



SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

# NEWS RELEASE



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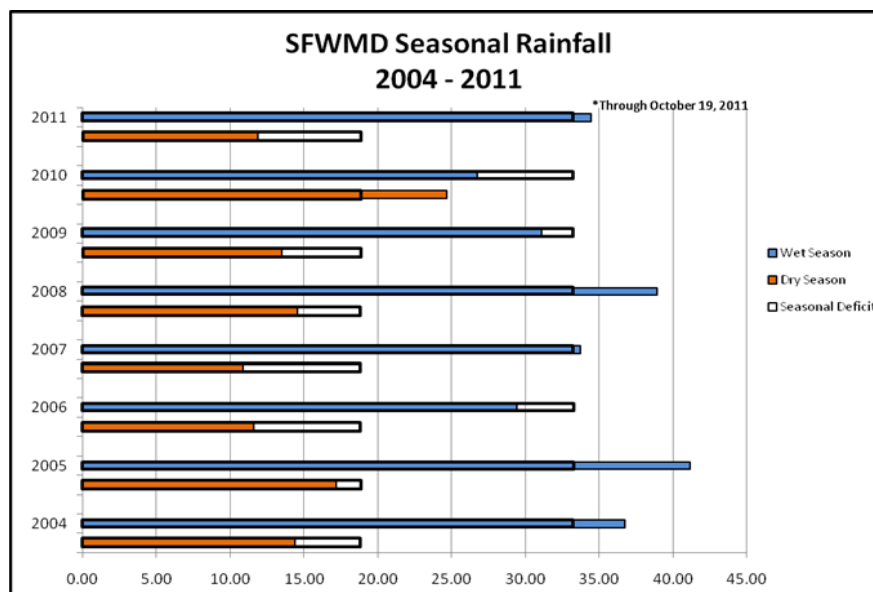
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[www.sfwmd.gov/news](http://www.sfwmd.gov/news)

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## Official Forecast for Upcoming Dry Season: Below-Average Rainfall

*SFWMD: water conservation remains crucial*



*(Click on the graphic for a larger version.)*

**West Palm Beach, FL** – Despite recent storms that replenished water levels from Orlando to the Florida Keys, the climate forecast for below-average rainfall means the region may still face water shortage conditions during the upcoming dry season, the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) and the National Weather Service (NWS) announced during a joint briefing today. Water conservation remains a crucial measure to guide South Florida through the 2011-2012 dry season.

For the second dry season in a row, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Climate Prediction Center is forecasting La Niña conditions to influence weather patterns across the country, including South Florida, from December through February. This colder-than-normal ocean surface temperature in the equatorial Pacific drives dry weather across South Florida.

"Our perennial challenge is to accomplish the District's core missions of flood control and water supply given these complex weather patterns," said Susan Sylvester, SFWMD Chief of the Water Control Operations Bureau. "One constant is that the District will continue to follow dry-season protocols and work with local communities and our federal partners to manage the water in the regional system as effectively as possible."

Water conservation is the most efficient and cost-effective way to stretch the regional water supply in preparation for the dry season. As a result, landscape irrigation restrictions remain in place throughout the District's 16-county region.

Predictions of below-average rainfall follow a slightly above-average 2011 South Florida wet season. An average of 34.49 inches of rain fell between June 1 and October 20, representing 107 percent of the average amount for this period.

However, Lake Okeechobee, the 730-square mile backup water supply for South Florida and a barometer of conditions for the entire region, remains below its historical average. The lake is at 12.63 feet NGVD today. The historical average for this date is 15.06 feet NGVD. Water managers expect the lake will remain in its water shortage management zone in the upcoming months.

This is because La Niña-influenced dry seasons often produce only about two-thirds of the average amount of rainfall during this period. The NWS is calling for a greater than 70 percent likelihood of a drier-than-normal November to April. These conditions also threaten to create a potentially severe wildfire season.

"This would be the second year of a multi-year La Niña. Second year La Niñas are often extremely dry," said Robert Molleda, warning coordination meteorologist for the National Weather Service. "Previous La Niña events during the last 60 years have resulted in average dry season rainfall amounts of about 60 to 65 percent of normal across South Florida."

***Just the Facts:***  
*South Florida's Dry Season*

- *November – May*
- *About 18 inches of rain is the average*
- *May and October are important transition months*
- *March, April and May have the highest evaporation rates and lowest rainfall*

The La Niña years of 1951, 1956, 1975 and 2000 were all among the driest calendar years on record.

Among the official forecast highlights:

- High likelihood of below-average precipitation for South Florida during winter-spring, with near-normal temperatures expected
- Drought conditions probable to return to South Florida sometime this coming winter or spring
- Average dry season precipitation: 12 to 15 inches in the interior/west to 15 to 21 inches in the east
- Average winter temperature: 64 to 66 F in the interior/west to 67 to 69 F in the east
- Less “storminess” due to winter storm tracks staying farther north in La Niña patterns, thereby decreasing severe weather potential
- Freezing temperatures possible sometime in early winter period (Dec. or Jan.), with a possible trend toward warmer conditions in February and beyond

A 2011 late-season tropical storm is still a possibility that could significantly impact rainfall amounts.

### **South Florida’s Weather Roller Coaster – Highlights of the Past Three Years**

Forecasts of a drier-than-normal dry season once again showcase South Florida’s weather extremes and water management challenges.

- **Normal:** Florida receives an average of 52 inches of rainfall a year, with 70 percent falling during the five-month wet season from approximately June through October.
- **Slightly above Normal:** The 2011 wet season has so far produced slightly above average rainfall. Two non-tropical storms brought high rainfall totals to several areas of the District in October in a stark contrast to the record dry October 2010.
- **Record Dry Conditions:** The 2010-2011 dry season saw one of its latest starts in 20 years. October 2010 was the driest October on record in South Florida since 1932. The drought continued, with the driest October-to-mid-June period on record.
- **Drier than Normal:** The 2010 wet season produced an approximately 4-inch rainfall deficit.
- **Wetter than Normal:** The 2009-2010 dry season recorded 131 percent of average dry season rainfall, representing 5.88 inches above normal from the beginning of November through the end of May.
- **Record Wet Conditions:** In 2009, the sea breeze cycle ushered in the wet season in May. With 9.04 inches of rain falling across the District, May 2009 became the wettest May on record, according to District records dating back to 1932.

- **Record Dry Conditions:** November 2008 through April 2009 marked the driest six-month period in South Florida, according to District records dating back to 1932.

### **Water Conservation Remains Key**

The SFWMD continues to closely monitor water levels and is urging residents and businesses to conserve water and follow landscape irrigation restrictions in effect. More information about irrigation restrictions by area is available on the District's water restrictions website. For water-saving tips, visit [www.savewaterfl.com](http://www.savewaterfl.com).

### **For more information:**

- [SFWMD Weather/Rainfall Data](#)
- [National Weather Service Dry Season Forecast](#)
- [Climate Prediction Center FAQ on La Niña](#)
- [Climate Prediction Center Precipitation Forecast](#)

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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.*