November 9, 2006

Florida's Water
It's Worth Saving

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Lake Okeechobee Service Area Water Shortage Order
&
Lower East Coast Water Shortage Warning

Lake Okeechobee Service Area Water Use Restrictions

Is everyone, including businesses and farmers, required to adhere to the restrictions in the Lake Okeechobee Service Area?
Yes, if their water supply source is Lake Okeechobee or another surface water source that is recharged by Lake Okeechobee. During mandatory water restrictions that go into effect on Nov. 17, agricultural users (including nurseries) have specific restrictions (to reduce surface water consumption by 15 percent). Residents and businesses must also limit outdoor use – for landscapes, car washing, driveway cleaning, etc. – to no more than three days a week. Water restrictions apply to all businesses, shopping centers, government buildings, street medians, parks, golf courses and other recreation facilities.

What if my city or county already has restrictions? Do I still need to follow the District's restrictions?
Check with your local city or county. As a general rule, you must adhere to whichever ordinance/restrictions are more stringent.

I'm not sure I can comply with the restrictions and need a variance. What do I do?
Your first step is to obtain a variance application form. Instructions for how to complete one and where to send it are included with the form. Your application will be reviewed by South Florida Water Management District staff, and approval or denial is based on the criteria listed in the Water Shortage Plan Rule. For more information, visit www.sfwmd.gov or call (800) 432-2045.

When will the District lift the restrictions and/or warning?
It depends on rainfall, Lake Okeechobee levels and other factors. The District will continue to monitor conditions on a daily basis, and when they improve, the SFWMD Governing Board will make the decision to lift restrictions.

Lower East Coast Water Shortage Warning

What is expected of businesses, residents and farmers in the Lower East Coast area?

We are asking residents to observe basic conservation practices in all water uses. While the majority of water use occurs in landscaping, such practices as taking shorter showers, washing full loads in dishwashers and clothes washers, and reducing excessive toilet flushing for disposal of facial tissues and insects, can also conserve water.

If my city or county has year-round restrictions in place, what do I do?

Check with your local city or county and continue to adhere to the ordinance/restrictions that are in effect.

Do I still need to conserve when it's raining?

Yes. Rainfall in South Florida is often very localized, sometimes raining on one side of the street and not on the other, or in one area but not regionally. All areas in the South Florida region depend on the same interconnected system of ground and surface water, with Lake Okeechobee serving as the backup water supply for most of the region.

Some long range forecasts predict dry to slightly wetter than normal dry season conditions for the coming months – but there are, of course, no guarantees. Even rainfall on the higher end of current projections may not be enough to raise water levels above what we would consider sufficient to meet dry season demands.

It's typically wet in Florida and we're surrounded by water. Why do we need to conserve water? Where does our fresh water come from anyway?

South Florida is extremely flat and our geography sentences us to almost total dependence on rainfall for most of our water supply. Rainfall is first stored in lakes, rivers, canals and wetlands – and it gradually makes its way to underground aquifers, where cities and towns (water utilities) draw much of their drinking water supplies.

While we average about 52 inches of rain each year, that total varies greatly from year to year. While it rains in one area, it may not be raining in an adjacent area, and not all of the water is available for consumptive use because as much as 45 inches of rain is lost each year through a combination of evaporation and transpiration (the process of plants absorbing water through their roots and returning it to the atmosphere as water vapor through their leaves). In terms of rainfall, this year has been among the driest on record dating back 75 years – about 10 inches below the historical average District-wide – leaving water levels throughout the region unusually low. What's more, millions of gallons of water are discharged through the District's water control system to the ocean or gulf to provide flood protection during heavy rains because of the lack of storage areas -- even during the dry season.

Meanwhile, the backup water supply for both agricultural and urban users in the Lower East Coast region comes from Lake Okeechobee, where the current level is more than 3.5 feet below the historical average for this time of year (November); and levels are low in most other available surface water storage areas. If conditions worsen, that doesn't mean that we will run out of water, but it does mean that conservation will become a necessity rather than a choice.

What is the easiest way to conserve the most water?

Simply turn off your sprinklers! Lawn irrigation counts for about 50 percent of drinking water used in South Florida. Water only when your lawn shows signs of wilt (stress) and only when it has not rained.

How much water does the average lawn really NEED?

Most people in Florida water more frequently than is needed. In fact, frequent watering is ineffective, especially for lawns, because it causes grass to develop shallow roots, and be more vulnerable to disease, pests and daily dryout. During the fall/winter dry months (November-March), your lawn will need from an inch to an inch and a half of water every 5-7 days. However, Mother Nature is likely to supply that water, so it is unlikely that you will need to water your lawn very often, if at all!

Installing a rain-sensing switch is a VERY good investment in your irrigation system, because it can turn off your system when nature has brought the rain your lawn needs.

It's also helpful to set your mower at its highest level, to allow grass blades to be about 3 inches long. The longer blades of grass develop deeper soil, and shade the soil so water is better retained.

What else can I do to conserve water?

There are a lot of ways you can conserve water, by making small changes in the way you use water at home, at work, or outdoors. Visit www.sfwmd.gov/conserve or call our **Water Conservation Hotline** at (800) 662-8876 to request more water conservation information.

Additional Background

What about other areas of the District, like Martin and St. Lucie counties, Orlando/Kissimmee and Southwest Florida?

Surface water restrictions are already in place in the Northern Indian Prairie Basin, located just north of Lake Okeechobee. At this point, groundwater levels are at acceptable levels in other areas across the District. St. Lucie County's canal sources are not connected to Lake Okeechobee and water levels remain at or above regulation schedules. Southwest Florida also draws its water from ground and surface water sources that are not connected to Lake Okeechobee. However, as the dry season progresses, the District will continue to monitor groundwater and aquifer levels, and if appropriate, may issue warnings or restrictions should conditions indicate water resource problems in other areas. ***Voluntary water conservation efforts are encouraged in all areas of the South Florida Water Management District.***

Why are lower Lake Okeechobee levels a concern? I thought that was a good thing for the environment.

It is a delicate balance: water supply for people and the needs of the environment. Low water levels do benefit the lake ecosystem; for example, submerged aquatic vegetation receives more sunlight and thus tends to thrive, rejuvenating fish and wildlife habitats and improving the ecology of the lake. However, because we have experienced unusually low rainfall this year, we are heading into the dry season with water levels appreciably lower than what we would consider sufficient to sustain the population's water supply needs until the wet season returns next year (June). Habitat recovery plans are in place should the lake fall below 11 feet.

Are there any other long-range plans to address water supply?

Yes. The District is proactively working with local communities to develop and fund alternative water supply sources. South Florida residents now number more than 7 million – placing a huge demand on the region's water resources. Despite excellent freshwater sources, South Florida's water supply is not unlimited, especially given limited storage. Alternative water supply projects such as reverse osmosis, aquifer storage and recovery, and reclaimed water use, help create new sources to meet our long-term needs and water conservation stretches our existing supply. Communities large and small are encouraged to explore alternative water supplies and to apply for funding assistance. More information is available at www.sfwmd.gov/conserve.

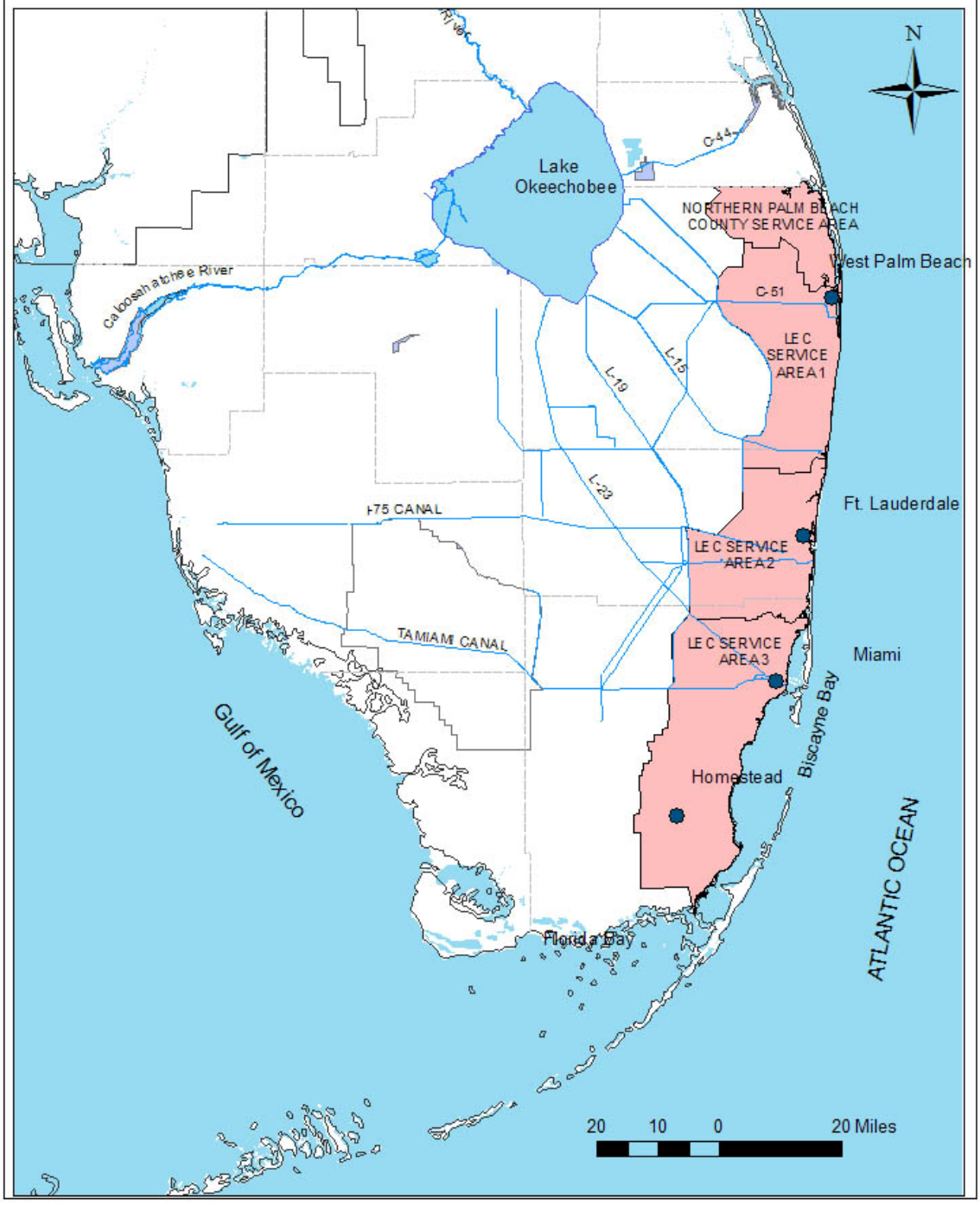
The District, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, local governments and others are also implementing the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP). This is a monumental plan with many projects to build and manage a more efficient system that can capture and store water that is now lost to sea. The project will help to restore the Everglades while meeting the water needs for a growing population for the next 50 years.

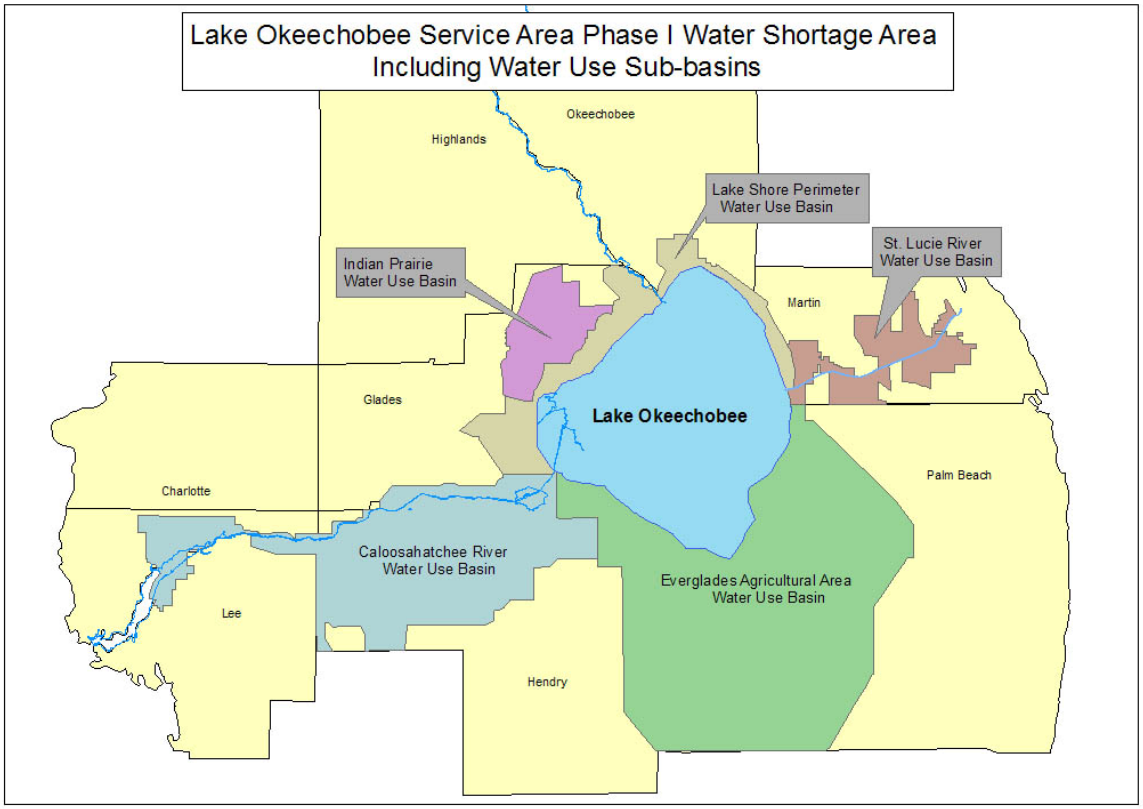
The District has already jump-started eight CERP projects under its Acceler8 Everglades restoration initiative, including three key storage reservoirs. For more information, visit www.acceler8evergladesnow.org

Florida's Water
It's Worth Saving

Find more water conservation tips, visit our web site at www.sfwmd.gov/conserve or call our **Water Conservation Hotline** at (800) 662-8876 to request more information.

Lower East Coast Water Shortage Warning Area




Lake Okeechobee Service Area Phase I Water Shortage Area
Including Water Use Sub-basins
Okeechobee
Highlands
Lake Shore Perimeter
Water Use Basin
St. Lucie River
Water Use Basin
Indian Prairie
Water Use Basin
Martin
Glades
Lake Okeechobee
Palm Beach
Charlotte
Caloosahatchee River
Water Use Basin
Everglades Agricultural Area
Water Use Basin
Lee
Hendry

# # #