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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.

Enhancing Water Storage and Treatment

Using Public, Private and Tribal Lands for Surface Water Storage

Since 2005, the South Florida Water Management District has been working with a coalition of other agencies, environmental organizations, ranchers and researchers to enhance opportunities for storing excess surface water on private, public and tribal lands. Managing water on these lands is one tool to reduce the amount of water that is delivered into Lake Okeechobee and discharged to coastal estuaries for flood protection purposes. This program complements water storage options available through public facilities such as reservoirs, restoration projects and stormwater treatment areas.

The Dispersed Water Management and Treatment Program encourages property owners to retain water on their land rather than drain it, accept regional runoff for storage, or do both. Through this program and regional public projects, more than 126,350 acre-feet of water storage has been made available in South Florida. There are more than 30 participating landowners providing water retention and/or storage ranging from 1 acre-foot to 10,000 acre-feet. The total includes more than 47,700 acre-feet provided by Kissimmee River Floodplain Restoration. Planned projects that have been assessed for implementation may provide approximately 366,700 acre-feet of additional storage in the future, pending funding. To put this in perspective, 450,000 acre-feet of storage equates to approximately 1 foot of water off of Lake Okeechobee. It will take both dispersed and regional projects to achieve our objectives.

Benefits of Surface Water Storage

- Ongoing Lake Okeechobee and estuary ecological improvement projects are enhanced by providing an alternative to storing water in the lake and reducing the volume of discharges to estuaries and coasts.
- Stored water may receive nutrient removal treatment, improving water quality.
- Groundwater recharge opportunities are expanded.
- Habitats for native plants and wildlife are improved when wetlands are rehydrated.

Water Storage Approaches

- **Payment for Services:** Through the Florida Ranchlands Environmental Services Project (FRESP), a program is in development to provide a service payment to agricultural owners for retaining and/or accepting water for storage. This approach provides an incentive for landowners to keep their property in low-intensity agriculture. Funding from



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federal, state and private sources exceeds \$6 million for pilot project implementation and program design.

- **Cost Share:** The District and property owners contribute financially to projects that improve water storage on private, public or tribal lands. In return, the property owners agree to maintain stormwater improvement projects and to retain and/or accept water for storage.
- **Easements:** Federal and state agencies acquire conservation easements where water can be stored and managed to improve wetland hydrology.
- **Regional public facilities:** These include reservoirs, restoration projects and stormwater treatment areas.

Ongoing Efforts

The District continues to work with public, private and tribal property owners to expand the Dispersed Water Management and Treatment Program.

- Opportunities to store water on public lands, including identifying and creating conceptual designs for water storage and retention facilities, are being reassessed.
- Property owners are being contacted to request their assistance in retaining stormwater and/or accepting water from Lake Okeechobee regulatory releases.

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