



SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

## NEWS RELEASE

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### **SFWMD Extends Florida Bay Seagrass Study**

*Partnership with Florida Atlantic University will benefit restoration efforts*

**West Palm Beach, FL** — The South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) has extended a partnership with Florida Atlantic University (FAU) to study seagrass health in Florida Bay. Seagrasses provide critical habitat for fish, shrimp and other animals and are sensitive to changes in water quality. As a result, they are important indicators that reflect the overall health of coastal ecosystems.

“We are very pleased to continue our productive partnership with FAU,” said Michael Collins, SFWMD Governing Board member. “Results of this research will be used by the District to better control freshwater flows to Florida Bay, helping to preserve, protect and restore one of Florida’s most unique ecosystems.”

The 36-month project will produce an improved computerized model for predicting changes in seagrass communities. Data from the study will provide a scientific basis for water management operational decisions, potential changes needed for District structures and project planning decisions for restoration of the wetlands and coastal waters of Everglades National Park.

Since 1994, the South Florida Water Management District has had an active research and monitoring program in the southern Everglades and Florida Bay. A key component has been studies on seagrass habitats and their response to water management and restoration activities. Specific study sites include the southern Everglades coastal wetlands, Manatee Bay and northern and eastern Florida Bay and Barnes Sound.

A District-sponsored study, conducted in 2008 with FAU, indicated that salinity impacts on seagrass reproduction may be the key factor in seagrass community success. This new information is being used for the 2011 update of Minimum Flows and Levels for Florida Bay, which identifies the minimum flow of fresh water needed to prevent harm to the water resources or ecology of the area.

Coastal ecosystems, comprised of 10 major estuarine areas, are found throughout the SFWMD's 16-county region, including Florida Bay. Three major issues are impacting them all: altered delivery of fresh water, declining water quality and continued habitat loss. The SFWMD is working with many organizations, including Florida Atlantic University, to produce a broad range of scientific and water resource information for better managing freshwater inputs to these vital ecosystems.

For more information about the seagrass study, Florida Bay and coastal ecosystem restoration, visit [www.sfwmd.gov](http://www.sfwmd.gov).

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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.*