



SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

NEWS RELEASE

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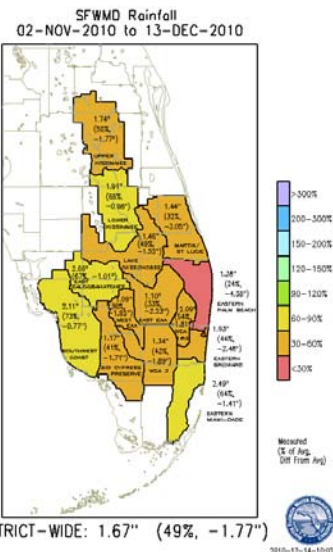
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DOF, SFWMD Urge Caution, Water Conservation During Fire Season *Extremely dry conditions enhance fire danger*



(Click on the pictures for larger versions)



West Palm Beach, FL — With extremely dry conditions already enveloping South Florida, the Florida Division of Forestry (DOF) and the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) are asking residents to help prevent fires and conserve water to see the region through the season.

“Below-average rainfall during the wet season, a record-dry start to the dry season and declining water levels present a formidable challenge to both water managers and state firefighters,” said Susan Sylvester, SFWMD Director of the Operations Control and Hydro Data Management Department. “These conditions mean we all must be conservative with our water use and be aware of the increased potential for wildfires.”

Residents living in or near brush or wooded areas should make their homes as safe as possible from the threat of wildfires. Homes and sheds should be surrounded by a buffer zone extending at least 30 feet. This area should be free of highly flammable vegetation and well maintained. Leaves, pine needles and twigs should be removed from roofs and gutters. Flammable materials such as wood, vehicles and propane tanks should not be stored next to the house.

Residents are also asked to follow year-round landscape irrigation measures now in place. Watering times by location are available at www.savewaterfl.com.

The coming year is predicted to be active for wildfires, and the DOF is currently listing several counties within the District as having an extreme or very high fire danger. More than 80 percent of fires from December to spring are caused by humans, with arson and embers from debris burning as the top two causes, according to the DOF. Children, campfires, equipment, railroads, power lines, fireworks and smoking can also cause fires. Residents are asked to help firefighters have a less active fire year by practicing good fire prevention techniques.

“This year is not the typical wildfire year. This year we did not receive enough tropical moisture in the summer months. In addition, the cold fronts are not bringing in substantial rain,” said Melissa Yunas, a DOF Wildfire Mitigation Specialist. “In most cases, the cold fronts are dry air masses that reduce the moisture in the grasses/fine fuels. Freezing temperatures kill the grasses/fine fuels, thus making the vegetation ripe for wildfires.”

This week, the DOF and Martin County Fire-Rescue saved 15 homes from a fire that was likely caused by power lines in Indiantown. Minor damage to a shed was the only report of damage. Forestry’s helicopter dropped 10 buckets of water at 350 gallons a bucket and utilized three bulldozers to contain the fire. This fire was west of the Indianwood subdivision where, two years ago, two homes were lost to a fire. To date this year, 2,680 wildfires have burned 29,045 acres across the state.

Following the driest October on record since 1932, forecasts call for drier-than-average weather to continue into the dry season with a strong La Niña. SFWMD meteorologists are reporting a 1.77-inch rainfall deficit across the District already this dry season. Eastern Palm Beach County has only received 24 percent of its average rainfall while the Southwest coast has received only 73 percent of its average rainfall. Lake Okeechobee’s level fell to 12.56 feet NGVD on December 15 from 13.30 feet NGVD a month ago.

“Remember – Only You Can Prevent Wildfires,” says Smokey Bear.

More information:

- [Florida Fire Danger Map](#)
- [Drought Index](#)
- [SFWMD Rainfall Map](#)

- [Residential Wildfire Safety Checklist](#)

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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.