

August 2008



just the FACTs

This fact sheet is provided as a reference to encourage a greater understanding of the various issues related to managing water in South Florida.

MEDIA QUESTIONS

Randy Smith
Media Relations
(561) 682-6197

Progress in Everglades Water Quality Improvements

Twenty years ago, the United States filed suit in federal district court compelling the State of Florida and the South Florida Water Management District to implement and enforce state water laws to protect Everglades National Park and the Arthur R. Marshall Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge. Three years later, the State and federal government entered into a Settlement Agreement, which was approved by the Court and sets out an adaptive, comprehensive plan for controlling and reducing phosphorus.

Achieving the Requirements of the Federal Settlement Agreement

- Florida has invested more than \$1.8 billion to improve water quality in the Everglades and has made significant and well-documented progress.
- For almost a decade (since February 1999), phosphorus levels have continued a significant downward trend within the interior marsh of the Arthur R. Marshall Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge, based on 14 monitoring sites.
 - Since September 2004, the District has met both the interim and long-term phosphorus levels at the monitoring sites in the Refuge.
 - For 2008, the average phosphorus level at the 14 monitoring sites has been 7.7 parts per billion (ppb).
- In Everglades National Park, the District has been in full compliance with the phosphorus requirements since they went into effect.

Investments that Improve Everglades Water Quality

- Treatment wetlands, known as Stormwater Treatment Areas (STAs), are key to the District's success in improving Everglades water quality. They use "green technology" to remove excess phosphorus from water flowing into the Everglades.
- More than 52,000 acres of land south of Lake Okeechobee have been converted to STAs, yielding 45,000 acres of constructed treatment areas.
 - This includes construction of 5,270 acres of additional wetlands completed in December 2006 as part of an effort to expand the STAs by 18,000 acres.
 - The additional 12,000 acres of wetlands are now being designed.
- Since inception, the STAs have retained more than 1,000 metric tons of phosphorus that would have otherwise entered the Everglades.
- Despite severe impacts to the STAs from the 2004-2005 hurricane season, a combination of rehabilitation and optimization activities – aided by low rainfall levels during the 2007-2008 water shortage – returned STA vegetation and water quality conditions to "pre-hurricane" condition.
 - The District successfully completed a \$3 million rehabilitation of STA-1West, which suffered severe damage.
 - The District also completed start-up operations at STA-1East, which for the last twelve months has discharged at 18 ppb.
- Since recovering, the majority of STAs collectively are achieving phosphorus outflow concentrations of around 20 ppb or below. These include STA-1East, STA-1West, STA-2, and STA-3/4.

sfwmd.gov

South Florida Water Management District
3301 Gun Club Road
West Palm Beach, Florida 33406
561-686-8800 FL WATS 1-800-432-2045
www.sfwmd.gov

MAILING ADDRESS P.O. Box 24680
West Palm Beach, FL 33416-4680



Progress in Everglades Water Quality Improvements

Best Management Practices (BMPs)

- Improved farming methods, known as Best Management Practices, provide additional phosphorus reductions in water flowing to the Everglades.
- Florida's Everglades Forever Act requires a 25-percent reduction in phosphorus leaving the Everglades Agricultural Area, a 500,000-acre farming region south of Lake Okeechobee.
- Growers in the Everglades Agricultural Area have been in continued compliance with these requirements since the inception of the BMP program 13 years ago.
- The average phosphorus reduction from the implementation of BMPs over the program's 13-year history is 50 percent, twice the amount required by law.
 - Over the past 13 years, the BMP program has kept 1,840 metric tons of phosphorus out of the Everglades.
 - Data for the 2008 annual monitoring period (May 1, 2007 to April 30, 2008) show that a 44-percent phosphorus reduction was achieved this year, equating to 73.3 metric tons.
- **Through April 2008, BMPs and STAs combined have prevented more than 2,848 metric tons of phosphorus from entering the Everglades.**