



SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

## NEWS RELEASE

June 18, 2010

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### **Construction Transforms Ranchland Into Wetland** *Stormwater Treatment Area will clean water flowing into Lake Okeechobee*



*(Click on the pictures for larger versions.)*

**West Palm Beach, FL** — The South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) today celebrated significant construction progress in the transformation of ranchland into the largest stormwater treatment wetland in the Lake Okeechobee watershed. The constructed wetland at the Martin-Okeechobee county line will improve water quality flowing into the lake and benefit the greater ecosystem.

“The construction progress I saw today on the Lakeside Ranch Stormwater Treatment Area brings us closer to achieving water quality improvements for Lake Okeechobee,” said SFWMD Governing Board member Joe Collins, who led a briefing at the site today. “A healthier lake has the ripple effect of benefiting the entire Everglades ecosystem.”

To date, construction is progressing on a 925-acre treatment wetland and a 250-cubic-foot-per-second (CFS) intake pump station on the northern part of the property. The stormwater treatment area (STA) project has achieved several additional construction milestones, including:

- Excavating 4.5 miles of canals and seepage ditches
- Building 3 miles of levees

- Planting 25 acres of sod on the levees
- Clearing 500 acres of land
- Constructing 5 water control structures
- Hauling 600,000 cubic yards, or 30,000 dump trucks full, of material

The work is part of the estimated \$31 million first phase of the Lakeside Ranch project, which is scheduled for completion in March 2012. The second phase will consist of a southern STA and second pump station to manage water levels in the rim canal in Lake Okeechobee during high water periods.

The 2,600-acre Lakeside Ranch project is a key component of the 2007 Northern Everglades & Estuaries Protection Program. The state-led 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.

“Treatment wetlands are among the most effective tools for improving water quality in America’s Everglades south of Lake Okeechobee,” said Ken Ammon, SFWMD Deputy Executive Director - Everglades Restoration and Capital Projects. “Building on proven STA performance, the Lakeside Ranch Stormwater Treatment Area should provide similar results north of the lake to help improve the overall health of the Northern Everglades.”

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.

Stormwater Treatment Areas are the water-cleaning workhorses of Everglades restoration, using plants to naturally remove phosphorus from water flowing into the fabled *River of Grass*. The District operates a network of six STAs south of Lake Okeechobee with a combined area of more than 52,000 acres. Since 1994, the treatment areas have retained more than 1,200 metric tons of total 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](http://www.sfwmd.gov/northerneverglades). For more information about water quality improvements in the Everglades, read [\*Just the Facts: Lakeside Ranch Stormwater Treatment Area\*](#).

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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.*