



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

[www.sfwmd.gov/news](http://www.sfwmd.gov/news)

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### **Land Acquisitions Boost Southern CREW Restoration**

*SFWMD has secured 97 percent of land needed for the Southwest Florida project*

**West Palm Beach, FL** – The South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) Governing Board recently approved the purchase of another 5-acre parcel of land to help restore the Southern Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed (CREW). Combined with the approved acquisition of two larger tracts in September, the District has now secured nearly 97 percent of the more than 4,100 acres of strategic land needed for this important Southwest Florida environmental project.

“Acquisition of these lands, in increments large and small, marks a critical step forward for restoring this vital ecosystem,” said SFWMD Governing Board member Charles Dauray. “We are committed to working with Lee County, other agencies and the public to ensure the benefits of this significant environmental project are realized.”

The recently approved investment of \$75,000 for 5 acres east of Interstate 75 will add to the approximately 4,000 acres of land the District successfully acquired north of Bonita Beach Road and upstream of the Kehl Canal Weir. The earlier agreement, passed by the Governing Board in September, involved a total of 191 acres that will be purchased for \$3.83 million by November 30.

Both acquisitions will be paid for with funds provided by the Florida Legislature through the Florida Forever Trust Fund.

When completed, the restoration project will provide significant benefits to the Southwest Florida ecosystem, including:

- Restoring wetlands and the historic sheetflow of water
- Improving regional flood protection and drainage
- Increasing water storage and aquifer recharge capability

Water once flowed freely across the pristine landscape of what is now Bonita Springs in Lee County. Historic water sheetflow in the Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed was later blocked by dirt roads, agricultural ditches and several home sites. This altered the ecosystem and contributed to flooding in residential and other areas. Floods in 1995

led the District to develop the Southern CREW Restoration Project to restore the ecosystem while protecting area residents and their properties.

During the last 10 years, the District has acquired approximately 4,000 acres for this project, cleared exotic vegetation from 2,560 acres, removed roads and plugged agricultural ditches on 640 acres. As of October 2010, the District has invested \$27.4 million to conserve the lands, with the U.S. Department of the Interior contributing another \$7 million to the restoration effort.

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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.*