



SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

NEWS RELEASE

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Restoration Progress, Ecosystem Status Highlighted in 2009 South Florida Environmental Report

West Palm Beach, FL — The Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) today released the *2009 South Florida Environmental Report* detailing a year of restoration, scientific and engineering successes in the Kissimmee Basin, Lake Okeechobee, Everglades and South Florida coastal areas. The 2009 report marks the 11th year of unified, streamlined environmental reporting by the two agencies.

“Year after year, the State of Florida and the District uphold a commitment to environmental stewardship and ecosystem restoration throughout this region,” said SFWMD Governing Board Chairman Eric Buermann. “Our accomplishments this year, documented in the comprehensive report, showcase the extensive work we are continually doing and the positive impacts we are achieving.”

The *2009 South Florida Environmental Report* spans two volumes comprising more than 50 individual reports. The volumes provide extensive research summaries, data analyses, financial updates and a searchable database of environmental projects. The report covers environmental information for Water Year 2008 (May 1, 2007 through April 30, 2008) and project/budgetary information for Fiscal Year 2008 (October 1, 2007 through September 30, 2008).

“Florida continues to display an unwavering dedication to restoring this one-of-a-kind ecosystem,” said DEP Secretary Michael W. Sole. “As this report demonstrates, we continue to see progress system-wide, from the Kissimmee River to Florida Bay.”

Highlighted in the 2009 report is the SFWMD Governing Board's vote to enter into a historic real estate transaction with the United States Sugar Corporation for the purpose of Everglades restoration. The proposed purchase, subject to financing, is the largest public land acquisition in Florida's history and the single most important action to protect the Everglades since the designation of Everglades National Park some 60 years ago.

Additional events documented in the 2009 report:

- **Textbook examples of South Florida's weather extremes.** Prolonged effects of a multiyear rainfall deficit coupled with a slow-moving tropical storm brought more than 14 inches of rain to parts of the region. Tropical Storm Fay inched its way through Florida for six days in August 2008, impacting multiple counties and raising Lake Okeechobee's low water level by more than two feet.
- **Ongoing efforts to improve Everglades water quality.** More than 775,000 acre-feet of runoff water was treated through six Stormwater Treatment Areas this water year. Since 1994, constructed treatment marshes together with the farming community's commitment to "Best Management Practices" have prevented more than 2,800 metric tons of phosphorus from entering the Everglades.
- **Northern Everglades restoration planning.** As part of the Northern Everglades and Estuaries Protection Program, a collaboration of agencies and stakeholders completed the Lake Okeechobee Watershed Construction Project Phase II Technical Plan and watershed protection plans for both the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee rivers and estuaries. Together, these comprehensive plans provide a road map for improving water quality, expanding water storage, and protecting and restoring the heart of the South Florida ecosystem.

Other findings in the 2009 report include:

- **Phosphorus source-control programs continue to meet requirements.** In Water Year 2008, the Everglades Agricultural Area (EAA) basin achieved a 44-percent reduction in total phosphorus load, marking the 13th consecutive year of basin compliance with the EAA Basin Rule.
- **Kissimmee River restoration progress continues.** Although the Kissimmee River and its floodplain were influenced by drought, densities of long-legged wading birds and waterfowl in the Phase I Restoration floodplain area rebounded from last year's reductions.
- **Backfilling two additional miles of the C-38 Canal was completed.** This work, reconnecting four miles of Kissimmee River channel, is expected to reestablish an additional 512 acres of floodplain wetlands.
- **Wading bird nests declined.** Dry conditions in previous years coupled with poor foraging conditions last year and higher-than-normal rainfall during the dry season, led to a 50-percent reduction in wading bird nests in the Greater Everglades ecosystem.

“Detailed data provided in the *2009 South Florida Environmental Report* reflect the strength of the science and technology used to direct environmental restoration projects,” said Carol Ann Wehle, SFWMD Executive Director. “The combination of sound science, an expert staff and commitment to purpose is a proven formula for our success.”

The *2009 South Florida Environmental Report*, including a 48-page executive summary, is available online at www.sfwmd.gov/sfer.

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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.