



SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

NEWS RELEASE

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Weed-Eating Fish Keep Flood Control Canals Clear *Grass carp are effective biocontrols of invasive aquatic plants*

 [Audio Interview Available](#)



Grass carp leave a tanker truck through a chute (left) to help keep a canal clear of non-native hydrilla (right). (Click on the pictures for larger versions.)

Fort Lauderdale, FL – More than 11,000 fish slid down a chute and into the North New River Canal this week in a continuing South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) effort to use environmentally friendly biocontrols that keep flood control canals clear of invasive weeds.

“Managing 1,600 miles of flood control canals requires a specialized and ongoing maintenance program to ensure they operate as designed to protect South Florida’s residents,” said SFWMD Director of Operations, Maintenance and Construction Division Tommy Strowd. “The fish are a natural means to maintain some of the canals and achieve our flood control mission.”

The carp, which are farm-raised in Arkansas, serve as highly effective biological controls by eating aquatic vegetation including hydrilla, a rapidly growing invasive plant. Overgrowth of these plants slows water flow and can clog SFWMD structures in canals that must be kept clear for flood control purposes.

Dense hydrilla growth also lowers dissolved oxygen concentrations that are critical to aquatic life. In addition, the invasive plant acts as a breeding ground for mosquitoes and can hamper recreational activities such as boating and fishing, according to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), a District partner in the grass carp management effort.

Utilizing the hungry fish to keep canals clear significantly reduces or eliminates the need for specially approved herbicides or labor-intensive mechanical means such as a tow boat.

Over a two-year timeframe, about 59,000 fish are being introduced to canals in Miami-Dade and Broward counties. The grass carp are stocked in strategic canal locations so they cannot enter natural areas, even though the fish are sterile and do not reproduce. Since 2007, the District has invested close to \$300,000 in the grass carp program.

Residents also play a role in protecting South Florida's environment from invasive species. One of the primary methods that invasive species, both plant and animal, end up in the natural environment is when they are thrown out or released by people who no longer want them. For example, emptying a tropical aquarium full of live but non-native aquatic plants can have serious consequences for the environment.

For more information, SFWMD Senior Scientist Mike Bodle discusses invasive plants and the District's management efforts.  [Audio Interview](#)

Additional information on the District's efforts to control exotic invasive species is available at www.sfwmd.gov.

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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.



FISH FACTS

- Grass carp are used throughout Florida and other states for vegetation control in canals and golf course ponds.
- The SFWMD began stocking canals with grass carp in 1987.
- The fish are certified triploid (sterile) by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.
- Because they are sterile and do not reproduce, the fish need to be restocked annually.
- Their favorite plant to eat is the non-native hydrilla.