



SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

## NEWS RELEASE

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### **SFWMD Partners with Pahokee for Environmental Enhancement**

*Project to enhance efforts to restore environment, reopen waterway and boost Glades economy*



*(Click on the image above for a larger version.)*

**West Palm Beach, FL** – The South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) Governing Board on Thursday approved funds to assist the City of Pahokee in reopening part of the vital Okeechobee Waterway, restoring more than 100 acres of Lake Okeechobee’s shoreline habitat, enhancing storm protection and stimulating the economy in the Glades region with eco-tourism opportunities.

“I applaud all parties involved in this restoration project as it benefits not only the environment, but fellow Floridians and our economy,” said Governor Charlie Crist. “This restoration is a major gain for Florida and Palm Beach County.”

The District Governing Board voted to invest \$3 million to install 90,000 cubic yards of riprap – large rocks – to protect 10,000 linear feet of the lake’s southeastern shore. The

work is among the first steps necessary to begin dredging to restore a portion of the Okeechobee Waterway, a 154-mile marine route connecting Florida's east and west coasts via Lake Okeechobee. According to the Florida Inland Navigation District (FIND), the Okeechobee Waterway provides for \$55 million per year (1999 dollars) in National Economic Impact.

"The City of Pahokee's effort will provide an array of ecological benefits to the lake itself and has tremendous potential to attract boaters and outdoor enthusiasts alike to the Glades region," said SFWMD Governing Board member Patrick J. Rooney Jr. "Merging restoration with economic stimulus will provide significant benefits for residents in the City of Pahokee and the Glades region as well as the environment."

Route 2, known as the "Rim Route," connecting Clewiston to Port Mayaca, has been subject to navigation restrictions because of shoaling caused by Hurricane Wilma filling the channel with sediment and debris in 2005. The District's support of the initial riprap work lays the foundation for building an upland shelf along the eastern shore that would facilitate a more gradual shoreline, enhance storm protection and create wildlife habitat areas. The riprap project, which has already received the necessary state and federal permits, also provides storage capacity to sequester more than 300,000 cubic yards of dredged material.

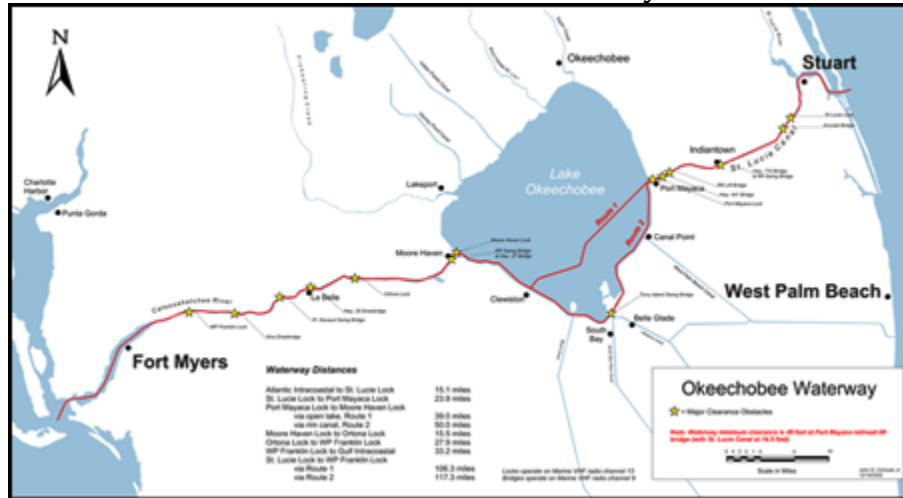
Once dredging is complete, the City of Pahokee plans to construct a series of eco-islands, providing for economic benefits by creating construction jobs and eco-tourism and recreational opportunities.

"On behalf of the City of Pahokee and the City Commission, I would like to extend our thanks to the South Florida Water Management District for its support on this vital project, which will create immense benefits for our residents, our environment and our economy," said Pahokee Mayor Wayne Whitaker. "These types of partnerships allow ambitious projects like this waterway and lake restoration to become reality."

Key benefits of the phased project include:

- Reopening of Route 2 of the Okeechobee Waterway
- Providing a natural mechanism to filter phosphorus and to retain suspended solids without removing material from Lake Okeechobee or destroying upland areas outside the lake's edge
- Filtering and removing suspended solids from the lake
- Enhancing storm protection
- Providing for safer navigation
- Creating recreational opportunities
- Re-establishing native eco-island systems

## The Okeechobee Waterway



*Click on the image above for a larger version.*

For more information on the Okeechobee Waterway, please visit the [U.S. Army Corps of Engineers](http://www.usace.army.mil/Portals/0/Florida/Florida%20Water%20Management%20District/).

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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.*