



SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

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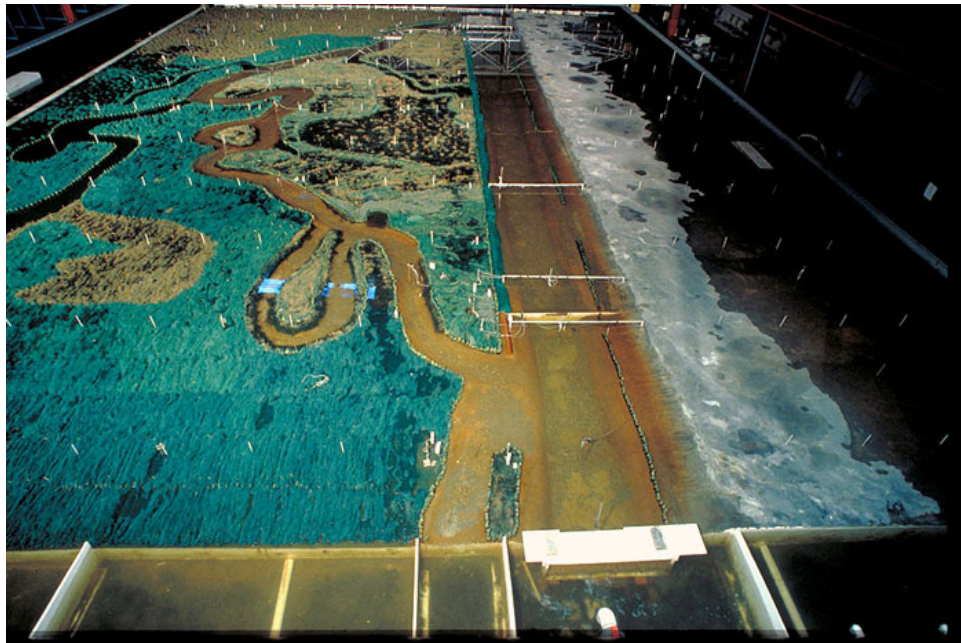
South Florida Water Management District

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1980-Today: Restoring the South Florida Ecosystem



(Click on picture for larger version.)

In 1992, the U.S. Congress authorizes Kissimmee River restoration, as represented in this scale model built by the University of California, Berkeley.

West Palm Beach, FL — As part of its ongoing celebration of 60 years of public service, the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) this month is looking back at the 1980s through today. Building on the increased environmental awareness of the 1970s, the last three decades have seen a wide variety of efforts to restore the South Florida ecosystem.

1980s: A Foundation for Restoration

The 1980s set the stage for the comprehensive ecosystem restoration efforts under way

today. The decade brought several policies and programs to protect Florida's natural areas, including:

- Governor Bob Graham launched the Save Our Everglades program, the first attempt to address restoration of the entire South Florida ecosystem.
- The Florida Legislature initiated aggressive land acquisition and water body protection programs, such as the Save Our Rivers program, to help preserve and improve lakes, rivers, wetlands and natural areas for future generations.
- The District conducted the Kissimmee River Demonstration Project to test the feasibility of returning portions of the channelized river back to its original winding path.
- Concerns for the failing health of Lake Okeechobee prompted an advisory committee to develop a series of recommendations for improving water quality.

In 1988, the U.S. State Attorney became involved in restoration efforts by suing the State of Florida to halt the flow of phosphorus and other pollutants into the Everglades. That same year, Governor Bob Martinez initiated the demonstration Everglades Nutrient Removal Project to reroute and treat runoff from the Everglades Agricultural Area on 4,000 acres of state-owned land. The parties involved in the lawsuit ultimately reached a settlement agreement in 1992 that established interim and long-term phosphorus concentration limits in the Arthur R. Marshall Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge and Everglades National Park.

1990s: Revitalizing the Ecosystem

Recognizing the unintentional consequences of the regional flood control network on the natural environment, the U.S. Congress took two key steps toward revitalizing the ecosystem in the Water Resources Development Act of 1992 by:

- Authorizing the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to restudy the Central and Southern Florida (C&SF) Project, the massive system of flood control works approved in the 1940s to harness and control water flow across a 16,000-square-mile area
- Directing the Corps to undertake restoration of the Kissimmee River, one of the largest ecosystem restoration projects in the world

Meanwhile, the Florida Legislature created two more land acquisition programs at the beginning and end of the decade by passing the Florida Preservation 2000 and Florida Forever acts.

In addition, legislators adopted the Everglades Forever Act to expand the scope of the state's water quality improvement efforts far beyond the terms of the 1992 settlement agreement. As a result of the act, the District today operates a network of six Stormwater Treatment Areas (STAs) south of Lake Okeechobee with a combined 45,000

acres of effective treatment wetlands. Since 1994, the STAs, combined with farming Best Management Practices, have prevented more than 2,800 metric tons of phosphorus from entering the Everglades. To date, the state has invested more than \$1.8 billion in these and other projects to improve Everglades water quality.

2000-2001: Watershed Years

In the Water Resources Development Act of 2000, Congress authorized the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP), a framework for restoring, preserving and protecting the South Florida ecosystem. Based on a 50-50 partnership between the state and federal governments, the 68 CERP project components were initially estimated to take 30 years at an estimated cost of \$8 billion. To help meet its share of the cost, the Florida Legislature passed the Everglades Investment Act, committing more than \$2 billion to CERP over the next 10 years.

In 2000, state legislators also passed the Lake Okeechobee Protection Act, a blueprint for reducing pollutant loads in the lake's watershed. A year later, the Corps completed the first phase of Kissimmee River restoration, backfilling 7.5 miles of canals, removing a major water control structure and recarving more than a mile of river channel.

2000s: Extreme Weather

Following the devastation of Hurricane Andrew's pinpoint strike in southern Miami-Dade County in 1992, Florida enjoyed several years of relative calm – until the 2004 hurricane season, the worst in the state's history. Between August 13 and September 25 of that year, hurricanes Charley, Frances, Jeanne and Ivan collectively caused more than \$45 billion in damage and dumped 30 inches of rain on the region, sending Lake Okeechobee water levels past 18 feet. A year later, Hurricane Katrina passed through on its way north, and Hurricane Wilma transected the lower Florida peninsula, damaging hundreds of thousands of homes. Through all of the storms, the regional flood control system controlled the flow of water and prevented serious damages.

Two years of historic hurricane activity and above-average rainfall were immediately followed by a historic, multiyear drought. 2006 and 2007 were the driest back-to-back years in South Florida history based on records dating back to 1932. As the cumulative rainfall deficit climbed, Lake Okeechobee sank to a record low of 8.82 feet in July 2007. The extreme water shortage prompted the SFWMD Governing Board to impose the most stringent water restrictions in the agency's history in early 2008. The drought finally broke in August 2008 when Tropical Storm Fay dropped an average of 7.5 inches of rain on the region over a week.

2009 and Beyond: Unprecedented Opportunities

While the District has accomplished much over the last 60 years, the future holds even greater promise.

In May 2009, the Governing Board approved a revised proposal to acquire huge swathes of land from the United States Sugar Corporation for Everglades restoration. The amended agreement provides for the initial purchase of 73,000 acres of strategically located land south of Lake Okeechobee with options to purchase another 107,000 acres when economic and financial conditions improve. The pending River of Grass land acquisition will provide unprecedented opportunities to restore the Everglades in ways not previously imagined.

Being open to new ideas while retaining a steady hand on existing duties is a hallmark of the South Florida Water Management District. With the recent signing of a bill reauthorizing the agency's regional role, the District will continue to proudly serve the people and environment of the region well into the future.

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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.