



SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

NEWS RELEASE

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Youths Enjoy Outdoor Experience on Public Lands

Alligator hunt in Everglades water-cleaning wetland highlights recreation program



(Click on the picture for a larger version.)

West Palm Beach, FL — With local guides, fishing poles and their dads, five youths from around the state spent a recent weekend camping, hunting and learning about South Florida's unique Everglades environment on public lands.

As part of its efforts to expand recreation on these public lands, the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) opened Stormwater Treatment Area 2 (STA-2) in Palm Beach County for the special Youth Hunting Program of Florida outing, led by the Florida Sportsmen's Conservation Association.

Administered by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), the youth program teaches young Florida residents between 12 and 17 years old how to hunt safely, legally and ethically. Among its many goals, the program seeks to foster an appreciation for Florida's natural areas while emphasizing the need for conservation.

Participants learn these values through camping, outdoor and environmental education and other related activities, in addition to hunting.

The District supports the youth program by providing access to public lands it manages and related assistance, such as education about the Everglades and ecosystem restoration efforts. For example, the recent weekend hunt took place in STA-2, one of 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 1,400 metric tons of total phosphorus that would have otherwise entered the Everglades.

Earlier this year, the District also opened 3,400 acres in Okeechobee County to organized hunting activities for youth at the Grassy Island property.

The South Florida Water Management District provides a variety of recreational opportunities on the STAs while continuing to manage them to support environmental restoration, water supply, water quality and flood control missions. At present, the District actively manages 621,000 acres of public land. Many of these properties are in their natural state or have enhancements, such as picnic tables, informational kiosks, campsites and hiking trails.

For more information on recreational opportunities throughout the District's 16-county region, visit www.sfwmd.gov/recreation.

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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.