



HISTORICALLY, SOUTH FLORIDA

was a giant marsh fed by rainfall. Like an ice glacier slowly moving over a huge mass of land, during the rainy wet season, sheets of water would move down the state through what was then the great expanse of Everglades.

Theoretically, a drop of water could fall on a leaf in the upper chain of lakes, travel down the meandering Kissimmee River, float over the natural southern shore of Lake Okeechobee, ride the sheet of water slowly gliding over the southern peninsula, and finally drift into Florida Bay.



We oversee water resources in the southern half of the state. We manage water in one of the most diverse ecosystems in the world – the Kissimmee-Okeechobee-Everglades system – stretching 240 miles from Orlando to the Florida Keys.

We provide water when there is not enough and take it away when there is too much. We channel and regulate water through canals that crisscross the southern peninsula to meet the needs of all users.

We safeguard the region's water quality to ensure enough usable water 50 years from now. Managing water for cities, farms, and the natural environment is a balancing act with competing needs and conflicting responsibilities. Major restoration projects dovetail our missions of flood control and water supply.

We restore floodplains along the Kissimmee River, revitalize the shoreline habitats on Lake Okeechobee, and will retool the flood control system to capture the 1.7 billion gallons of water now lost to sea and to better mimic the way nature delivered water to the Everglades.

VISION



to be the world's premier water resource agency



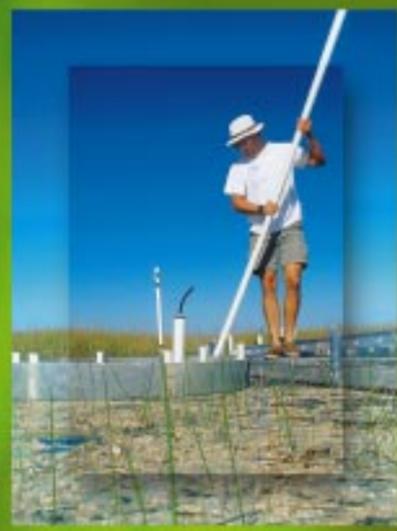
REFLECTIONS

is one in a series of brochures that reflect the mission of the South Florida Water Management District. This information is also available on CD as a powerpoint presentation.

Who we are and what we do

at the

SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT



OUR MISSION

to manage and protect water resources of the region by balancing and improving water quality, flood control, natural systems and water supply



sfwmd.gov
South Florida Water Management District
3301 Gun Club Road
West Palm Beach, Florida 33406
561-686-8800 • FL WATS 800-432-2045
www.sfwmd.gov
MAILING ADDRESS: P.O. Box 24680
West Palm Beach, FL 33416-4680

sfwmd.gov

SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

ON THE COVER



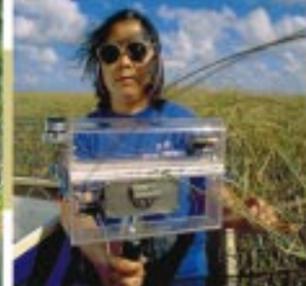
A scientist monitors plants in a stormwater treatment area, part of an Everglades nutrient removal project. These marsh plants will uptake phosphorus and filter the water before it flows to the Everglades.



There was a time in southeastern Florida when a continuous cypress swamp narrowly bordered the Everglades' eastern edge.

These ancient trees can grow to heights of 130 feet with bases over 10 feet in diameter.

Wet-footed mystery trees, cypress stand guard in South Florida's remaining freshwater swamps.



PROVIDING FLOOD CONTROL

is at the core of our mission; however, our responsibilities have increased greatly since being created by the state legislature in 1949. We employ approximately 1,800 people organized under three business groups.

Water Resources Operations employees operate and maintain the Central and Southern Florida Flood Control project, monitor the weather, and are stewards of public lands.

The **Water Resources Management** workforce develops water supply plans, provides research, regulates land and water use, purchases land for preservation, and implements ecosystem restoration.

Corporate Resources employees handle the economics and information components of managing water. They conduct environmental monitoring and assessment, develop the budget, produce public outreach materials, and oversee contractual services.

The weather in South Florida can be erratic and unpredictable. In fact, it has been said that if you don't like the weather wait a few moments or cross the street.

DRENCHED IN SUNSHINE

for most of the year, it is easy to call South Florida, "Paradise." Turquoise seas lap the shoreline and gently swaying palm trees stir the breezes for easy living and great recreation. But there was a day the area was much less than a desirable place to live.

WET is South Florida in its natural state. One could argue the first letters once stood for Soggy and Flat. As recently as a hundred years ago, for most of the year, the terrain was wild and wet. Hardy pioneers assumed the plentiful, large mosquitoes had to be the state bird.

Because the land is so flat, during the wet season (May through October) water could flow from lake to lake, spill over natural river channels, and spread into floodplains. There were no barriers or canals to direct or control the path of water.

In the aftermath of large storms, water could stand for weeks and months and leave devastating damage and disease in its wake. During the drier months of winter and spring, Florida had its own version of the dust bowl days – cows went thirsty and crops withered on parched land.

Geography sentences Florida to total dependence on rainfall. To make our watery state more inhabitable, through the years we attempted to control the water. For more than a century, from 1850 to 1950, the solution was to dredge and drain the "swamp."

After years of severe hurricanes, then drought, then more deadly storms, Florida asked the federal government for a master plan to tame nature's excesses.

In 1948, the U.S. Congress authorized the largest civil works project in the country. Construction began the next year and continued for over 20 years as the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers built a massive plumbing system called the Central and Southern Florida Flood Control Project.

The project stretches from just south of Orlando to Florida Bay. It consists of 1,800 miles of canals and levees, and 200 water control structures. It includes 16 major pump stations to send water south and through waterways eastward and westward to both coasts.

In 1949, the state created our agency – the South Florida Water Management District – to be the local sponsor for the federal project. We operate and maintain the system. Our primary role is to smooth the peaks and valleys of the dry and wet seasons.

Specifically, our mission is to manage and protect water resources of the region by balancing and improving four major elements: water quality, flood control, natural systems, and water supply.

The large public works project built in the '50s and '60s to manage the water works very well. As well as provide flood control during the wet season and water supply during the dry months, the project drained floodplains and wetlands making them more accessible to humans.

Over the last four decades, urban development and agricultural production have flourished. At the same time, the altered natural areas became inhospitable to native wildlife. As a result, the environment began to flounder. The number of wading birds decreased along with the amount of floodplains.

In the 1970s, as more habitats showed signs of distress, our responsibilities expanded to encompass environmental restoration.

During the last century, the Everglades decreased in size dramatically. Current restoration projects include not only the Everglades proper, but encompass the entire Everglades ecosystem – the area from the upper chain of lakes to Florida Bay where the water once flowed naturally down the state.

A major initiative called the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan is under way. It will provide the right amount of water and the right flow conditions to the Everglades WHILE providing water for urban and agricultural needs for a 50-year population projection. With the collaborative effort of our federal partners, the Army Corps of Engineers, and our state partners, the Department of Environmental Protection, we are committed TODAY to shape the Florida our children will have TOMORROW.



We activate our Emergency Operations Center for hurricanes, wild fires, floods, and droughts.