



SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

NEWS RELEASE

May 29, 2008

CONTACT:

Randy Smith

South Florida Water Management District

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

Lake Kissimmee Snail Study to Benefit Endangered Snail Kites
SFWMD to release thousands of snail hatchlings for study

West Palm Beach, Fla. - Scientists from the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) have collected 9,000 apple snail eggs from Lake Kissimmee as part of ongoing research to boost snail populations in the wild. The eggs will be hatched in captivity and the immature snails released at key sites in the lake. Apples snails are the primary food source for Florida's endangered snail kites, a native bird.

"Florida's native plants and wildlife, like the snail kite, are benefiting from Everglades ecosystem studies like this one," said Melissa Meeker, SFWMD Governing Board member. "Increasing our snail kite populations will be an important indicator of restoration success."

Hatchlings from the egg clutches collected this month will be re-released in Lake Kissimmee at designated sites in late June. They will be monitored for one year to determine an optimum size for release into the wild that ensures survival and reproductive success.

South Florida's lingering water shortage has severely reduced apple snail populations in many locations, particularly in Lake Okeechobee and the Everglades. The snails typically lay their eggs on vegetation above the waterline, but the hatchlings must drop into the water to survive. Freshwater marshes at the lake's edge and in many areas of the Everglades are now too dry for the hatchlings to reach water.

Healthy native apple snail populations remain in Lake Kissimmee, where District scientists are collecting them in clutches of 25 to 40 eggs. In four to six weeks, thousands of new hatchlings will be returned to three sites in Lake Kissimmee and monitored for up to a year.

Snail kites eat an average of 2.5 apple snails an hour when feeding, according to a study by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The birds are medium-sized hawks with a slender, curved bill uniquely suited to removing apple snails from their shells.

###

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.

CS