

February 2011

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Chairman's Message

Eric Buermann, Governing Board Chairman



With each of the District's 16 counties receiving moderate to abundant rainfall during the past several weeks, South Florida had a small but welcome boost to regional conditions. The heaviest rainfall was in the Upper Kissimmee Basin, which last month received a total of 4½ inches—more than twice its January average. Even Broward County, where the least rain fell, received about 1½ inches for the month.

Despite the slight gains, a long-term rainfall deficit from 2011 remains, and we continue to emphasize that careful resource management and water conservation remain a top priority.

In addition to its notable rainfall, the Kissimmee region was also the focus of several waterway improvements this past month. Four navigation locks along the Kissimmee River, which allow boats to navigate around water control structures, were refurbished during an intensive six-month effort. By scheduling the work on all four locks at the same time, the District saved taxpayers close to a half million dollars in design and engineering costs.

To the south, the District marked completion of a key project in restoration of Lake Trafford in Collier County. The 1,600-acre lake, the largest water body south of Lake Okeechobee, serves as headwaters of the Corkscrew Swamp and several regional watersheds, including the Panther Preserve watershed that drains into the Ten Thousand Islands National Wildlife Refuge. Up to 3 feet of muck have been dredged from the lake bottom and nearshore areas, improving water quality in the lake and nearby natural areas.

As with so many restoration efforts, progress was achieved through partnership. The Lake Trafford work was coordinated between the District and Collier County, with support from the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

On a personal note, I spoke during our meeting this month about the upcoming conclusion of my term on the South Florida Water Management District Governing Board. Although my term formally ends at the end of February, I am gladly serving until a successor is named. As I said at the meeting, I have deeply enjoyed my service with the Board in setting policy for the agency. I also offered a warm salute to the staff, who in so many talented ways, "makes it all happen" for the betterment of our flood control system, water resources and the environment of our great state.

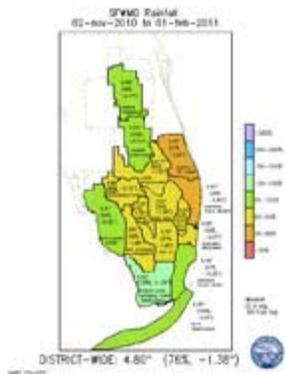
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Wet January Welcome but Water Shortage Concerns Remain

Long-term forecasts show few signs of relief, making water conservation imperative

Although parts of Central and South Florida received above-average rainfall in January, South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) meteorologists are reporting that the region remains in a rainfall deficit for the 2010-2011 dry season.

"January's rainfall was welcome and helpful, but in reality, it did not make up for a deficit accumulated through the last wet season and the beginning of the current dry season," said Tommy Strowd, SFWMD Deputy Executive Director of Operations and Maintenance. "The existing situation and the long-term forecast for continued extreme dry conditions make



water conservation efforts essential.”

District-wide rainfall for January registered 2.38 inches for a surplus of 0.45 inches, or 123 percent of the historical average for the month. Nearly half of the month’s rainfall came on January 26, when 1.09 inches fell across the District’s 16-county region. On average, the

District receives an inch or more of rain in a single day only six times per year.

January’s rainfall was not evenly distributed throughout the region. For example, the Upper Kissimmee Basin received 4.51 inches of rain, more than twice the historical average for the month. Meanwhile, Eastern Broward County only saw 1.48 inches of rain, just 68 percent of the historical average for that area.

The rainfall did give surface water bodies such as Lake Okeechobee a chance to temporarily stabilize. Groundwater sources in most areas also received a slight boost.

Lake Okeechobee remains nearly two feet below its historical average for this time of year. The current level is posted on the opening page at www.sfwmd.gov.

After a record dry October, rainfall amounts since the official start of the annual dry season have continued to contribute to a rainfall deficit. From the beginning of November through the end of January, the District’s 16-county region has received 4.8 inches of rain, a shortfall of 1.38 inches, or 78 percent of the historical average.

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Lake Trafford Restoration Cleans Water Flowing to Southwest Florida

SFWMD, partners mark completion of project to improve water quality, revitalize lake



In a significant step to improve water quality in Southwest Florida and protect an economic resource, the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) and its partners recently marked the completion of the effort to restore Lake Trafford.

“The largest lake in Southwest Florida is a vital component of the regional ecosystem and represents an important ecotourism destination and economic engine for our area,” said SFWMD Governing Board member Charles Dauray.

“This dredging project is an important step that is now providing many benefits to the lake, the environment and our residents.” With an investment of approximately \$21.4 million, the District achieved a host of restoration goals, including:

- Removing 3 feet of muck from the lake bottom during 2004 - 2007
- Removing 2 feet of muck from the near shore areas during 2009 - 2010
- Restoring native fisheries
- Developing a Watershed Protection Plan to reduce nutrients

Restoration of Lake Trafford will not end with the completion of dredging. Other plans to maintain the health of the lake include:

- Re-establishing native submerged aquatic vegetation, such as Vallisneria, through littoral plantings
- Monitoring the long-term health of the lake using water quality parameters (dissolved oxygen), environmental indicators and the recovery of native fish communities
- Promoting additional studies to develop best management practices to control nutrient runoff and minimize growth of invasive aquatic vegetation

Lake Trafford is a shallow, 1,600-acre lake, marking the headwaters of the Corkscrew Swamp and the Imperial and Cocohatchee

River watersheds, along with the Camp Keais Strand and Panther Preserve watershed that drains into the Ten Thousand Islands. Lake Trafford is the largest lake south of Lake Okeechobee in South Florida, serving as an important ecotourism resource for recreational boating and fishing.

At one time, the lake was sand bottomed. However, nutrient runoff in the watershed resulted in a shift from native aquatic vegetation to dense mats of hydrilla, an invasive exotic plant. The hydrilla has been controlled using herbicides, however, dead plant material accumulated on the bottom of the lake, releasing nutrients, triggering algal blooms and impacting prime habitat for native fish species.

The District began the first phase of dredging Lake Trafford in 2004, with a focus on its center, completing the project two years later. A second muck-removal effort began in November 2006 for the near shore area and, after being placed on hold because of drought conditions in 2007, was completed recently.

Restoration of Lake Trafford was a unique example of local citizens, public agencies and private organizations working together to restore a precious natural resource. The project was conceived and initiated by the Immokalee Chamber of Commerce. A Lake Trafford Task Force was formed, jointly sponsored by the Big Cypress Basin of the South Florida Water Management District and Collier County, with support from the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Environmental interest organizations, such as the Audubon Society and the Conservancy of Southwest Florida, also have supported the project. The Task Force and the Friends of Lake Trafford (a grassroots group) mobilized users of the lake and continue to be the proud supporters of this successful restoration project.

For more information:

- [Quick Facts: Lake Trafford Restoration](#)
- [Everglades Restoration](#)

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New Navigational Markers Will Help Guide the Way on the Kissimmee

SFWMD is taking special care to protect nesting ospreys during the project



To better aid boaters traveling between the City of Kissimmee and the Kissimmee River, the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) is preparing to replace a set of aging navigational markers in the Kissimmee Chain of Lakes.

“In the three decades since their installation, the current set of navigational markers has been battered by the elements, including a series of hurricanes a few years ago,” said Tommy Strowd, SFWMD Deputy Executive Director of Operations and Maintenance. “The new markers will help guide the way for boaters through the Kissimmee Chain of Lakes for many more years to come.”

During a six-month period, the \$385,000 project will result in construction of:

- 27 navigational markers along the federal navigation channel stretching from the City of Kissimmee lakefront to the Kissimmee River
- Two directional day beacons, one at the south end of Lake Tohopekaliga and the other at the north end of Lake Kissimmee
- Two navigation barriers — known as dolphins — with floating booms that will replace an aging boat barrier at the flood control structure on Lake Tohopekaliga

Before work begins, special consideration must be given to ospreys that have built nests atop the existing navigational markers. Avian experts will carefully move the nests to special osprey nesting platforms that will be placed adjacent to the markers.

This month, environmental scientists will begin determining which nests are active. Inactive nests will be covered to encourage ospreys to nest elsewhere, while active nests will be avoided until newly hatched ospreys have fledged. Once all the young ospreys have fledged, the nests will be moved to the platforms before the old navigational markers are removed.

Construction of the new navigational markers is scheduled to begin in April. The project is expected to be completed by the end of September.

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SFWMD Opens Public Land in Okeechobee County to Youth Hunting

FWC-managed program teaches safe hunting while fostering an appreciation for Florida's natural areas



As part of its efforts to expand recreation on public lands, the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) will open 3,400 acres in Okeechobee County to organized hunting activities for youth beginning later this year. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) will direct the hunts on part of the SFWMD's Grassy Island property through the Youth Hunting Program of Florida.

"The hundreds of thousands of acres of land managed by the District belong to the people of South Florida, so it is only fitting to give the next generation an opportunity to appreciate them up close," said SFWMD Governing Board member Joe Collins. "By allowing these carefully monitored hunting activities for our youth at Grassy Island, we can forge a lasting bond between our young people and these natural areas."

Administered by the FWC, the Youth Hunting Program of Florida teaches young Florida residents between 12 and 17 years old how to hunt safely, legally and ethically. Among its many goals, the program seeks to foster an appreciation for Florida's natural areas while emphasizing the need for conservation. Participants learn these values through camping, outdoor and environmental education and other related activities, in addition to hunting.

Beginning in 2011, the program will hold approximately six outings at the Grassy Island site each year during established hunting seasons. As many as 10 youths will participate in each event. Under the program, each participant must be accompanied by a parent or guardian and will be partnered with an experienced volunteer certified by the FWC to assist in hunting activities.

The youth hunting site is part of a larger tract of land that includes the Taylor Creek Stormwater Treatment Area, which is designed to treat and remove phosphorus from water ultimately bound for Lake Okeechobee. District land managers will closely coordinate with the FWC to ensure all activities associated with the Youth Hunting Program of Florida are compatible with the ongoing management of the 3,400-acre site.

The South Florida Water Management District is steadily increasing recreational access to public lands while continuing to manage them to support environmental restoration, water supply, water quality and flood control missions. At present, the District owns 621,000 acres of land that are open to the public. Many of these properties are in their natural state or have enhancements such as picnic tables, informational kiosks, campsites and hiking trails.

For more information on recreational opportunities throughout the District's 16-county region, visit www.sfwmd.gov/recreation. More details on the FWC's Youth Hunting Program of Florida are available [here](#).

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Living Everglades Lab Adds New Formula: Students

Hands-on education program introduces high school students to SFWMD public lands



Forest Hill Community High School students became environmental researchers one recent morning at a living Everglades laboratory, collecting water samples and aquatic invertebrates as part of a new South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) education program known as Legacy.

The students conducted water quality testing and field identification of species at the Loxahatchee Impoundment Landscape Assessment (LILA), a working 80-acre model of the Everglades ecosystem on the grounds of the Arthur R. Marshall Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge. Legacy connects water resource and environmental education with land management activities. The program partners local high schools with District-managed public lands, where teachers and students learn by collecting information that will add to the knowledge and experience relied on by District land managers to make real-world decisions.

"This is real, hands-on field research that brings the classroom into the ecosystem," said SFWMD Governing Board Chairman Eric Buermann. "The Legacy program is a perfect match of learning and the special experience of enjoying public lands managed by the District for restoration."

Originally developed by the St. Johns River Water Management District, the Legacy program utilizes the SFWMD's expertise in land

management, water resource and environmental science to create classroom-specific activities tailored to certain sites. The goals of the program include:

- Strengthening the connection of District lands with water resource and environmental education
- Providing communities with new opportunities to benefit from public lands
- Enhancing environmental stewardship in youth
- Encouraging recreational use of public lands

Representing an ideal location for the Legacy program, LILA gives experts an opportunity to research and apply restoration techniques on a small, controlled scale before taking them into the 1.7 million-acre Everglades ecosystem.

Forest Hill Community High School student Aidan Arruza, 15, may just become one of those scientists.

“Actually, I’ve been thinking about it a lot. I want to do something with the environment,” he said, while testing a water sample for pH and dissolved oxygen levels. “I love being out in the ecosystem.”

That’s exactly the right message for instructors at the school’s Academy of Environmental Science and Technology.

“It’s really good practical application of what we talk about in the classroom,” said teacher Samara Osowiecki. “Legacy and the partnership with the District allow students to experience the natural environment around them.”

Amid four, 20-acre cells filled with pickerelweed, spatterdock and sawgrass, one team of students dipped nets into the marshy areas to collect specimens later identified under the microscope as crayfish, dragonfly nymphs and shrimp. Another team used an electrical probe to check dissolved oxygen levels that are vital to the health of aquatic species.

Such work mirrors the ongoing research at LILA, which is crucial to Everglades restoration success. Studies have included:

- Manipulating water levels while using bird decoys to draw birds in for closer study. This helps determine the optimum water levels for bird feeding.
- Monitoring how fast water must flow to move soil particles downstream. This will determine the critical velocity needed to sustain differing soil elevations or depths within the Everglades, factors that also affect water quality.
- Planting 6,000 trees on the created tree islands. This study will identify the necessary hydrology for tree survival and growth. It will also determine the range of water levels tolerated by tree species found in the Everglades.

The other three Legacy sites for 2010-2011 are:

DuPuis Management Area – Martin County

Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed (CREW) – Lee and Collier counties

Reedy Creek, Osceola Environmental Studies Center – Osceola County

For more information on the Legacy program, please visit the District’s Educational Programs [website](#) or read this [fact sheet](#).

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SFWMD Completes Airboat Crossings to Boost Recreation in Kissimmee

New crossings offer enhanced access to boating, camping, hunting and related activities



Outdoor enthusiasts now have two new boater-friendly airboat crossings in the Kissimmee Chain of Lakes as part of the South Florida Water Management District’s (SFWMD) commitment to increasing recreation on public lands.

“The Kissimmee region is one of the most beautiful and ecologically diverse landscapes in our region, not to mention its importance to the Everglades and South Florida’s water supply,” said Tommy Strowd, SFWMD Deputy Executive Director of Operations and Maintenance. “The District is continually searching for ways to enhance recreational opportunities on public land, where it is compatible with restoration, so that residents and visitors can enjoy the outdoors.”

Located in the Gardner-Cobb Marsh, the new crossings feature slats that allow airboats to easily move from one marsh to another across gravel roads that run through the property.

The new structures improve the ease with which people can access the area and replace old gravel crossings that were abrasive to airboat hulls.

Accessible only by boat or airboat, the Gardner-Cobb Marsh is the largest District property in the Upper Kissimmee Chain of Lakes region. Gentle slopes in elevation by only a few inches or feet result in a rolling landscape that produces a contrast in natural communities. Swamps, pine flatwoods and wet prairie, which burst forth in the fall and spring with an abundance of wildflowers, dominate the landscape.

Outdoor enthusiasts can rest in the shady oak hammock, explore the property or set up camp at the primitive campsite after docking along the sandy shoreline. The landing there is known as “The Yacht Club” among airboaters. The land is also a good place to hunt deer and turkey.

The marsh offers walks along the oak- and cypress-lined berm, just landward from the lake's edge to the neighboring Drasdo property. A small area at the southeast corner is high ground where the scrub jay forages in rare scrub habitat.

A more common habitat in the region is the prairie hammock. This classic Florida landscape sports cabbage palms and live oak trees among grassy prairies and marshes. Boaters can enjoy fishing at the lake's edge or anywhere else on the property that is fishable.

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