SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

NEWS RELEASE

October 11, 2012

CONTACT:
Gabe Margasak
South Florida Water Management District
Office: (561) 682-2800 or Cellular: (561) 670-1245

www.sfwmd.gov/news
follow us on twitter

SFWMD Takes Action to Store Water Headed to Caloosahatchee Estuary

Emergency storage being configured on restoration project site

West Palm Beach, FL — With Lake Okeechobee's water level rising from above-average rainfall and discharges from the lake increasing for flood control and protection of the Herbert Hoover Dike, the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) is taking emergency steps to capture water from the Caloosahatchee River to reduce freshwater impacts on the downstream estuary. The water will be stored at the site of the C-43 West Basin Reservoir, a future Everglades restoration project.

District engineers identified part of the 11,000-acre project site in Hendry County with capability for creating emergency shallow water storage. Clewiston Field Station crews are set to install two, 42-inch temporary pumps capable of moving 300 cubic feet per second from a tributary of the river. Existing infrastructure on the property, plus pumping coordination with the LaBelle private drainage district, will allow for up to 2 feet of water to be stored on 3,500 acres—potentially up to 2 billion gallons of storage. District staff is working with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to expedite the necessary permit and protect existing wetlands on the site.

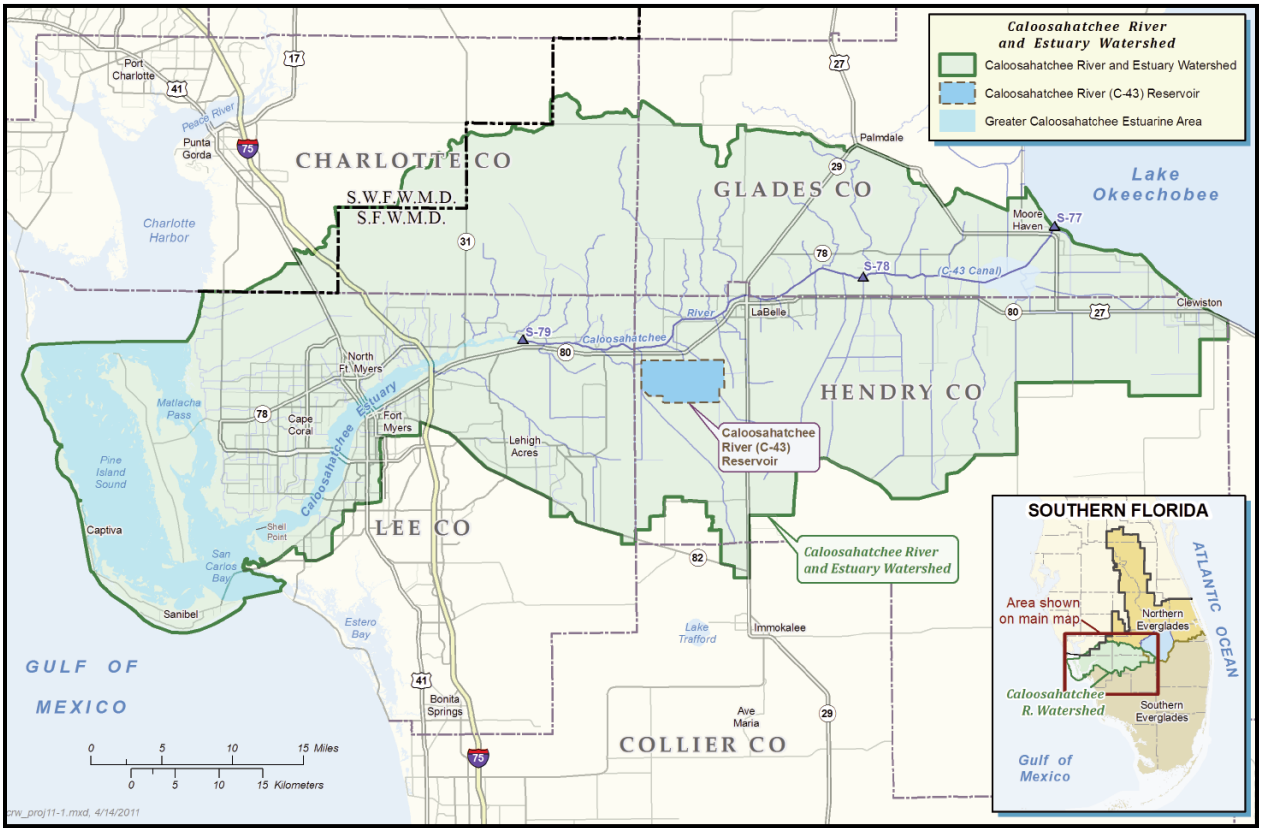
"Increasing water storage is a constant challenge that requires creative ideas and innovative engineering solutions," said SFWMD Governing Board Chairman Joe Collins. "With a rapid rise in the lake from Tropical Storm Isaac and weeks of additional rainfall, this opportunity to capture and store lake discharges will provide some relief for the Caloosahatchee. Every bit of storage helps."

Since 2005, the District has been working with a coalition of agencies, environmental organizations, ranchers and researchers to enhance opportunities for storing excess surface water on private, tribal and public lands. Managing water on these lands, known as dispersed water management, is one tool to reduce the amount of water delivered during the wet season into the lake and discharged to coastal estuaries for flood protection. Shallow water retention also provides valuable groundwater recharge for water supply, opportunities for water quality improvement and rehydration of drained systems.

The C-43 West Basin Reservoir, located on former farmland west of LaBelle, is a key project in the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan. When the restoration project is complete, the reservoir will hold approximately 170,000 acre-feet of water, with maximum depths ranging from 15 feet to 25 feet across the expanse. The restoration project will provide storage needed for the estuary by capturing and storing local basin runoff as well as Lake Okeechobee regulatory releases. This will reduce lake discharges reaching the estuary, improve the health of the Caloosahatchee ecosystem and revitalize fish and oyster habitats by reducing the frequency of undesirable salinity ranges. Releases of water from the reservoir during the dry season will provide essential flows, resulting in improved salinity balance, survival of young fish and shellfish and improved ecological health.

Lake Okeechobee's water level rose quickly during Tropical Storm Isaac and has gained about 3.7 feet since the event in late August. With subsequent wet season rainfall, the lake level today is 15.92 feet NGVD. Consistent with its operations protocols for this water level, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is currently discharging water from the lake at a rate of approximately 4,000 cubic feet per second to the Caloosahatchee River.

For more information, click on the map below:



# # #

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.