



SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

NEWS RELEASE

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EAA Phosphorus Reduction Again Surpasses Everglades Water Quality Requirement

West Palm Beach, FL — For the 14th consecutive year, water flowing out of the farmlands in the Everglades Agricultural Area (EAA) and into the Everglades achieved phosphorus reductions that were again better than the 25 percent reduction required by law. With the continued implementation of improved farming techniques, results for the 2009 monitoring period show a 68 percent phosphorus reduction in the 500,000-acre EAA farming region south of Lake Okeechobee.

“The region’s agricultural community has continually strengthened its commitment to protecting and improving South Florida’s ecosystems,” said SFWMD Governing Board Chair Eric Buermann. “The solid performance record and continued commitment will serve to further improve water quality.”

Phosphorus reductions were largely achieved through Best Management Practices, or BMPs. BMPs are improved ways of farming — all with the goal of improving water quality. In the EAA, the most commonly used BMPs are improved fertilizer application, improved stormwater pumping practices and erosion controls to reduce the amount of phosphorus discharge to the Everglades and connected water bodies.

Phosphorus can harm the Everglades ecosystem when stormwater runoff carries excess amounts into the protected wetlands. To meet the requirements of Florida’s Everglades Forever Act, the amount of phosphorus leaving the EAA must be 25 percent less than before phosphorus-reduction efforts started. Data for the 2009 annual monitoring period show that a 68-percent phosphorus reduction was achieved this year. The average reduction from the implementation of BMPs over the program's 14-year history is 54 percent, more than twice the amount required by law.

When measured in actual mass, 278 metric tons of phosphorus were prevented from entering the regional canal system, which sends water into the Everglades, during the

monitoring period from May 1, 2008, to April 30, 2009. Over the past 14 years, the BMP program kept approximately 2,000 metric tons of phosphorus out of the Everglades.

Together with best farming practices, water leaving the EAA receives additional treatment in one of several Stormwater Treatment Areas (STAs) before entering the Everglades. These wetlands – constructed by the SFWMD – are filled with native vegetation and use “green” technology to further reduce phosphorus levels. Since 1994, STAs south of Lake Okeechobee – with a combined area of more than 52,000 acres – have retained more than 1,200 metric tons of phosphorus that would have otherwise entered the Everglades. The latest data indicate that through treatment wetlands and the BMP program, more than 3,200 metric tons of phosphorus have been prevented from entering the Everglades. Overall, Florida has invested more than \$1.8 billion to improve Everglades water quality since 1994.

While the EAA continues to meet its targets, work is continuing to improve water quality in the C-139 Basin, approximately 170,000 acres of primarily pasture land, row crops, citrus and sugarcane located west of the EAA. Unlike the EAA, the predominantly sandy soils and gravity drainage within the C-139 Basin present unique challenges to achieving nutrient reductions.

While the C-139 Basin achieved phosphorus reduction goals in 2008, results for Water Year 2009 (May 1, 2008 – April 30, 2009) indicate the basin fell short of targets in the Everglades Forever Act. A BMP program has been in place for seven years in the C-139 Basin.

The District is currently expanding several water quality improvement projects to further enhance its water cleaning efforts:

- The SFWMD Governing Board approved a 4,656-acre expansion of treatment wetlands in southeast Hendry County. Construction of "Compartment C," a \$47.5 million investment in restoration, will connect two existing Stormwater Treatment Areas (STA-5 and STA-6) in the EAA and more than double water treatment capability at the site.
- The renovation of Stormwater Treatment Area 5 in Hendry County is enhancing plant growth and water movement through the 8,000-acre treatment marsh. District crews moved 407,270 cubic yards of soil in STA-5, shaping the land surface more evenly so that a larger area of wetland vegetation can improve the treatment area's ability to remove phosphorus from Everglades-bound waters.

The District's historic plan to purchase land from the U.S. Sugar Corporation represents the next step in improving Everglades water quality, complementing the BMP program with a managed system of storage and treatment to protect Florida's coastal estuaries

and to better revive, restore and preserve the fabled *River of Grass*. Environmental benefits include:

- Increasing water storage to reduce harmful freshwater discharges from Lake Okeechobee to Florida's coastal rivers and estuaries.
- Improving delivery of cleaner water to the Everglades.
- Preventing tons of phosphorus from entering the Everglades.
- Eliminating the need for "back-pumping" water into Lake Okeechobee.

For more information on the SFWMD's water quality improvement initiatives, please see Just the Facts: [Progress in Everglades Water Quality Improvements](#).

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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.