



SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

## NEWS RELEASE

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### **Water Managers Initiate Effort to Protect Kissimmee River Flows**

*SFWMD Board authorizes rulemaking to set aside water for restoration first*

**West Palm Beach**— As part of its continued commitment to protecting and restoring the Kissimmee River, the Governing Board of the South Florida Water Management District today put the wheels in motion for reserving the water needed for environmental protection as part of the \$620 million plan to restore more than 27,000 acres of wetlands along the Central Florida waterway.

Water is the lifeblood that makes the Kissimmee River Valley home to more than 300 fish and wildlife species. The Board's unanimous decision directs the District to begin developing rules that will provide the water needed to protect the fish and wildlife and the collection of plants critical to their habitats.

"Kissimmee River Restoration is among the great efforts to restore and preserve Florida's natural heritage, and water is an absolutely essential component of that work," said Eric Buermann, chairman of the SFWMD Governing Board. "This reservation underscores our commitment to restore more than 40 miles of the Kissimmee River to the dynamic and habitat-rich place it once was."

Known as a water reservation, Florida law allows the Governing Board to establish rules that set aside water for protection of fish and wildlife or public health or safety. The reservation can be revised to fit changing conditions.

As Central Florida and its demand for public water supply grows, the water reservation is a necessary tool for protecting the Kissimmee and other surface water systems. Based in sound science, a reservation defines a specific amount of water to set aside for the natural system and ensures that the environment receives the water it needs before water is allocated to other users.

To assure that reservations for specific water bodies are developed as accurately as possible, all scientific and technical data, methodologies, and models receive independent scientific peer review during the rulemaking process. Along with

the public rule development process, the reservation undergoes additional Governing Board consideration before it can be adopted.

The Kissimmee River Restoration is restoring miles of river and flood plain impacted by channelization in the 1960s. The SFWMD has invested more than \$300 million to purchase 105,000 acres needed for the restoration. So far, about 10 miles of the C-38 canal have been backfilled, restoring flow to 19 miles of the historic Kissimmee River and significantly expanding its floodplain.

Several species of plants and animals, such as the Ring-necked Duck, American Avocet and Black-necked Stilt, have returned to the Kissimmee after being absent for more than 40 years. When work is complete in 2012, more than 40 square miles of the river/floodplain ecosystem will be restored, including 43 miles of meandering river channel and 27,000 acres of wetlands. The reservation ensures that progress already made in restoring the Kissimmee River floodplain ecosystem is not be compromised.

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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.*

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