



SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

## NEWS RELEASE

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### **SFWMD Extends Key Science Monitoring Programs** *Oyster bed, seagrass habitat and groundwater efforts support restoration*



*Monitoring programs include seagrasses as seen in the northern most reaches of Florida Bay (left) and oysters as seen in a research project in the Loxahatchee River (right). Click on the pictures for larger versions.*

**West Palm Beach, FL** – The South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) Governing Board took action today to extend for several years scientific monitoring in support of the agency’s core missions of water quality improvement and restoration of South Florida’s natural systems, including the Everglades.

“Strategic investments in monitoring are essential to continued progress in Everglades restoration,” said SFWMD Governing Board Chairman Joe Collins. “These projects support the agency’s mission-specific priorities for restoration and will provide valuable data for future decision making.”

Among the science work extended by the Governing Board is a 3 ½-year agreement with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) for continued oyster monitoring in the St. Lucie River Estuary, the Loxahatchee River Estuary and the Lake Worth Lagoon. This work will help advance understanding about the health of South Florida’s coastal estuaries as it relates to Everglades restoration.

Providing important habitat for numerous organisms, oyster beds are indicators of a healthy estuary and a key performance measure used to help assess the success of the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP). Additionally, data from this monitoring program supports real-time management of Lake Okeechobee, the St. Lucie River Watershed Protection Plan and the Loxahatchee River Watershed Restoration Project.

<b>SFWMD Annual Scientific Monitoring</b>	
<b>\$250 million invested in the past 6 years</b>	
<b>Monitoring Stations</b>	<b>2,000</b>
<b>Laboratory Tests</b>	<b>300,000</b>
<b>Water Flow Sensors</b>	<b>4,500</b>
<b>Everglades Monitoring Sites</b>	<b>500+</b>

Information on the location, quantity and health of oyster reefs in the estuaries and the lagoon will also help quantify the future success of the C-44 Reservoir and Stormwater Treatment Area in Martin County. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers marked the start of work on this key CERP project in October.

Four aspects of oyster ecology are being monitored:

- Spatial and size distribution patterns of settled oysters
- Distribution and frequency patterns of oyster disease
- Reproduction and recruitment
- Juvenile oyster growth and survival

### **Seagrasses Essential to Fish Habitat, Estuary Health**

Along with monitoring oyster beds, the Governing Board extended for nearly four years another key science program to study seagrass habitat, which is considered the most important indicator of the status of Florida’s southern estuaries. The presence of healthy seagrass cover is central to maintain and restore fish populations and water quality.

One of the restoration goals of CERP is to improve the species diversity and aerial extent of seagrass communities. The cooperative agreement with the FWC’s Fish and Wildlife Research Institute supports a comprehensive seagrass monitoring program, known as the Fish Habitat Assessment Program. The program is designed to effectively assess whether this CERP goal is being met, documenting the status and trends of seagrass distribution and abundance.

The Fish Habitat Assessment Program is closely coordinated to complement other monitoring within the southern estuaries, including nearshore northeast Florida Bay monitoring by the Miami-Dade County Department of Environmental Resources Management.

Both the oyster bed and seagrass programs are part of RECOVER, an interagency, interdisciplinary team sponsored by the District and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The role of RECOVER is to organize and apply scientific and technical information in ways that are most effective in supporting the objectives of CERP and to ensure that the effort's goals and purposes are achieved.

### **Groundwater Monitoring**

Separately, the Governing Board approved the continuation of a nearly 60-year water monitoring partnership between the District and the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS). Monitoring support provided by USGS assists the District's efforts in assessing groundwater availability changes in flow trends due to structural changes in the system and their impact on water quality issues.

The monitoring work includes the collection of monthly and continuous data from approximately 49 surface water stations, five evapotranspiration stations and groundwater level data from 149 groundwater stations. The data are archived in the USGS's national database and provided to the District.

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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.*