



SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

## NEWS RELEASE

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### **Restoration Reviving Collier County's Lake Trafford**

*Wildlife, water quality continue to improve a year after major restoration effort*



*Aquatic vegetation such as **Vallisneria** and bulrush are experiencing a dramatic recovery, providing important habitat for the lake's wildlife. (Click on the pictures for larger versions.)*

**West Palm Beach, FL** — Aquatic plants are experiencing a dramatic recovery to provide important and expansive habitat for wildlife. Largemouth bass are reproducing. And wildlife is thriving on the 1,600-acre Lake Trafford in Southwest Florida.

A year after the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) and its partners completed a major restoration effort on the popular lake in Collier County, scientists are reporting burgeoning signs of success. Monitoring efforts have identified numerous improvements, including:

- Aquatic plants such as *Vallisneria*, bulrush, lilies and lotus are flourishing.
- Plankton populations, at the base of the food chain, are stabilizing.
- Visibility has nearly doubled from less than 6 inches to about 1 foot.
- Wildlife such as black crappie and alligators are thriving.
- Anglers are catching 10-inch, robust largemouth bass.

“The most exciting part of a restoration project is actually seeing recovery of the ecosystem,” said SFWMD Governing Board member and Big Cypress Basin Board Chairman Daniel DeLisi. “Flourishing wildlife, along with improved water quality and clarity, are the result of significant investment in Lake Trafford. This beautiful lake is an important part of the greater Everglades as well as a recreation destination and an

economic engine for our area.”

One of the most successful components of the lake’s restoration has been the planting and subsequent recovery of submerged aquatic vegetation. Well-established aquatic plants prevent sediments from clouding the water and blocking sunlight, which is vital to plant growth. Plants also provide the primary habitat for fish and invertebrates, critical components in the food chain for wildlife such as wading birds.

Restoration of Lake Trafford will continue with activities to maintain its health, including:

- Re-establishing native submerged aquatic vegetation, such as *Vallisneria*, through plantings
- Monitoring the long-term health of the lake using water quality parameters such as dissolved oxygen, environmental indicators and the recovery of native fish communities
- Promoting additional studies to develop best management practices to control nutrient runoff and minimize growth of invasive aquatic vegetation

**With an investment of approximately \$21.4 million, the District achieved a host of restoration goals for Lake Trafford, including:**

- **Removing 3 feet of muck from the lake bottom during 2004–2007**
- **Removing 2 feet of muck from the nearshore areas during 2009–2010**
- **Restoring native fisheries**
- **Developing a Watershed Protection Plan to reduce nutrients**

## **Background**

Lake Trafford is a shallow lake, marking the headwaters of the Corkscrew Swamp and the Imperial and Cocohatchee River watersheds, along with the Camp Keais Strand and the Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge watershed that drains into the Ten Thousand Islands. Lake Trafford is the largest natural lake south of Lake Okeechobee in South Florida, serving as an important ecotourism resource for recreational boating and fishing.

At one time, the lake was sand bottomed. However, nutrient runoff in the watershed resulted in a shift from native aquatic vegetation to dense mats of hydrilla, an invasive exotic plant. The Hydrilla that remains in the lake today is being successfully controlled using herbicides to prevent the accumulation of dead plant material on the lake bottom and the release of excess nutrients, which in the past triggered algal blooms and impacted prime habitat for native fish species.

The District began the first phase of dredging Lake Trafford in 2004, with a focus on its center, completing the project two years later. A second muck-removal effort began in November 2006 for the nearshore area and, after being temporarily suspended due to

drought conditions in 2007, was recently completed. The District has invested \$21.4 million to restore the lake over the last eight years.

Restoration of Lake Trafford was achieved by local citizens, public agencies and private organizations working together to restore this resource. The project was initiated by the Immokalee Chamber of Commerce. A Lake Trafford Task Force was formed, jointly sponsored by the Big Cypress Basin of the South Florida Water Management District and Collier County, with support from the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Environmental interest organizations, such as the Audubon Society and the Conservancy of Southwest Florida, also have supported the project. Florida Gulf Coast University has been a restoration partner in monitoring and vegetation planting activities.

For more information:

- [Quick Facts: Lake Trafford Restoration](#)
- [Everglades Restoration](#)

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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.*