



SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

NEWS RELEASE

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South Florida Water Managers Take Steps to Increase Water Storage *Dispersed water projects provide a cost-effective method of keeping water on the landscape*



(Top) In early 2009, the Nine Gems property sat mostly dry. (Bottom) The District, in cooperation with Martin County, has since restored the land's hydrology to add 2,000 acre-feet of regional water storage.

West Palm Beach, FL — The South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) Governing Board today approved eight cost-effective projects to increase water storage on ranches north of Lake Okeechobee while improving water quality for the Everglades as well as for the lake and coastal estuaries.

“Storing large volumes of water north and south of Lake Okeechobee is one of the most significant water management challenges facing South Florida,” said SFWMD Executive Director Melissa Meeker. “Assembling a collection of shallow, on-site retention projects — that work in conjunction with planned regional reservoirs — sustains local economies and helps to meet the State’s Everglades restoration goals.”

With a \$7 million investment over 10 years, the eight contracts will provide 4,800 acre-feet of water retention in the Northern Everglades to assist with meeting the storage and water quality improvement goals for the watershed. All of the projects will be fully

operational within six months and demonstrating these cost-effective water retention services.

The projects in Okeechobee, Highlands and Polk counties, along with the amount of water able to be retained, include:

- Alderman-Deloney Ranch: 147 acre-feet
- Buck Island Ranch: 1,573 acre-feet
- Dixie Ranch: 856 acre-feet
- Dixie West: 315 acre-feet
- Lightsey Cattle Company: 887 acre-feet
- Lost Oak Ranch: 374 acre-feet
- Triple A Ranch: 397 acre-feet
- Willaway Cattle & Sod: 229 acre-feet

Dispersed Water Management Program

Since the start of the District's Dispersed Water Management Program in 2005, the District has collaborated with a coalition of agencies, environmental organizations, ranchers and researchers to enhance opportunities for storing excess surface water on private, public and tribal lands. In addition to utilizing regional public projects, the program encourages property owners to retain water on their land rather than drain it and to accept and detain regional runoff.

To expand the effort following the pilot Florida Ranchlands Environmental Services Project (FRESP), the District issued a solicitation in January 2011 aimed at ranch owners in the Northern Everglades region. A total of 14 proposals were evaluated and ranked in response to the competitive solicitation. The eight approved projects were determined through a Governing Board-approved negotiation process.

The selected ranchers will receive financial assistance in making the best use of existing infrastructure and/or developing new, simple infrastructure that will increase water and nutrient retention capabilities. All projects will be monitored under an agreement with the World Wildlife Fund to

Benefits:

- *Reduces excess water flowing into Lake Okeechobee during the wet season*
- *Reduces the amount of water discharged to the coastal estuaries for flood protection*
- *Provides valuable groundwater recharge for water supply*
- *Improves water quality and rehydration of drained systems*
- *Enhances plant and wildlife habitat*
- *Helps sustain the local economy*

By the numbers:

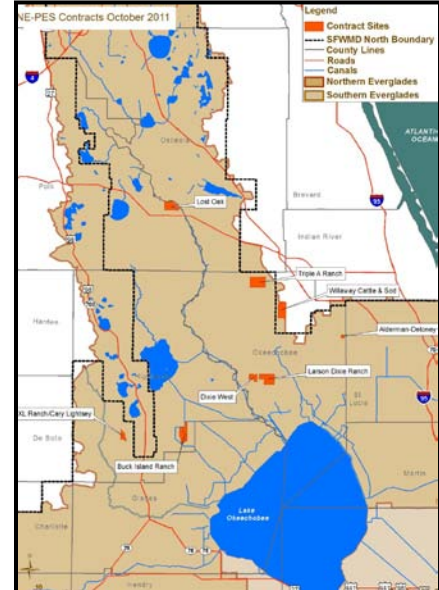
- *Through a combination of public and private projects, 131,500 acre-feet of water retention/storage has been made available to date*
- *To date, the District has collaborated with more than 100 participating landowners*
- *The ultimate goal for the program is to provide 450,000 acre-feet of retention/storage throughout the Northern Everglades watershed*
- *450,000 acre-feet of additional storage equates to approximately 1 foot of water off of Lake Okeechobee*

document that the contracts, known as Payment for Environmental Services, are meeting the water retention goals.

The Dispersed Water Management Program Northern Everglades Payment for Environmental Services is being implemented in coordination with the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS), Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) and the United States Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), World Wildlife Fund and UF/IFAS.

For more information:

- Fact sheet on the [Dispersed Water Management Program](#).
- A list of the FY2012 Projects: Northern Everglades.
- [Northern Everglades and Estuaries Protection Program](#)
- [Florida Ranchlands Environmental Services Project](#)



Click on the graphic for a map of the projects.

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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.