



SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

NEWS RELEASE

March 13, 2009

CONTACT:

Gabe Margasak

South Florida Water Management District

Office: (561) 682-2800 or Cellular: (561) 670-1245

www.sfwmd.gov/news

follow us on [twitter](#)

SFWMD Recognizes Audubon Volunteer's Achievements on Public Lands

Margaret England of Hendry-Glades Audubon helped District birding tours take flight



Willie Howard/Palm Beach Post

West Palm Beach, FL – Everglades restoration lands are public lands, and the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) has increasingly opened these properties for public recreation when compatible with their restoration purpose. Bird-watching is a prime example of low-impact public use, and thanks to Margaret England of LaBelle, few locations are more popular for bird-watching activities than Stormwater Treatment Area 5 (STA-5), a water-cleansing wetland in eastern Hendry County.

Since 2005, the LaBelle resident has shared her avian expertise as a volunteer birding tour leader at STA-5, showcasing wildlife and recreation access to lands managed by the District for Everglades restoration. On Thursday, the SFWMD Governing Board recognized England's dedicated community service with the District's first Ambassador Award.

"Margaret England's willingness to share her passion and knowledge of birds has enhanced public understanding of Everglades wildlife, which is vital to successful conservation efforts," said SFWMD Governing Board member Charles Dauray. "Her volunteer spirit and community service are as special as the Everglades itself."

The Ambassador Award was created to honor those who foster the public missions of the SFWMD, such as Everglades's restoration. England, a library media specialist at LaBelle Elementary School and secretary of the Hendry-Glades Audubon, was chosen as the inaugural award recipient from among a number of worthy candidates. The award was presented in Clewiston at the March Governing Board meeting, as part of the District's celebration of its 60th year managing and protecting water resources of the region.

While England fittingly personifies the title of "ambassador" in the partnership between the SFWMD and the Hendry-Glades Audubon, she is also a contributor to the science of environmental restoration. England and 50 volunteers recently documented 112 species – numbering more than 92,600 birds – during the 109th national Christmas Bird Count at STA-5. Known as "citizen science," bird counts are vital to studies of the long-term health and status of bird populations.

In her job as media specialist at LaBelle Elementary, England shares her knowledge and love for the environment with students and their parents. She recently received a grant to purchase a 3-D watershed model for the school that she uses to teach about stormwater management and wetland protection.

England also serves as a vice-president for the Caloosahatchee River Citizen's Association "Riverwatch" and is a certified Florida Master Naturalist, which enhances her tour-guiding knowledge at STA-5.

During the past 15 years, Stormwater Treatment Areas have proven to be the water-cleaning workhorses of Everglades restoration, utilizing plants to remove phosphorus from water flowing into the Everglades. Since 1994, six STAs – with a combined area of more than 52,000 acres – have retained more than 1,000 metric tons of total phosphorus that would have otherwise entered the Everglades.

At each Stormwater Treatment Area, water levels are managed at an optimal depth for water quality improvements, which also creates an attractive habitat for wading birds.

The District has taken steps to ensure the public has access at these sites for spectacular wildlife viewing as well as duck hunting, enhanced at STA-5 by construction of a waterfowl watching/hunting platform for disabled veterans and residents alike.

In addition to providing educational and recreational interest, birding tours have been shown to generate economic benefits to local communities. Birding, a national pastime, is big business, with 48 million people observing birds both around the home and through vacation travel. A 2001 report by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service concluded that nationwide birding generated \$32 billion in retail sales and created 863,406 jobs.

A Florida-based study showed that non-consumptive bird use (i.e., non-hunting activities) supported more than 19,000 jobs in Florida in 2006, and all wildlife viewing activities generated more than \$3 billion statewide that year, according to a state report. Birding specifically generates an estimated \$477 million in retail sales in Florida every year, second in the nation only to California.

For more information about recreation on public lands managed by the District, visit the [SFWMD recreation guide](#). STA-5 is only accessible during scheduled tours. View the STA-5 [tour schedule](#) for times and signup information.

###

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.