



SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

NEWS RELEASE

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Water Managers Start Work to Safeguard Water for the North Fork of the St. Lucie River and Indian River Lagoon

SFWMD water reservation to support Everglades restoration, protect natural system



(Click on photo for a larger version.)

West Palm Beach, FL – The South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) Governing Board recently approved moving forward with the public rule-making process to reserve water for the protection of fish and wildlife within the North Fork of the St. Lucie River and in support of Indian River Lagoon restoration.

“Our community was built around the unique lifestyle offered by the St. Lucie River, and we rely on its health for everything from renowned recreational opportunities to economic well-being,” said SFWMD Governing Board member Kevin Powers, who represents the Treasure Coast. “Protecting this vital resource depends on the right amount of water, and we are working toward guaranteeing the ecosystem will have the

clean water it requires.”

A water reservation is a legal mechanism to set aside water for the protection of fish and wildlife or public health and safety as set forth in Section 373.223(4) of the Florida Statutes. When a water reservation is in place, volumes and timing of water at specific locations are protected for the natural system ahead of consumptive uses, such as new development.

“As part of this ongoing reservation effort, the District has hosted six public workshops since April 2009 to share information and gather input from interested stakeholders to guide rule development,” said Kenneth Ammon, P.E., SFWMD Deputy Executive Director of Everglades Restoration and Capital Projects. “This is an important component in ensuring the success of restoration of the St. Lucie River and Indian River Lagoon.”

Along with providing immense benefits to the North Fork of the St. Lucie River, the water reservation is also necessary for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to proceed with construction activities on the Indian River Lagoon - South project, a key component of the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP). One of the components of the Indian River Lagoon - South project involves redirecting water from the C-23 and C-24 canals, located in Martin and St. Lucie counties, to be stored in two new reservoirs and cleaned in treatment wetlands to improve water quality and water supply for the North Fork. These canals provide flood protection but by doing so also impact the greater ecosystem by draining into the St. Lucie Estuary and Indian River Lagoon.

The St. Lucie Estuary and Indian River Lagoon are home to more than 4,000 species, including 35 species listed as endangered or threatened, making it the most diverse estuarine environment in North America. The lagoon supports a multitude of industries and activities, from fishing and recreation to tourism and agriculture. A study concluded that the economic benefits of the Indian River Lagoon totaled more than \$3.7 billion in 2007 alone.

The North Fork water reservation is the second of its kind in Florida. The first water reservation for America’s Everglades was adopted for the protection of the Picayune Strand, Fakahatchee Estuary and related ecosystems and wildlife on Florida’s southwest coast for decades to come. Approved by the Governing Board in February 2009, the first water reservation allowed the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to continue construction on the Picayune Strand restoration project, which is designed to restore surface water flow to vital wetlands to ensure that plants and animals thrive, including the endangered Florida panther, and to improve the Ten Thousand Islands estuaries.

“We have made tremendous strides this year with our federal partners to obtain funding for and begin construction on CERP projects,” said SFWMD Executive Director Carol Ann Wehle. “The water reservation for the North Fork will help us protect a vital waterway and achieve substantial benefits for residents and the environment.”

A final public hearing is scheduled for the Governing Board meeting in February. For more information, please visit the [St. Lucie River Water Reservation](#) Web page.

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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.