

September 2009



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.

St. Lucie River Water Reservation Protecting Water Resources

The southern Indian River Lagoon, St. Lucie Estuary and its designated watershed are included in the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP). The Indian River Lagoon – South (IRL-S) Recommended Plan calls for constructing a series of reservoirs to reduce the high-volume discharges that impact estuarine biota, and to improve water quality and water supply by providing for more natural quantity, quality, timing and distribution of inflows to the estuary, and to restore the North Fork of the St. Lucie River and its floodplain.

A water reservation is proposed to support ongoing restoration in the St. Lucie River, which is included in CERP's Indian River Lagoon – South Project. The state of Florida, the Florida legislature and the South Florida Water Management District have appropriated \$2.4 billion toward CERP.

The federal Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) of 2000 requires the District to complete the reservation prior to signing an agreement to receive federal CERP funding for the Indian River Lagoon – South Project. Construction of the project was authorized by WRDA 2007.

Defining water reservations

Florida law supports the creation of water reservations, a legal mechanism to set aside water for the protection of fish and wildlife or public health and safety. When a water reservation is in place, volumes and timing of water at specific locations are protected for the natural system ahead of consumptive uses such as new development.

- Reservations are identified using scientifically reviewed data linking local hydrology to the needs of fish and wildlife.
- Enough water is reserved, or set aside, to encourage the survival of a healthy and sustainable native fish and wildlife community during natural cycles of drought, flood and population variation.
- Water that is reserved for the protection of fish and wildlife in the identified water bodies will not be allocated for consumptive use.
- Any water above the amount needed to protect fish and wildlife may be considered for allocation.
- Existing legal uses that are not contrary to the public interest may continue.

Reservations benefit the environment

Long-term success of ecosystem restoration is measured, in part, by the ability of native fish and wildlife to thrive in habitats in the southern Indian River Lagoon, the St. Lucie River and Estuary and its floodplain.

The St. Lucie Estuary and Indian River Lagoon together form the most diverse estuarine environment in North America. The lagoon contains the St. Lucie Estuary, a designated Estuary of National Significance.

- The lagoon and estuary are home to more than 4,300 species, including 35 species listed as endangered or threatened.

- More than 50 endangered and threatened species and species of special concern are found in the Indian River Lagoon and its watershed.
 - Land and marine animals includes shortnose sturgeon, smalltooth sawfish, the Florida scrub jay, peregrine falcon, sandhill crane, manatee and five species of sea turtles – hawksbill, green, loggerhead, leatherback and Kemp’s ridley.
 - Plants include Lakela’s mint, Johnson’s seagrass and bay cedar.
- A recent study shows that the economic benefits of the Indian River Lagoon totaled more than \$3.7 billion in 2007.

The St. Lucie River is designated an Outstanding Florida Water, one worthy of special protection because of its natural attributes.

- The St. Lucie River has more species of fish than any other river in Florida, and more than 500 fish species, have been documented within a two-mile radius of the St. Lucie River where it meets the Indian River Lagoon.

The North Fork of the St. Lucie River is a state aquatic preserve and part of Florida’s “Save Our Rivers” program.

- More than 650 native species, including fish, amphibians, reptiles, birds, mammals, invertebrates, plants and phytoplankton, have been located and identified within the preserve and adjacent floodplain.
- There are 33 species of special concern in and adjacent to the preserve and 20 additional rare species supported by the preserve.
 - This includes the mangrove rivulus and opossum pipefish, the only two federally listed fish species in the preserve.
 - It also contains rookeries for the endangered wood stork.

To survive, the thousands of species found in the Indian River Lagoon, St. Lucie River, Estuary and its floodplain depend on the year-round availability of water.

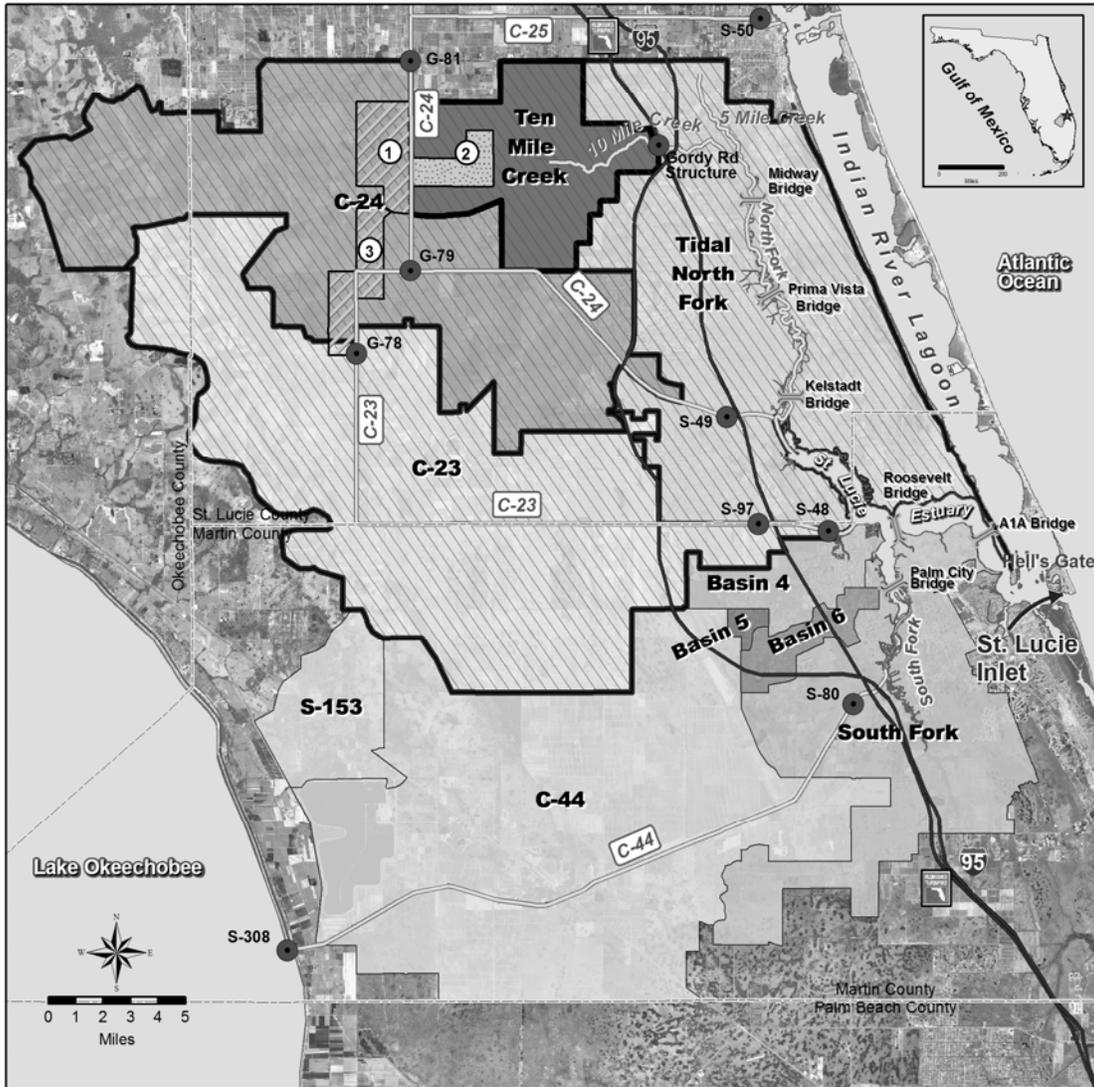
Developing the reservation and gathering public input

- In April 2008, the District Governing Board initiated a rulemaking process to protect water provided to the natural system by the Indian River Lagoon-South Project.
- A multi-step process is in place to ensure that the proposed water reservation is thoroughly studied and considered by scientific experts, officials, stakeholders and the public.
- A panel of nationally recognized, independent scientific experts reviewed research supporting the proposed reservation and published their findings in June 2009. The panel’s analysis showed that the proposed reservation is supported by sound science.
- Public workshops to develop draft rule language began in April 2009 and continues through October 2009.

What’s next

- When available, a draft of the water reservation rule will be posted online at www.sfwmd.gov/slrreservation.
- It is anticipated that the District Governing Board will authorize publicizing the draft in the Florida Administrative Weekly this fall.
- A public hearing to consider adopting the water reservation rule will take place after the draft is publicized.

Water reservations for these basins are proposed to support ongoing St. Lucie River restoration.



St. Lucie Estuary Watershed Basins Contributing to the North Fork of the St. Lucie River Reservation Water Body

- Water Reservation Basins
- Non-contributing Basins
- Water Control Structures
- Major Canals
- Bridges
- Open Water
- Major Highways
- County Boundaries
- STAs
- Reservoirs
- ① C-23/24 North Reservoir
- ② C-23/24 STA
- ③ C-23/24 South Reservoir

