

September 2013

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Chairman's Message

Daniel O'Keefe, Governing Board Chairman



In addition to the Governing Board's regular business meeting in September, it held two public hearings for approval of the District's budget for the upcoming fiscal year.

Aligned with the agency's core mission, more than 80 percent of the approved \$622.2 million budget for FY2014 is dedicated to restoration and water management operations. Among the key features of the budget is \$251 million to restore the Everglades ecosystem, improve Lake Okeechobee and protect the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee estuaries. In addition, the budget includes \$261 million to operate and maintain South Florida's regional flood control system and stormwater treatment areas, including \$50 million for refurbishment of flood control infrastructure. Our focus on efficiency is also reaping benefits. While accomplishing these core tasks, this is the third year in a row that District millage rates have been reduced.

The Board received an update this month on a project to upgrade a section of the East Coast Protective Levee, part of South Florida's flood control system. The construction work, completed ahead of schedule, successfully strengthened a 38-mile levee section in Broward County. This also allows the structure to meet criteria for new flood mapping in the county by the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

Although summer has officially ended on the calendar, there is still another month or so remaining in South Florida's wet season. With the region averaging more than 32 inches of rain since June, District staff have worked tirelessly to identify sites to store excess water and minimize impacts on the environment, especially the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee estuaries. The District's Dispersed Water Management projects as well as emergency storage sites continue to capture and hold some of our abundant summer rainfall. A recent \$1.5 million grant from the Florida Department of Environmental Protection is providing an additional boost to further expand these efforts.

On a final note, the Board welcomed Blake Guillory this month at his first Governing Board meeting as the agency's new Executive Director. We also thanked Ernie Barnett, Assistant Executive Director, for his service as Interim Executive Director through an extremely busy, productive and rainy summer. These experienced leaders are an asset to the District, and the Board appreciates their service on behalf of South Florida's citizens and water resources.

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SFWMD 2014 Budget Supports Restoration, Flood Control

More than 80 percent of the budget is invested in environment, operations, maintenance

At a public hearing on Sept. 24, the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) Governing Board adopted a \$622.2 million budget for Fiscal Year 2014 (*Oct. 1, 2013 - Sept. 30, 2014*). The annual budget funds the agency's core flood control and water supply missions as well as its continued progress to restore the South Florida ecosystem, which includes America's Everglades.

"This budget provides the means to continue implementing projects that improve Everglades water quality and use new state funding to send water south and help maximize storage to benefit the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee estuaries," said SFWMD Governing Board Chairman Daniel O'Keefe. "In a reflection of our continued commitment to fiscal responsibility, District millage rates have been reduced for the third year in a row."



More than 80 percent of the District's FY2014 budget is dedicated to flood control operations and restoration:

- \$261 million to operate and maintain South Florida's regional flood control system and Stormwater Treatment Areas (STAs), including \$50 million toward refurbishment of the primary network of canals, levees, structures and pump stations.
- \$251 million to restore the Everglades ecosystem, improve Lake Okeechobee and protect the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee estuaries.

Everglades Ecosystem

The approved \$622.2 million budget contains a significant investment in South Florida's environment, including \$67 million appropriated by the Florida Legislature this year to help move key Everglades projects forward. The spending plan also includes \$101.6 million to implement the next phases of the governor's \$880 million Restoration Strategies plan to improve the quality of water flowing into the Everglades, including:

- \$72.4 million to enhance and expand water treatment facilities and construct more than 100,000 acre-feet of water storage.
- \$17.5 million to increase water treatment capacity at STA-1 West.
- \$2.4 million to construct additional conveyance features.
- \$9.3 million for implementing a comprehensive science plan to optimize STA performance; modeling to plan operations of new STAs and storage basins; and additional source controls.

St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee Estuaries

Following record wet season rainfall, the budget invests in projects to benefit South Florida's coastal estuaries, including:

- \$8.5 million to implement water quality treatment and storage projects in the Caloosahatchee watershed.
- \$29 million to support construction of the Indian River Lagoon-South C-44 (St. Lucie) Reservoir and to take the lead on the Stormwater Treatment Area component.
- \$9.4 million to expand public-private partnerships with landowners to hold water on their property and increase regional water storage to benefit the environment.
- \$2.7 million in legislative funding to move more water south.

The FY2014 budget includes \$196 million from accumulated reserves primarily to implement critical water resource projects to improve water storage and water quality in the northern and southern Everglades.

The District's annual budget is funded by a combination of ad valorem (property) taxes and other revenues such as state and federal sources, licenses and fees, agricultural taxes, balances and investment income. About 43 percent of the total FY2014 budget comes from property taxes.

The approved millage rates for FY2014 represent \$41.10 per \$100,000 of taxable value in 15 of the District's 16 counties (the Okeechobee Basin). In Collier County and mainland Monroe County (the Big Cypress Basin), the tax rates represent \$32.78 per \$100,000 of taxable value.

For more information, see:

- [Just the Facts: FY2014 Budget](#)
- [Governor Rick Scott's Letter of Approval](#)

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SFWMD Completes Work to Strengthen Protective Levee in Broward

Reinforcement work meets federal standards for levee certification



The South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) has completed work to strengthen the 38-mile portion of the East Coast Protective Levee in western Broward County.

"These upgrades build on 60 years of effective flood protection from the levee, ensuring it continues to operate as designed for many more years to come," said Tommy Strowd, SFWMD Assistant Executive Director of Operations, Maintenance and Construction. "The work will also meet Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) certification criteria, which may benefit residents and businesses during the federal flood map update process."

The District's \$18 million investment in work on the Broward portion of the levee, which stretches in total for 105 miles along South Florida's east coast, included:

- Reinforcing banks to better protect against erosion and seepage
- Grading and restoring the top of the levee
- Strategically stockpiling material for emergencies
- Building access ramps for future maintenance work

With construction complete, the SFWMD will submit detailed engineering reports to FEMA, which is expected to accept the documentation as proof the levee meets its standards.

Background

The District has actively maintained South Florida's extensive network of earthen levees since they were constructed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in the 1950s and 1960s. The agency continues to make significant investments in improvements and routine maintenance of the levees, including those that border some of the region's most populated areas.

Annual inspections conducted jointly by the District and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers consistently indicate the East Coast Protective Levee is performing as intended. Over the years, the District has made improvements to address maintenance items identified by regular inspections.

Along with the regular assessments, a pair of federal evaluations recommended further improvements. In 2007, the Corps initiated a nationwide inventory and inspection of federally sponsored levee systems, including the East Coast Protective Levee.

Separately, Broward County requested the District provide documentation to FEMA on its 38-mile portion of the East Coast Protective Levee for a routine update of National Flood Insurance Program maps. Current maps recognize the Broward section as an accredited levee that provides protection from a flood with a 1 percent chance of occurring in any given year.

For more information, see:

- [Just the Facts: Maintenance of South Florida's Levee System \[PDF\]](#)
- [Just the Facts: Accreditation of Broward Portion of East Coast Protective Levee \[PDF\]](#)
- [New Flood Zone Maps for Broward County \(County website\)](#)

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SFWMD Cuts Gap in Old Tamiami Trail to Improve Water Flow

The channel will help achieve healthier water levels for Everglades ecosystem



To help relieve critically high water levels impacting South Florida, the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) deployed heavy equipment in early September to excavate a flood control channel through the Old Tamiami Trail.

The emergency project will move additional water south from Water Conservation Area 3 (WCA-3) in Miami-Dade and Broward counties, where months of above-average regional rainfall have raised water levels and forced wildlife such as deer onto levees and tree islands.

"The Tamiami Trail channel project is one of several efforts the District is undertaking on an emergency basis to help relieve high water levels," said Tommy Strowd, SFWMD Assistant Executive Director of Operations, Maintenance and Construction. "We will continue to look for additional short-term solutions that will provide the most benefit as fast as possible."

Water levels in the 921-square-mile Water Conservation Area 3 have remained high following the wettest April-through-July period on record in South Florida since 1932. Water flow south out of WCA-3 is constrained by several factors, including the barrier

created by remnants of the Old Tamiami Trail, which ran from Miami to Naples.

By cutting a 35-foot gap in the old roadway about 30 miles west of Miami, District crews from the Okeechobee and Miami field stations were able to open a flow-way capable of moving approximately 800 to 1,000 cubic feet per second (cfs) of water from WCA-3 into the L-67 Extension Canal. This canal moves water into Everglades National Park, creating a previously unavailable option for moving water south.

The project will work in conjunction with federal and state efforts to bridge portions of the Tamiami Trail to increase water flows to the south. The District is evaluating additional sites to create further flows south from the Water Conservation Areas.

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SFWMD Completes First Phase of Comprehensive Land Assessment

97 percent of acreage reviewed will remain in current use to support core mission



As part of an ongoing effort to maximize resources toward its mission-critical responsibilities, the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) has completed the first phase of a comprehensive assessment of its public lands.

This phase was a review of the District's nearly 750,000 acres of fee-owned lands — properties in which the agency has full or shared ownership rights. More than 97 percent of the acreage evaluated across five geographic regions was determined to directly support the District's core mission: balancing and improving water quality, flood control, natural systems and water supply. The majority of fee-owned lands were recommended to remain in SFWMD ownership in their current uses.

"Completion of this comprehensive effort provides a thorough assessment of the District's land resources," said SFWMD Governing Board Chairman Daniel O'Keefe. "With significant input from the general public and local stakeholders, the Board is now able to make well-informed decisions that best direct our resources toward District priorities."

Approximately 3 percent, or 21,000 acres, of lands that do not directly support the core mission were identified for possible exchange or surplus. Following guidelines from the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), the District will evaluate swapping these properties for more needed lands as well as considering them for potential sale. As evaluations are completed, final recommendations on exchange or surplus will be presented to the Governing Board for approval before action is taken.

Further analysis is also being carried out on three properties: the Munger Tract in Orange County, Pal-Mar in Martin and Palm Beach counties and Bird Drive Basin in Miami-Dade County. Due to a variety of assessment challenges, SFWMD staff identified the need for further, in-depth research on these sites.

Public Process and Next Steps

Launched in January, the land assessment was designed to thoroughly analyze each property to determine how its current use contributes to the agency's core mission. Throughout an extensive public process, the District has remained committed to transparency and has actively encouraged public and stakeholder participation. Outreach efforts included:

- Utilizing a dedicated web page (www.sfwmd.gov/landassessment) to post more than 600 pages of land profiles, staff recommendations for each of the five regions, presentations from public meetings and a variety of other documents
- Receiving nearly 1,500 public and stakeholder comments and more than 400 responses from SFWMD subject matter experts
- Holding 12 regional public workshops throughout the assessment process at various locations around South Florida
- Providing the Water Resources Advisory Commission (WRAC) and Governing Board with regular updates at their monthly public meetings

With the fee-owned phase of the land assessment complete, a comprehensive review of 700,000 acres of non-fee-owned lands is scheduled to start during the next fiscal year. Most non-fee-owned lands are properties in which the District has conservation or flowage easements. Reassessments of all District lands will be conducted as needed.

More information on the SFWMD land assessment process, including final staff recommendations by region, is available at www.sfwmd.gov/landassessment.

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SFWMD Welcomes New Executive Director Blake C. Guillory

Professional engineer also led the Southwest Florida Water Management District



With 26 years of water resource experience in the public and private sectors, Blake C. Guillory began work on Sept. 5 as the Executive Director of the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD).

"Managing water resources for millions of South Floridians and the famed *River of Grass* requires a rare set of skills and knowledge," said SFWMD Governing Board Chairman Daniel O'Keefe. "Blake has the right experience and qualifications to get the job done, and we look forward to his leadership."

As head of the state's largest water management agency, Guillory will lead the District in carrying out its mission to balance and improve water quality, flood control, natural systems and water supply across a region that encompasses 7.9 million people in 16 counties.

This vast area from Orlando to the Florida Keys includes some of Florida's most treasured natural areas such as the Everglades, Biscayne Bay, Florida Bay, the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee rivers and estuaries and Big Cypress National Preserve.

Among the director's duties are several mission-critical priorities, including:

- Maintaining one of the largest flood control systems in the world
- Expanding water storage and restoring more natural flows to the Everglades
- Implementing landmark restoration strategies to improve water quality
- Working with utilities and stakeholders on long-term water supply plans

Background

Guillory, a registered professional engineer, joined the SFWMD following two years as executive director of the Southwest Florida Water Management District, headquartered in Brooksville.

Prior to his public service, Guillory was vice president for Brown and Caldwell, a national consulting firm providing water supply, wastewater, stormwater, infrastructure and environmental science expertise. He also served as vice president and water resources division manager for PBS&J, now Atkins North America.

Guillory holds the designation of Diplomate, Water Resources Engineer (D. WRE) from the American Academy of Water Resources Engineers and is a member of several professional organizations, including:

- Florida Stormwater Association
- Florida Floodplain Managers Association
- Florida Engineering Society
- Florida Water Environment Association
- American Water Works Association
- American Water Resources Association
- American Society of Civil Engineers

His degrees include a Bachelor of Science from Texas A&M University, along with both a Master of Civil Engineering and a Master of Business Administration from the University of South Florida.

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New Volunteers Join SFWMD Water Resources Advisory Commission

Diverse group of stakeholders advises policy makers on key water issues

Adding to a diverse group of public voices from across South and Central Florida, 12 new volunteers have been appointed to the South Florida Water Management District's (SFWMD) Water Resources Advisory Commission, known as WRAC. Representing organizations ranging from Audubon of Florida to the Florida Association of Counties, the new members participated in their first two meetings in August in Jensen Beach and September in West Palm Beach.

Consisting of 42 members, WRAC was established more than a decade ago to enhance stakeholder and public input to the SFWMD Governing Board on a wide range of water



resource topics. Each of the nine Governing Board members makes two appointments representing sectors that include business, agriculture, the environment, local government and water utilities. To ensure balanced representation across these sectors, the SFWMD Board chairman makes additional "balancing" appointments, which were unanimously ratified by the full Board at its August meeting. Federal government and tribal

representatives also serve on WRAC.

"Public participation is one of the hallmarks of our approach in managing and protecting South Florida's water resources," said Timothy Sargent, SFWMD Governing Board member and WRAC Chairman. "WRAC provides a vital forum for civic involvement and helps the Board address complex issues that touch the lives of 7.9 million residents and the environment."

With discussion topics ranging from Everglades restoration and health of the estuaries to regional water supplies and recreation on public lands, WRAC members provide ideas, insights and recommendations that are incorporated into the Governing Board's monthly public meeting discussions. Special WRAC issues workshops on topics such as the Central Everglades Planning Project and water supply plans are held as needed.

WRAC is also an advisory body to the South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force. This federally sponsored taskforce was established by Congress in 1996 to bring together top policy makers working on restoring the Everglades ecosystem.

SFWMD Governing Board members serve as WRAC leaders. Timothy Sargent currently serves as WRAC chairman; Kevin Powers is vice chairman. The commission meets once a month and holds special meetings as necessary.

For more information on WRAC, including a complete list of members, visit www.sfwmd.gov/wrac.

New Members:

Environmental Sector

1. Erin Deady, Erin L. Deady, P.A.
2. Jane Graham, Audubon of Florida
3. Nancy Payton, Florida Wildlife Federation
4. Jenny Conner Nelms, The Nature Conservancy

Business Sector

5. Josh Kellam, The ESG Companies
6. Lance Bennett, Poulos and Bennett, LLC

Local Government Sector

7. Deena Reppen, Florida Association of Counties
8. Karson Turner, Chairman, Hendry County Commission

Agriculture Sector

9. Tom Jones, Barron Collier Partnership

Utility/Water Supply Sector

10. Brian Wheeler, Toho Water Authority
11. Pam Keyes, Lee County Utilities

Public Interest Sector

12. Adam Gelber, Atkins North America

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Bird-Watching, Photography Tours Take Flight in Martin County

SFWMD, Audubon of Martin County partner to feature wildlife, restoration



The South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) is partnering with Audubon of Martin County to host birders and photographers on tours at a wetland that cleans water before it enters Lake Okeechobee.

The partnership expands on similar programs in Hendry and Palm Beach counties to offer bird watchers access to District wetlands where more than 200 different avian species have been spotted.

On Sept. 21, District and Audubon wildlife experts led the inaugural tour at the 2,600-acre Lakeside Ranch Stormwater Treatment Area (STA) in western Martin County. These wetlands are the water-cleaning workhorses of Everglades restoration, using aquatic plants to remove excess nutrients from water flowing into the natural system.

Each year, a vast array of bird species travel through South Florida and the District's network of STAs during the winter migration. The first tour at Lakeside Ranch STA was planned to feature:

- A guided drive around water impoundment areas
- Stops for viewing with scopes, plus information from tour leaders about the birds and their behaviors
- Possibility of sighting white pelicans, short-tailed hawks, burrowing owls and endangered Everglade snail kites
- Viewing of two established eagle nests

Birding tours at Lakeside Ranch STA are free and planned through April 2014. [Click here for the full schedule and sign-up information.](#)

Bird Tour Partnerships

The District now supports three free, organized tour programs at its water-cleaning wetlands:

- **STA-5 (Hendry County)** – The District's first organized bird-watching program began in 2005 with a partnership with the Hendry-Glades Audubon Society. To date, Audubon volunteers, in coordination with the District, have served more than 5,100 bird watchers and photographers from across the globe on 135 individual tours at the site. [Click here for the current schedule.](#)
- **STA-1 East (Palm Beach County)** – In January 2012, the District partnered with the Audubon Society of the Everglades to host tours at STA-1 East in western Palm Beach County. To date, Audubon volunteers have hosted approximately 400 visitors on 20 tours. [Click here for the current schedule.](#)
- **Lakeside Ranch STA (Martin County)** – Beginning in this month, tours at the site will feature diverse wildlife for viewing and photography. A number of tours will be specifically designed each year for photographers. [Click here for the current schedule.](#)

Lakeside Ranch STA

This treatment wetland uses aquatic vegetation to remove nutrients from stormwater runoff in the Taylor Creek/Nubbin Slough basins before it reaches Lake Okeechobee.

The District operates a network of five STAs south of Lake Okeechobee with an effective treatment area of 57,000 acres. Since 1994, the treatment areas have retained more than 1,707 metric tons of total phosphorus that would have otherwise entered the Everglades.

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