



SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

NEWS RELEASE

March 06, 2009

CONTACT:

Randy Smith

South Florida Water Management District

Office: (561) 682-2800 or Cellular: (561) 389-3386

www.sfwmd.gov/news

follow us on [twitter](#)

SFWMD, Palm Beach County, Tri-Cities Dedicate Lake Region Water Treatment Plant

Alternative water supply project completed ahead of schedule to serve lakeside communities of Pahokee, Belle Glade, South Bay

West Palm Beach, FL – The South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) and Palm Beach County today dedicated the Lake Region Water Treatment Plant in the western portion of the county during a ribbon-cutting ceremony. The facility was completed last year in a multi-agency effort to reduce public water supply withdrawals directly from Lake Okeechobee by providing an alternative water supply solution for the lakeside communities of Pahokee, Belle Glade and South Bay.

“The Lake Region Water Treatment Plant is providing the communities of western Palm Beach County with a reliable source of water and reducing dependence on Lake Okeechobee,” said SFWMD Governing Board member Patrick J. Rooney Jr. “The District remains committed to supporting and implementing water resource projects to enhance the quality of life throughout the region.”

At an investment of close to \$58 million, the plant was scheduled for completion by August 2008. However, in January 2008, as water levels in Lake Okeechobee set record lows on a daily basis during a prolonged water shortage, the District and Palm Beach County partnered to accelerate the facility’s construction. As a result of the joint effort, the Tri-Cities of Pahokee, Belle Glade and South Bay began receiving treated water from the plant by March 31, 2008, four months ahead of schedule and before the most severe part of the dry season.

The District contributed approximately \$12 million toward design and construction, including \$500,000 in emergency funding to assist in fast-tracking the plant’s completion. Palm Beach County provided \$12.5 million for the project, and the Florida Legislature, through appropriations to the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, contributed \$8.2 million. Additional funding of \$800,000 was provided by

the federal government through Environmental Protection Agency grants, with the three lakeside communities collaborating for the remaining costs.

“The day is finally here, where all residents of the Tri-Cities can actually drink the water straight from their tap and be assured that they are getting the highest quality drinking water available,” said Bevin A. Beaudet, PE, Palm Beach County utilities director. “And, the majority of the employees at the plant live right here in the communities which they serve.”

The Lake Region Water Treatment Plant replaces the aging treatment plants that served Pahokee, Belle Glade and South Bay and shifted the area’s water supply source from Lake Okeechobee to the Upper Floridan Aquifer, a reliable and virtually drought-proof groundwater source. The plant treats the brackish Floridan water using reverse osmosis to provide high-quality potable water for each of the three cities. The plant is capable of producing 10 million gallons of potable water per day, enough to meet the cities’ current water demands with adequate capacity for future growth.

Lake Okeechobee is the source of water for 500,000 acres of farmland in the Everglades Agricultural Area and serves as a primary back-up supply to more than 5 million South Floridians. Beginning with the 2006-2007 dry season, the lake remained in a water shortage zone for nearly two years, reaching an all-time low of 8.82 feet above sea level on July 2, 2007. Tropical Storm Fay finally alleviated the water shortage in August 2008, raising the lake level more than two feet in a single week for the first time on record. As of Friday, March 6, the lake level stood at 12.61 feet. Conditions in the region remain dry. The 2008-2009 South Florida dry season is the third driest on record as of March 1, dating back to 1932.

###

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.