuing recovery of seagrass beds in western Florida Bay, where seagrass die-offs occurred in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and also an increase in species diversity in southern Florida Bay.

The cooperative agreement between SFWMD and FWC continues a monitoring program that began in 2005. It is an expansion of scientific monitoring that began 13 years ago. The new agreement supports monitoring through 2011. Total SFWMD funding for the three-year project is \$676,500.

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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.