



SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

NEWS RELEASE

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SFWMD Approves Investments to Improve Water Quality in Indian River Lagoon, St. Lucie Estuary

Team of local stakeholders recommended "turn-dirt" projects that provide timely results



(Click on pictures for larger versions.)

West Palm Beach, FL – The South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) Governing Board on Thursday took action to protect the Indian River Lagoon and St. Lucie Estuary by investing in water quality improvement projects recommended by a team of government and public stakeholders.

Known as the St. Lucie River Issues Team, the group represents 17 different federal, state and local governments, as well as agricultural and environmental organizations. The goal of the Issues Team is to prioritize and fund "turn-dirt" projects that provide immediate results toward improving water quality and ecosystem functions in the St. Lucie Estuary and Indian River Lagoon.

“This action for funding projects backs our commitment to improving water quality for the Indian River Lagoon, the St. Lucie Estuary and the residents and wildlife that depend on their health,” said SFWMD Governing Board member Kevin Powers. “We are as committed as ever to being good stewards of the environment and protecting these vital waterways to sustain our region and our way of life.”

In Thursday’s action, the Governing Board approved \$643,759 to help complete two projects in the City of Fort Pierce and the City of Port St. Lucie to clean stormwater runoff before it reaches the lagoon and the estuary.

In Fort Pierce, the District is investing \$465,118 with its partners at the Treasure Coast Resource Conservation and Development Council for a project to reduce the amount of sediment flowing to the Indian River Lagoon. The project will upgrade the Fort Pierce Farms Water Control District Canal 1, located between Keen Road and 25th Street. Project features include:

- Improving two miles of the 50-year-old canal, which has nearly vertical banks that are susceptible to erosion.
- Installing rip rap (large rocks) to stabilize the bottom of the canal bank.
- Installing textile fabric to hold sod to strengthen the top of the canal bank.

In Port St. Lucie, the District is building on prior investments (\$675,000 since 2005) with \$178,641 for its partners at the City of Port St. Lucie to continue a project to clean stormwater from older neighborhoods in the northwestern part of the city. Runoff from these subdivisions in the Gatlin Boulevard area flows through the city’s canals to the regional C-24 Canal and ultimately to the St. Lucie River and Estuary. The project involves:

- Removing exotic and nuisance vegetation.
- Re-grading canal banks.
- Upgrading stormwater system outfalls.
- Adding sod to strengthen canal banks.
- Improving flood control.

Limiting nutrients and sediment protects seagrasses, which serve as vital nurseries for more than 4,000 species, including 35 species listed as endangered or threatened. This abundance makes the estuary and lagoon the most diverse estuarine environment in North America. The lagoon itself also supports a multitude of industries and activities, from fishing and recreation to tourism and agriculture. A recent study concluded that the economic benefits of the Indian River Lagoon totaled more than \$3.7 billion in 2007 alone.

Both projects, designed to achieve timely and tangible results, were recommended by the St. Lucie River Issues Team. To date, the Issues Team has received more than \$63.7 million from the Florida Legislature, more than \$65.7 million from local partners and an

additional \$2 million from the federal government. The program has funded more than 114 individual projects, totaling more than \$131.4 million in Martin and St. Lucie counties.

Restoration efforts include:

- Restoring and preserving 9,029 acres of critical habitat, wetlands and environmentally sensitive lands.
- Removing 1,026,000 cubic yards of muck and sediment.
- Closing 120 Floridan aquifer wells.
- Constructing more than 3,844 acre-feet of water storage areas.
- Constructing stormwater retention and water quality treatment for 64,258 acres of developed land.
- Installing 163 baffle boxes, which trap sediment.
- Installing 38 water quality and quantity monitoring sites.
- Developing Best Management Practices (BMPs) and performance measures.

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About the South Florida Water Management District

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.