



SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

NEWS RELEASE

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CONTACT:

Randy Smith

South Florida Water Management District

Office: (561) 682-2800 or Cellular: (561) 389-3386

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Restoration Progress, Flood Control Maintained Without Raising Tax Rates

SFWMD staff to recommend efficiencies, no change in tax rate

West Palm Beach, FL — Financial staff at the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) will recommend to the Governing Board this week that ecosystem restoration and water management operations serving 7.5 million residents can continue forward without raising the agency's tax rates for residents from Orlando to the Keys.

"In uncertain economic times, the District must meet its responsibilities by operating as efficiently as possible," said SFWMD Assistant Executive Director Tom Olliff. "Through conservative fiscal and strategic planning, next year's budget will meet flood protection, water supply and environmental restoration goals while reducing the taxes paid by South Floridians."

If approved by the Governing Board at its public meeting on Thursday, the millage rate would become part of the proposed \$1.04 billion Fiscal Year 2011 budget (Oct. 1, 2010 – September 30, 2011) that will once again reflect a significant investment in the environment and a commitment to fiscal responsibility. The proposed budget is reviewed and finalized in September. The District tax rate has remained the same since Fiscal Year 1998.

Included in the proposed budget is a host of funded projects to benefit restoration and enhance flood control operations including:

- \$15.9 million for continued construction of the C-111 Spreader Canal to restore Florida Bay and the Everglades
- \$11.7 million for ongoing construction of the Lakeside Ranch Stormwater Treatment Area, which is transforming ranchland north of Lake Okeechobee into a wetland to remove phosphorus before it reaches the lake
- \$60 million for operations and maintenance of 2,600 miles of canals and levees

The proposed budget also reflects an approximately \$61 million reduction in property tax revenues, in comparison with the current year.

“The District consistently takes a fiscally conservative approach to budgeting, which enables the agency to meet its core functions – even during periods of economic downturns,” said SFWMD Budget Director Mike Smykowski. “A variety of cost-cutting measures over the years – constantly reassessing operating costs and proposed projects – ensure that every taxpayer dollar goes directly to support our mission.”

From Fiscal Year 2008 to Fiscal Year 2010, the District achieved more than \$10.8 million in savings by reducing costs for fleet management, training, travel, energy use and other operations.

The District’s annual budget is funded by a combination of ad valorem (*property*) taxes and other sources, such as federal, state and local revenue; licenses; permit fees; grants; agricultural taxes; investment income and bond proceeds.

The proposed tax rates represent 62.4 cents per thousand dollars of value in 15 of the District’s 16 counties (*the Okeechobee Basin*). For example, a home with a taxable value of \$200,000 (*assessed value of \$250,000, less the \$50,000 homestead exemption*) would see a total District tax bill of \$124.80. For Collier County and mainland Monroe County (*the Big Cypress Basin*), the tax rates represent 48.14 cents per thousand dollars. A similar home in this region would see a tax bill of \$96.28.

The District’s nine-member Governing Board will consider the staff’s recommendation on millage rates at its business meeting on Thursday, July 15. The meeting will be held at the District’s headquarters at 3301 Gun Club Road, West Palm Beach, FL 33406.

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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.