

August 2013

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## Chairman's Message

### **Daniel O'Keefe, Governing Board Chairman**



With an exceptionally wet rainy season this year, the Governing Board took action in August to continue moving forward with projects that will increase water storage, protect water quality and redirect flows south toward the Everglades.

The Central Everglades Planning Project (CEPP) is part of this effort. As local sponsor for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' initiative for projects that will send more water south, the South Florida Water Management District has received frequent project updates and extensive public input.

This month, the Governing Board unanimously supported the Corps' release of the draft CEPP Project Implementation Report for public and agency review. While there is more work to be done, the District remains engaged on this important restoration effort.

Because of the heavy rains this season, Lake Okeechobee releases increased into our east and west coast estuaries, causing environmental impacts. The District continues to assist the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in its water management decisions for the lake, which include protecting the Herbert Hoover Dike while maximizing flows south when possible. A "full system" across most of South Florida, especially in the Water Conservation Areas (WCAs), has made this challenging.

Fortunately, comparatively drier conditions this month have given water managers the opportunity to reduce levels in the WCAs and move water south. The drier conditions also have allowed the Corps to reduce the volume of lake releases to the east and west.

In conjunction with these efforts, increasing storage options continues to be a District priority. The Board this month voted to expand the Dispersed Water Management Program to include the first water farming project on citrus lands. An initial three-year pilot project will pump water onto 450 acres along the St. Lucie Canal in Martin County, helping to relieve some of the flows into the estuary.

This partnership has already reaped immediate benefits, as the private landowner, Caulkins Citrus Company, has been pumping water onto the property on an emergency basis. King Ranch similarly has been pumping and holding excess water. Reimbursed only for their cost of fuel for pumping, these private landowners have helped the District address one of this year's most challenging water management issues.

On an organizational note, the Board approved the contract that brings Blake Guillory aboard as the South Florida Water Management District's next executive director. Blake is completing his tenure as executive director at the Southwest Florida Water Management District and will be joining us on September 5. We look forward to bringing his superb knowledge, experience and leadership to South Florida.

[Top of Page](#)

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## Central Everglades Planning Project Moves Forward

### **SFWMD Governing Board supports next steps in a key Everglades restoration plan**

The South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) Governing Board voted unanimously on Aug. 15 to move forward the Central Everglades Planning Project (CEPP) by supporting the release of a draft report for public and agency review by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.



This step signals the District's continued partnership with the Corps in developing plans for key restoration projects that will direct more water south into the heart of the Everglades. The action was the first formal vote by the SFWMD as the local sponsor of this planning effort.

"This is one of many steps, but it is an important one that comes after extensive public participation and technical work," said SFWMD Governing Board Chair Daniel O'Keefe. "We continue to make progress with CEPP, which is a reflection of the ongoing commitment between the Corps and District to restore the Everglades."

The Governing Board's vote on CEPP is part of the federal process to deliver a technically sound plan, known as a Project Implementation Report, for a suite of restoration projects in the central Everglades to prepare for congressional authorization as required under the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP). The vote supported the release of the draft Project Implementation Report for public and agency review.

"Our shared commitment to completing a final report as expeditiously as possible is evident by the milestone we have reached today," said Col. Alan Dodd, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Jacksonville District Commander. "I would like to applaud the District and our dedicated partners and stakeholders for remaining engaged and flexible in the planning process. Thanks to your dedicated efforts, we now have a draft report that can be released to the public for review."

The Corps is scheduled to officially publish the draft on Aug. 30 through a federal process for public review.

CEPP is part of the long-term solution for moving water south away from the northern coastal estuaries and into the heart of the Everglades and Everglades National Park. When this project is completed, approximately 210,000 acre-feet of water on an average annual basis will be captured and directed south where it can provide ecological benefits.

The SFWMD is fully integrated in the technical process of the planning effort, which is led by the Corps.

For more information on the plan, visit [www.evergladesplan.org](http://www.evergladesplan.org).

[Top of Page](#)

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## SFWMD Water Farming Pilot Project to Benefit St. Lucie Estuary

### ***Project goals include reducing flow to the estuary by increasing water storage on land***



As part of the broad effort to restore and protect the St. Lucie River and Estuary, the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) has approved a water farming pilot project to store excess water on fallow citrus land before it can flow to the estuary.

"Working with local landowners to identify property for water storage is an integral part of our strategy to address high flows into the estuaries," said SFWMD Governing Board Chair Daniel O'Keefe. "This pilot project on citrus land highlights the District's expanded efforts to implement near-term solutions that make a difference."

Under the pilot program, Caulkins Citrus Company will pump water onto 450 acres of its property located along the St. Lucie Canal in Martin County. This can capture an average of 6,780 acre-feet of water a year that would otherwise flow along the canal from Lake Okeechobee and surrounding basins into the St. Lucie River and Estuary.

The three-year pilot project will provide vital information on the proposed concept of retaining storm water on citrus properties.

With Lake Okeechobee's water levels high from months of above-average rainfall, the private landowner on this project is already pumping water onto the property on an emergency basis under an agreement with the District. To date, approximately 200 acre-feet of water have been diverted from the watershed that drains to the St. Lucie Estuary.

### **Pilot Project Background**

The District issued a request for water farming pilot project proposals in April in close coordination with several partner agencies including:

- Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
- Florida Department of Environmental Protection
- U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service

Five proposals were evaluated and ranked. Caulkins Citrus Company, the first ranked respondent, came to an agreement with the District, which will invest approximately \$1.2 million in the project, or about \$76 per acre-foot per year of storage.

### **SFWMD Dispersed Water Management Program**

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 and public lands.

Managing water on these lands, known as the Dispersed Water Management Program, is one tool to reduce the amount of water flowing during the wet season into the lake and discharged to coastal estuaries for flood protection. Private ranchlands in this program currently provide a storage volume of more than 60,000 acre-feet.

Shallow water retention also provides groundwater recharge for water supply, potential for water quality improvements and rehydration of drained ecosystems.

The program encourages property owners to retain water on their land rather than drain it, accept and detain regional runoff or do both.

For more information on the District's water storage efforts, visit [www.sfwmd.gov/storage](http://www.sfwmd.gov/storage).

[Top of Page](#)

## **SFWMD Takes Action to Store Water Headed to Caloosahatchee Estuary**

### ***Emergency operation at restoration site is part of a broad effort to store water***



With Lake Okeechobee's water level high from months of above-average rainfall, the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) is again taking emergency action to capture water from the Caloosahatchee River to reduce freshwater impacts on the downstream estuary.

"Creating storage to capture flows from the rapidly rising lake is crucial to the health of the Caloosahatchee River and Estuary," said SFWMD Governing Board member Mitch Hutchcraft, who represents the Southwest Coast at large. "Every acre we can identify and utilize to hold water benefits the river, the estuary and the system as a whole."

As part of the District's sustained effort to identify opportunities for storage, water will be pumped onto the site of the Caloosahatchee River (C-43) West Basin Storage Reservoir, a future Everglades restoration project in Hendry County. Emergency operations will occur as the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers continues discharging water from the lake to the river for

flood control and protection of the Herbert Hoover Dike.

This site was identified and successfully utilized in 2012 for the same purpose. Building on that effort, the District has continued to store water, which would have otherwise flowed to the estuary, on the property.

All necessary permits and authorizations have been obtained from partners such as the Corps, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection and Hendry County to pump additional water onto 3,500 acres at the site as conditions allow. Overall capacity to capture flows from the river is dependent on how much rain falls in the immediate area.

The District was successful in pumping 9,000 acre-feet of water onto the site following heavy rainfall from Tropical Storm Isaac in 2012. District engineers designed the emergency project, which was accomplished by Clewiston Field Station crews installing two 42-inch temporary pumps that could move 300 cubic feet per second (cfs) from a tributary of the river.

Existing infrastructure on the property, plus pumping coordination with the LaBelle Private Drainage District, allowed the water to be pumped into the area during the operation from Oct. 13, 2012, through Nov. 29, 2012.

### **C-43 Background**

The Caloosahatchee River (C-43) West Storage Basin Reservoir, located on former farmland west of LaBelle, is a key project in the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP). 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.

### **SFWMD Dispersed Water Management Program**

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[Top of Page](#)

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## **July Rainfall Helps Produce Wettest Start to Wet Season Since '68**

### ***All counties in the SFWMD experienced above-average rain for the month***



July's soaking of South Florida capped the wettest start to the wet season since 1968 and the wettest April-through-July period on record, South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) meteorologists reported. August, however, has provided some respite from the above-average rainfall of the previous four months.

District-wide, 10.36 inches of rain fell in July, representing 147 percent of average, or 3.33 inches above average. All 16 counties in the District saw above-average rainfall for the month, with the central portion of South Florida, including Lake Okeechobee, receiving the highest totals.

Early wet season rainfall topped recorded amounts, including:

- Wettest July since 2001
- Wettest June since 2005
- Combination of late May through July led to the wettest start to the wet season since 1968, or the wettest in 45 years
- Wettest April-through-July period on record in South Florida since 1932

Since August began, rainfall across the region has eased. Through Aug. 27, 5.17 inches of rain have fallen District-wide, which is 76 percent of average, or 1.61 inches below average.

### **Water Levels**

Following several months of above-average rainfall, water levels are currently at or above scheduled levels in key areas, such as some lakes in the Kissimmee region and the Everglades Water Conservation Areas. With the decline in rainfall in August, however, water levels are beginning to drop closer to preferred wet season targets.

Lake Okeechobee stood at 15.56 feet NGVD on Aug. 28. This is 1.4 feet higher than its historic average for this date. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which manages the lake level with input from stakeholders including the District, has been making regulatory releases.

### **South Florida Wet Season Facts**

- On average, South Florida's wet season begins around May 20 and ends around October 13, lasting for about 21 weeks.
- Typically, about two-thirds of annual rains fall during the wet season, or approximately 35 inches out of 52 inches.
- June is usually South Florida's wettest month.
- Since 1932, virtually all wet seasons have produced 2 to 4 feet of rainfall.
- South Florida's wet season has three general phases:

- o Memorial Day weekend through July 4 weekend, which are typically the wettest six weeks of the year.
- o Early July through mid-August, which are hotter and often drier.
- o Late August through October, which are characterized by highly variable rainfall mainly due to tropical activity and cold fronts.

[Top of Page](#)

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## Big Cypress Basin Board Recognizes Efforts to 'Keep Collier Beautiful'

### *Volunteers adopt canals to help keep local waterways clear of debris*



Keep Collier Beautiful Inc. and its teams of volunteers were recently recognized by the South Florida Water Management District's (SFWMD) Big Cypress Basin Board for their ongoing efforts to improve the cleanliness and beauty of canals within the Big Cypress Basin.

Local volunteers — ranging from high school students to commercial businesses — have adopted close to 17 miles of Big Cypress Basin canal banks and have removed approximately 8,895 pounds of debris in the last year. At the Aug. 22 Basin board meeting, the nine groups that participate in the program were formally recognized. Their efforts are also commemorated with a signpost next to the section of canal they adopted. The groups commit to hosting a clean-up along the canal bank up to four times a year.

"We appreciate the effort to keep our canals clean, which helps us maintain the canals for the purpose of flood control and also beautifies our community," said Rick Barber, Big Cypress Basin Board Chairman and SFWMD Governing Board member. "By removing debris from canals, the volunteers make a real difference in the community."

Keep Collier Beautiful, an affiliate of Keep America Beautiful Inc., is a non-profit public education organization dedicated to improving waste handling practices in Collier County.

In addition to trash and debris, unusual items such as lawn furniture, fire extinguishers, buckets, coolers, furniture and grocery carts have also been removed.

For more information on the Big Cypress Basin and the Big Cypress Basin Board, visit [www.sfwmd.gov/bcb](http://www.sfwmd.gov/bcb).

[Top of Page](#)

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