



SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

NEWS RELEASE

June 18, 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](#)

New Season of SFWMD, Audubon Bird-Watching Tours Begins at Renowned Everglades Treatment Wetland

*District, Hendry-Glades Audubon continue successful partnership to provide public
access to one of the premier bird-watching spots in the country*



*A roseate spoonbill wades through Stormwater Treatment Area 5 in Hendry County,
just south of Lake Okeechobee. See the new [Bird Tour Schedule](#).*

West Palm Beach, FL — An Everglades restoration project just south of Lake Okeechobee continues to live up to its reputation as a national bird-watching location.

June marks the beginning of another season of partnership between the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) and the Hendry-Glades Audubon, whose experts lead public birding tours at the District-managed Stormwater Treatment Area 5 (STA-5) in Hendry County. Most tours are guided by Audubon's Margaret England, who recently received the District's first Ambassador Award to recognize her community service and commitment to assist the District in providing increased access to public lands.

"The diversity of species at STA-5 is truly breathtaking, and the partnership with the Hendry-Glades Audubon is a significant public service," said SFWMD Executive Director Carol Ann Wehle. "These treatment wetlands are effective at cleaning water flowing into the *River of Grass* and, as an added benefit, have also become wildlife havens that showcase the environmental and economic significance of Everglades restoration."

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.

Non-consumptive bird use (non-hunting activities) supported more than 19,000 jobs in Florida in 2006, and wildlife viewing activities generated more than \$3 billion statewide that year, according to a state report. Second in the nation only to California, birding generates an estimated \$477 million in retail sales in Florida every year.

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. Overall, Florida has invested more than \$1.8 billion to improve Everglades water quality.

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.

The District is committed to increasing recreational access to District lands, while continuing to manage them effectively to meet its environmental restoration, water supply, water quality and flood control missions. For more information on recreational opportunities, please visit www.sfwmd.gov/recreation. For more information on Florida bird watching, visit [the Great Florida Birding Trail](#).

To sign up for the STA-5 Birding Tour: Send an e-mail to Margaret England, at sta5birding@embarqmail.com with your name, contact information, including an emergency cell number for the tour day, the date you want to go and the number in your party. You may also leave a message at (863) 674-0695 or (863) 517-0202. For tour dates, see the [latest schedule](#).

#

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.