



SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

NEWS RELEASE

July 15, 2010

CONTACT:

Randy Smith

South Florida Water Management District

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

www.sfwmd.gov/news

follow us on 

EAA, C-139 Basin Each Better Everglades Water Quality Requirements *Improved farming techniques help agricultural areas meet phosphorus reduction goals*

West Palm Beach, FL – For the 15th consecutive year, water flowing from farmlands in the Everglades Agricultural Area (EAA) achieved phosphorus reductions that were better than the 25 percent reduction required by law. With the continued implementation of improved farming techniques known as Best Management Practices (BMPs), results for the 2010 monitoring period show a 41 percent phosphorus reduction in the 470,000-acre EAA farming region south of Lake Okeechobee.

The C-139 Basin also met its goal of reducing phosphorus discharges to below historic levels. Located west of the EAA, the 170,000-acre C-139 farming region consists primarily of pasture land, row crops, citrus and sugarcane. Results show 41.9 metric tons flowed through the basin during the 2010 monitoring period, well below the target load of 53.6 metric tons.

“These encouraging results are a measurable reflection of the commitment made by our region’s agricultural community to protecting and improving South Florida’s ecosystems,” said SFWMD Governing Board Chairman Eric Buermann. “While the District applauds this accomplishment, much more work lies ahead to ensure we consistently surpass our water quality requirements for the Everglades.”

Results from the 2010 annual monitoring period (May 1, 2009, to April 30, 2010) show phosphorus reductions were largely achieved through BMPs. In the EAA, the most commonly used BMPs are refined fertilizer application, precise stormwater pumping practices and erosion controls to reduce the amount of phosphorus discharge to the Everglades and connected water bodies. In the C-139 Basin, the District has worked with farmers in recent years to implement a stronger BMP program that addresses unique challenges to achieving phosphorus reductions in the basin.

Phosphorus can harm the Everglades ecosystem when stormwater runoff carries excess amounts into the protected wetlands. To meet the requirements of Florida’s Everglades Forever Act and a 1992 consent decree between the state and federal governments, the amount of phosphorus leaving the EAA must be 25 percent less than the amount before

phosphorus-reduction efforts started. Data show that a 41 percent phosphorus reduction was achieved for the 2010 monitoring period. The average reduction from the implementation of BMPs over the program's 15-year history is 53 percent, more than twice the amount required by law.

When measured in actual mass, 119 metric tons of phosphorus were prevented from entering the regional canal system, which sends water into the Everglades, during the 2010 monitoring period. Over the past 15 years, the BMP program has prevented 2,237 metric tons of phosphorus from leaving the EAA.

In the C-139 Basin, a BMP program has been in place for the past eight years with the goal of reducing phosphorus discharges below historic levels. The District uses a model to determine the target phosphorus load for the agricultural region each year based on rainfall totals. For the 2010 monitoring period, the target load was 53.6 metric tons. Data show the actual mass of phosphorus discharged from the basin during that time was 41.9 metric tons, or nearly 22 percent less than the target.

Together with best farming practices, water leaving the EAA receives additional treatment in one of several Stormwater Treatment Areas (STAs) before entering the Everglades. These SFWMD-constructed wetlands are filled with native vegetation and use "green" technology to further reduce phosphorus levels.

Since 1994, the network of six STAs south of Lake Okeechobee – with a combined area of more than 52,000 acres – have retained more than 1,400 metric tons of phosphorus that would have otherwise entered the Everglades. Through the end of April 2010, more than 3,500 metric tons of phosphorus have been prevented from entering the Everglades through treatment wetlands and the BMP program. Overall, Florida has invested more than \$1.8 billion to improve Everglades water quality since 1994.

The District is currently expanding several water quality improvement projects to further enhance its water cleaning efforts:

- Construction is under way to nearly double the size of STA-2 in western Palm Beach County to 15,140 acres. Known as Compartment B, the 6,817-acre expansion will help the STA achieve optimal performance.
- A 4,656-acre expansion of treatment wetlands in southeast Hendry County is also progressing to further improve water quality flowing into the Everglades. Construction of Compartment C, a \$47.5 million investment, will connect two existing Stormwater Treatment Areas (STA-5 and STA-6) in the EAA and more than double water treatment capability at the site.
- Renovation of STA-5 in Hendry County is enhancing plant growth and water movement through the treatment marsh. Recently, District crews moved nearly 170,000 cubic yards, or 8,500 truckloads, of soil in STA-5 over 32 days, filling deeper areas so that more vegetation can take root and improve the wetland's ability to remove phosphorus from Everglades-bound waters.

For more information on the SFWMD's water quality improvement initiatives, please see [*Just the Facts: Progress in Everglades Water Quality Improvements*](#). A multimedia look at how STAs work and what water quality improvements they have delivered can be found on the District's [Improving Water Quality website](#).

#

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.