



SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

NEWS RELEASE

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South Florida Water Managers Take Steps to Increase Water Storage *Dispersed water projects provide a cost-effective method of keeping water on the landscape*



(Top) In early 2009, the Nine Gems property sat mostly dry. (Bottom) The District, in cooperation with Martin County, has since restored the land's hydrology to add 2,000 acre-feet of regional water storage.

West Palm Beach, FL — The South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) Governing Board this week approved eight cost-effective projects to increase water storage on ranches north of Lake Okeechobee while improving water quality for the Everglades as well as for the lake and coastal estuaries.

“The future of water storage north of Lake Okeechobee relies on innovative public-private partnerships and marks a milestone in our collective efforts to preserve both the Northern Everglades and our working landscapes for future generations,” said Florida Commissioner of Agriculture Adam Putnam. “This program is a progressive way of achieving our shared goals of environmental restoration and a healthy and sustainable agricultural economy.”

With a \$7 million investment over 10 years, the eight contracts will provide 4,800 acre-feet of water retention in the Northern Everglades to assist with meeting the storage

and water quality improvement goals for the watershed. Within six months, all of the projects will be fully operational and demonstrating these cost-effective water retention services.

“It is imperative that we work to get the water right in South Florida, which includes both ensuring an adequate water supply and improving water quality,” said Florida Department of Environmental Protection Secretary Herschel T. Vinyard Jr. “The projects approved by the South Florida Water Management District Governing Board will allow the district to collaborate with property owners to retain excess water on public, private and tribal lands to ensure a more reliable water supply for Florida’s future generations.”

The projects in Okeechobee, Highlands and Polk counties, along with the amount of water able to be retained, include:

- Alderman-Deloney Ranch: 147 acre-feet
- Buck Island Ranch: 1,573 acre-feet
- Dixie Ranch: 856 acre-feet
- Dixie West: 315 acre-feet
- Lightsey Cattle Company: 887 acre-feet
- Lost Oak Ranch: 374 acre-feet
- Triple A Ranch: 397 acre-feet
- Willaway Cattle & Sod: 229 acre-feet

Dispersed Water Management Program

Since the start of its Dispersed Water Management Program in 2005, the District has collaborated with a coalition of agencies, environmental organizations, ranchers and researchers to enhance opportunities for storing excess surface water on private, public and tribal lands. In addition to utilizing regional public projects, the program encourages property owners to retain water on their land rather than drain it and to accept and detain regional runoff.

“Storing large volumes of water north and south of Lake Okeechobee is one of the most significant water management challenges facing South Florida,” said SFWMD Executive Director Melissa Meeker. “Assembling a collection of shallow, on-site retention projects

Benefits:

- *Reduces excess water flowing into Lake Okeechobee during the wet season*
- *Reduces the amount of water discharged to the coastal estuaries for flood protection*
- *Provides valuable groundwater recharge for water supply*
- *Improves water quality and rehydration of drained systems*
- *Enhances plant and wildlife habitat*
- *Helps sustain the local economy*

By the numbers:

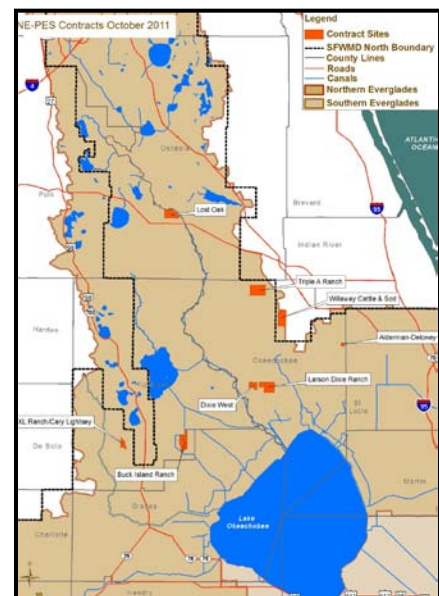
- *Through a combination of public and private projects, 131,500 acre-feet of water retention/storage has been made available to date*
- *To date, the District has collaborated with more than 100 participating landowners*
- *The ultimate goal for the program is to provide 450,000 acre-feet of retention/storage throughout the Northern Everglades watershed*
- *450,000 acre-feet of additional storage equates to approximately 1 foot of water off of Lake Okeechobee*

– that work in conjunction with planned regional reservoirs – sustains local economies and helps to meet the State’s Everglades restoration goals.”

To expand the effort following the pilot Florida Ranchlands Environmental Services Project (FRESP), the District issued a solicitation in January 2011 aimed at ranch owners in the Northern Everglades region. A total of 14 proposals were evaluated and ranked in response to the competitive solicitation. The eight approved projects were determined through a Governing Board-approved negotiation process.

The selected ranchers will receive financial assistance in making the best use of existing infrastructure and/or developing new, simple infrastructure that will increase water and nutrient retention capabilities. All projects will be monitored under an agreement with the World Wildlife Fund to document that the contracts, known as Payment for Environmental Services (PES), are meeting the water retention goals.

“The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Florida, a supporter and contributor to the Northern Everglades – Payment for Environmental Services (NE-PES) initiative from the beginning, is excited and proud to be a part of one of the nation’s largest market-based payment for environmental services programs,” said Carlos Suarez, state conservationist for the United States Department of Agriculture’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). “We anticipate that the NE-PES program will contribute toward sustaining cattle ranching as an important industry throughout the region, maintaining important wildlife habitats, improving wetlands and keeping working lands working.”



Click on the graphic for a map of the projects.

The Dispersed Water Management Program Northern Everglades – Payment for Environmental Services is being implemented in coordination with the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS), Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) and the NRCS, World Wildlife Fund and UF/IFAS.

For more information:

- [Just the Facts: Dispersed Water Management Program](#)
- [List of the FY2012 Projects: Northern Everglades](#)
- [Northern Everglades and Estuaries Protection Program](#)
- [Florida Ranchlands Environmental Services Project](#)

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.