



SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

NEWS RELEASE

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SFWMD Takes Steps to Strengthen Everglades Restoration Partnership, Continue Picayune Strand Project

Enhanced cooperation represents a significant step forward in restoring famed River of Grass



(Click on image for larger version.)

West Palm Beach, FL — Strengthening its commitment to Everglades restoration and a partnership with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) Governing Board recently approved key agreements to govern future construction, operation and maintenance of projects in the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP), including the Picayune Strand Restoration Project.

“Florida has already invested \$2.4 billion as part of its long-term commitment to revive America’s Everglades,” said SFWMD Governing Board Chairman Eric Buermann. “These agreements are designed to build on the significant progress made so far and continue vital restoration work with our federal partners.”

The first agreement, called the Master Agreement, is one of the first in a series of steps necessary for the Corps to start construction on CERP projects. In 2009, the Corps

received approximately \$115 million in Congressional appropriations for construction of CERP projects, representing the first appropriations from Congress for construction since CERP was first authorized in the Water Resources Development Act of 2000. The appropriated dollars include stimulus funding and FY09 regularly appropriated funds in the amount of \$65 million for construction of the Picayune Strand Restoration Project.

Acting as an umbrella agreement governing Everglades restoration, the Master Agreement establishes uniform terms and conditions for all future CERP project partnership agreements. A project partnership agreement will be required for each of the approximately 50 restoration projects included in the CERP.

Following four years of detailed negotiations with the federal government, the Master Agreement serves as the framework that will provide for future project partnership agreements to be negotiated in a shorter time, allowing restoration work to move forward more efficiently.

Key features of the Master Agreement include:

- Strengthening the federal/state partnership for Everglades restoration by providing for the Corps and the SFWMD to make joint decisions on key project issues, giving the State and its citizens an equal voice in Everglades restoration.
- Defining conditions for the Corps and SFWMD to balance the 50-50 cost-share on construction of projects in the CERP.
- Defining conditions for the Corps to provide 50 percent of the annual costs for operations and maintenance of CERP projects, a unique cost-sharing provision authorized by Congress. Typically, local sponsors are responsible for 100 percent of the costs for operations and maintenance.
- Providing for the SFWMD to perform construction of certain project features and receive credit toward its 50 percent cost-share. This allows for the Corps and SFWMD to begin construction on separate projects at the same time, providing the potential to expedite Everglades restoration.

While the Master Agreement covers all CERP projects, Governing Board approval of the Picayune Strand Project Partnership Agreement defines the terms, conditions and responsibilities specific to the Picayune Strand restoration. The estimated cost for the Picayune Strand project, including the cost of acquiring lands and project construction, is \$438 million. The estimated annual cost of operation and maintenance is \$3.7 million once the project is fully operational. A third agreement, known as the Pre-Partnership Credit Agreement, is a new requirement by Congress that is necessary to preserve the opportunity for the SFWMD to receive credit for its \$15 million investment in restoration work already completed for the Picayune Strand. With the approvals by the SFWMD Governing Board, the next step is for execution of the agreements by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Located north of Ten Thousand Islands National Wildlife Refuge on Florida's Southwest coast, the Picayune Strand was drained in the 1960s for a failed real estate development. Road construction and canal excavations reduced aquifer storage, increased freshwater discharges to estuaries in the Ten Thousand Islands, disrupted native plant communities and increased the frequency of wildfires.

Construction features on the approximately 55,000-acre project include removing or degrading more than 260 miles of roads, installing three pump stations, backfilling and plugging 40 miles of canals and distributing overland flows via spreader canals. Progress to date includes:

- Investing approximately \$150 million to place in public ownership 55,000 acres.
- Filling and plugging 7 miles of the Prairie Canal.
- Completing 25 percent of the road removal necessary for restoration.
- Restoring 13,000 acres of natural habitat.
- Removing structures, facilities and debris from the area, including tires, asphalt, concrete and vehicles.
- Completing the construction plans and specifications and permitting for the project's restoration elements and pump stations.

Everglades restoration is a key mission of the SFWMD. The Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan provides a framework and guide to restore, protect and preserve the water resources of central and southern Florida. The State of Florida and the South Florida Water Management District have appropriated \$2.4 billion toward this effort. Through December 31, 2008, 58.76 percent, or 229,834 acres, of the estimated lands needed to implement CERP have been acquired. For more information, visit www.sfwmd.gov/everglades.

For more information on restoration progress in the Everglades, read [Revising the River of Grass](#) for further details.

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About the Everglades

America's Everglades once covered almost 11,000 square miles of south Florida. Just a century ago, water flowed down the Kissimmee River into Lake Okeechobee, then south through the Everglades to the Florida Bay – the ultimate destination of the pure sheetflow. Because of efforts to drain the marshland for agriculture, development and flood control, the Everglades is today half the size it was a century ago. Dubbed the River of Grass for the sawgrass that flourished throughout the marsh, the Everglades is a mosaic of freshwater ponds, prairies and forested uplands that supports a rich plant and wildlife community. Renowned for its wading birds and wildlife, the Everglades is home to dozens of federally threatened and endangered species, including the Florida panther, American crocodile, snail kite and wood stork. The mix of salt and freshwater makes it the only place on Earth where alligators and crocodiles exist side by side.

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.