

## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Governing Board Members  
**FROM:** Chip Merriam, Deputy Executive Director, Water Resources  
**DATE:** March 30, 2009  
**SUBJECT:** Florida Bay Seagrass Studies

**Background:** Seagrasses are keystone habitat for many of the prized environmentally and economically important wetland and estuarine fish and other fauna. Since 1994, the District has had an active research and monitoring program in the southern Everglades and Florida Bay. A key part of that research recently has been determining seagrass habitat response to management and restoration. In 2008, the District contracted with the Florida Atlantic University (FAU) for a six-month study that produced new and unexpected information indicating that salinity effects on seagrass reproduction may be the prime determinant of seagrass community success. This new information led to conclusions that are directly applicable to the review and 2011 update of Minimum Flows and Levels (MFL) for Florida Bay, which is required by the existing Florida Bay MFL rule.

This amendment provides a thirty-six month extension to the contract with the Florida Atlantic University to provide data to continue to develop a predictive ecological model of seagrass community dynamics. The model will be used for improving the technical basis for the 2011 update of the MFL rule. Data from this study will also improve evaluations for operations and restoration (notably CERP's C111 Spreader Canal Project and RECOVER).

**How this helps meet the District's 10-Year Strategic Plan:** The proposed study directly follows the deliverables and milestones outlined in the Strategic Plan to complete a technical report in 2011 in support of the mandated Florida Bay MFL rule update.

**Funding Source:** This is an amendment to contract 4600001483 with the Florida Atlantic University for Florida Bay Seagrass Studies, and a Waiver of Competition as an exception to the standards of competition, to extend the term by 36 months and to increase funding in the amount of \$295,000, for which \$95,000 in dedicated funds (Florida Bay Fund) is budgeted, and the remainder is subject to Governing Board approval of the FY10-FY12 budgets.

**This Board item impacts the following areas of the District:** The Everglades Division is responsible for this project. The studies include the southern Everglades mangrove ecotone, northern and eastern Florida Bay and Barnes Sound, and Manatee Bay. The item will support mandates and projects regarding the restoration and protection of Everglades and Florida Bay.

**What concerns could this Board item raise?** The Governing Board may be concerned over the waiver of competition. Upon repeatedly soliciting bids for similar work in the past, the District has received no responses from applicants except FAU. FAU has developed expertise and infrastructure, including a seagrass processes laboratory and a seagrass mesocosm facility specifically targeted to perform the kinds of work that the District is seeking with this contract. Contracting the continuation of this study to another entity would require the construction of a new mesocosm facility that would add hundreds of thousands of dollars to the cost of the contract. Further, public confidence is preserved by the selection of FAU because of their proven record of timeliness and high quality, evidenced by peer reviews and publications.

**Why should the Governing Board approve this item?** The District does not have the resources to complete this work without outside assistance. Data from this study will provide the District with the knowledge base required to update the Florida Bay MFL in 2011, as specified in the existing MFL rule. The proposed study will also provide a scientific basis for operational and structural management, and decisions required to maintain or restore the wetlands of Everglades National Park (ENP) and Florida Bay.

CM/cjm

Attachments: Resolution, Map