



SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

NEWS RELEASE

December 10, 2009

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Ranchland Transforming to Water-Treating Wetland

S-650 pump station construction next step to improving water quality in the Northern Everglades and Lake Okeechobee



(Click on picture for larger version.)

West Palm Beach, FL – Continuing the transformation of former ranchland into a 2,000-acre wetland that will clean stormwater runoff bound for Lake Okeechobee, the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) Governing Board today approved construction of the S-650 pump station in western Martin County. When complete, the pump station will direct water through the future Lakeside Ranch Stormwater Treatment Area (STA), which is designed to be the largest treatment wetland in the Northern Everglades for improving water quality flowing into the lake.

“As the liquid heart of Florida, Lake Okeechobee is critically important to our state’s natural resources and economy,” said SFWMD Governing Board member Kevin Powers. “Cleaning water through the Lakeside Ranch Stormwater Treatment Area will make for a healthier lake, benefiting the entire Everglades ecosystem.”

Douglas N. Higgins Inc., which has two offices in Florida, will build the pump station, the S-658 water control structure and a 500-foot canal improvement, representing an investment of nearly \$6.8 million. The work is part of the estimated \$34.4 million first phase of the Lakeside Ranch project. Scheduled for completion in December 2011, this phase also includes construction already under way on a 925-acre treatment wetland on the northern part of the property. The second phase will consist of a southern STA and second pump station to manage rim water canal levels in Lake Okeechobee during high water periods.

The 2,700-acre Lakeside Ranch project is a key component of the 2007 Northern Everglades & Estuaries Protection Program. The landmark state restoration initiative expanded the Lake Okeechobee Protection Act to strengthen protection for the Northern Everglades, recognizing the connectivity of the entire Everglades ecosystem and the importance of capturing and cleaning water before it flows into Lake Okeechobee.

The Northern Everglades plan seeks to improve the quality, quantity, timing and distribution of water to the natural system. When complete, the strategically located Lakeside Ranch STA will help meet those goals by capturing and treating stormwater runoff to remove up to 19 metric tons of phosphorus annually from the water before it reaches Lake Okeechobee.

“Treatment wetlands have a proven record of improving water quality in America’s Everglades south of Lake Okeechobee,” said Ken Ammon, SFWMD Deputy Executive Director of Everglades Restoration and Capital Projects. “The Lakeside Ranch Stormwater Treatment Area should provide similar results north of the lake, contributing to an improvement in the overall health of the Northern Everglades.”

Stormwater Treatment Areas are the water-cleaning workhorses of Everglades restoration, using plants to naturally remove phosphorus from water flowing into the Everglades. Lakeside Ranch joins two pilot STAs north of Lake Okeechobee. The 190-acre Taylor Creek STA became operational in June 2008, and the 800-acre Nubbin Slough STA is currently under construction.

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

More information on the Northern Everglades plan is available at www.sfwmd.gov/northerneverglades. For more information about water quality improvements in the Everglades, read [***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.