



SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT
3301 Gun Club Road, West Palm Beach, FL 33406

NEWS RELEASE

August 26, 2008

CONTACT:

Randy Smith

West Palm Beach

Office: (561) 682-6197; Cell: (561) 389-3386

EAA Achieves 13th Year of Better-than-Required Phosphorus Reductions to Improve Everglades Water Quality

C-139 Basin meets phosphorus reduction targets for first time

West Palm Beach—Water flowing out of the Everglades Agricultural Area (EAA) achieved a 13th year of successful phosphorus reductions with the continued implementation of improved farming techniques known as Best Management Practices (BMPs). Results for the 2008 monitoring period show that phosphorus reductions in the EAA, a 500,000-acre farming region south of Lake Okeechobee, were reduced by 44 percent, exceeding the 25-percent reduction required by law.

“These results reflect the commitment of our region’s agricultural community to protecting and improving South Florida’s environment,” said Eric Buermann, SFWMD Governing Board Chair. “Thirteen years of continually besting the 25-percent requirement is a track record that speaks for itself.”

The C-139 Basin, which has had a BMP program in place for six years, achieved compliance with phosphorus reduction goals for the first time. The 170,000-acre agricultural basin includes improved pasture and row crops mixed with citrus and sugarcane. The District has been working with growers to identify the most effective BMPs for this region.

Phosphorus can harm the Everglades ecosystem when stormwater runoff carries excess amounts into the protected wetlands. To meet the requirements of Florida’s Everglades Forever Act, the amount of phosphorus leaving the EAA must be 25 percent less than before phosphorus-reduction efforts started. Data for the 2008 annual monitoring period—May 1, 2007 through April 30, 2008—show that a 44-percent phosphorus reduction was achieved this year. The average reduction from the implementation of BMPs over the program's 13-year history is 50 percent, twice the amount required by law.

When measured in actual mass, 73.3 metric tons of phosphorus were prevented from entering the regional canal system, which sends water into the Everglades. Over the past 13 years, the BMP program has kept 1,840 metric tons of phosphorus out of the Everglades.

Phosphorus reductions were largely achieved through Best Management Practices, or BMPs. BMPs are improved ways of farming, ranching, landscaping, irrigating and managing animal waste—all with the goal of reducing environmental harm. In these areas, the most commonly used BMPs are improved fertilizer application, improved stormwater pumping practices or detention impoundments, and erosion controls to prevent runoff of phosphorus-laden soils.

Together with best farming practices, water leaving the EAA and C-139 Basin receive additional treatment in one of several Stormwater Treatment Areas (STAs) before entering the Everglades. These constructed wetlands are filled with native vegetation and use “green” technology to further reduce phosphorus levels. To date, the District has converted more than 52,000 acres of land south of Lake Okeechobee to STAs, yielding 45,000 acres of treatment wetlands. Another 12,000 acres will be added and are now being designed as part of the District’s effort to improve Everglades water quality. Through treatment wetlands and the BMP program, more than 2,848 metric tons of phosphorus have been prevented from entering the Everglades.

###

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.