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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.

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District Undertakes Rulemaking to Reserve Water for Picayune Strand — a First for Everglades Restoration

The process to reserve water for the Everglades reached a major milestone on December 2, 2008, when the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) Governing Board approved the rulemaking process that will set aside water to protect the Picayune Strand and Fakahatchee Estuary ecosystems. It is the first water reservation to move forward as part of the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP).

About the Picayune Strand Restoration Project

- The 55,000-acre project is located north of Everglades National Park on Florida's Southwest coast in Collier County.
- The strand was drained in the 1960s for a failed real estate development. Road construction and canal excavations reduced aquifer storage, increased freshwater discharges to estuaries in the Ten Thousand Islands, disrupted native plant communities and increased the frequency of wildfires.
- The restoration project will restore surface water flow to vital wetlands, ensure wetland plants and animals thrive, including the endangered Florida panther, and improve the Ten Thousand Islands estuaries. Expected benefits also include a more natural fire regime and improved aquifer recharge.
- The project is one of the CERP projects authorized by Congress in the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) of 2007.

Progress since restoration work was initiated by the State of Florida and the SFWMD:

- Invested \$125 million to place in public ownership 54,310 acres, which represents 99 percent of the land required to complete the restoration project;
- Filled and plugged 7 miles of the Prairie Canal;
- Completed 25 percent of the road removal necessary for restoration.
- Documented environmental benefits on 13,000 acres of restored area to date;
- Initiated remediation of contaminated sites and completed removal of structures, facilities and debris, including tires, asphalt, concrete and vehicles;
- Completed 100 percent of the design plans for the project's restoration elements and pump stations, along with required permits;

(more)

What is a water reservation?

- A water reservation is a legal mechanism to set aside water for the protection of fish and wildlife or public health and safety as set forth in Section 373.223(4) of the Florida Statutes.
- Volumes and timing of water at specific locations are protected for the natural system from consumptive uses such as new development.
- If an allocation increase is requested by an existing consumptive use permit holder, the permit applicant will be required to demonstrate that it will not interfere with the water reservation. This condition will affect permit holders upon renewal once the rule is adopted.

About the rulemaking process

- The SFWMD initiated rule development in February 2008 for a reservation of water identified for the Picayune Strand Restoration Project.
- This rule will fulfill the requirement of WRDA 2000 to reserve or allocate the water identified for the natural system in the federal project implementation report.
- The December 2, 2008, SFWMD Governing Board action to authorize publication of a Notice of Rulemaking in the Florida Administrative Weekly begins a 21-day period for public comment, upon publication at www.flrules.org
- The rulemaking action will also allow the SFWMD to enter into a cost-sharing partnership with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to proceed with further construction of restoration projects in the Picayune Strand area.