



SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

## OPINION

November 30, 2011

### **Water Management Districts: Intact, on Task and Spending Wisely**

Myths and misinformation continue to swirl around Florida's water management districts and their ability to do their job with lower revenues and smaller organizations. In South Florida, unfounded concerns have been expressed about the future of Everglades restoration, the capacity of our District scientists and the erosion of our regulatory authority. The facts can alleviate these unwarranted fears.

Fact 1. The establishment of Florida's five water management districts is firmly rooted in statute. In Florida, water is a public resource. The districts were specifically created by the Water Resources Act in 1972 to manage and protect the state's waters on behalf of our citizens. For four decades we have fulfilled our responsibilities of managing water supply, water quality, flood protection and natural systems in the public interest through a solid regulatory framework, governing boards appointed by the Governor and state oversight through the Department of Environmental Protection. This framework has not changed.

Fact 2. The South Florida Water Management District is indeed building a leaner, more efficient agency by eliminating unnecessary expenses and getting back to its core mission. In doing so, we are saving South Floridians \$128 million through a 30-percent tax reduction, the majority of which was realized by cutting overhead and administrative costs. This is welcomed news for taxpayers who expect cost-effective services, government transparency and accountability in spending.

Fact 3. The District continues to be a dynamic agency, providing more than 1,600 jobs across the region. Close to half of these jobs are dedicated to operating South Florida's massive flood control system. To support water resource protection and environmental restoration, more than 25 percent of our workforce holds Ph.D. or Master degrees, and we have more than 150 certified professional engineers and geologists on staff. This highly qualified, capable and competent workforce is focused on efficiently achieving the agency's water management responsibilities.

Fact 4. The District's \$576.1 million budget is being used to deliver tangible, meaningful results. For fiscal year 2012, more than 70 percent of the budget will go toward flood control and restoring the South Florida ecosystem. With a combined investment of more than \$850 million in 2011 and 2012, we will be completing construction on a half dozen restoration projects. And over the next five years, the District will use financial reserves

to invest another \$350 million toward developing and protecting the water resources of this state and to improving the Everglades, Lake Okeechobee and the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee watersheds.

Fact 5. Our appointed Governing Board is highly engaged and actively guiding the agency's work. Representing diverse South Florida interests, these volunteers have oversight of District activities and provide policy direction on all issues, including regulatory functions. The District continues to scrutinize permit applications to ensure water resource protection, and we share with the Florida Department of Environmental Protection the objective of improved statewide consistency while recognizing our regional diversity. There is no effort to weaken our standards.

These facts do not represent the actions of a disabled water management district. Just the opposite. They are the actions of a government agency true to its founding principles, clearly focused on its mission, streamlined in its internal operations and delivering efficient and cost-effective water resource management.

*Joe Collins, Chairman  
South Florida Water Management District Governing Board*