

FRIDAY, JULY 11, 2008

Compiled by: South Florida Water Management District
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Media Contacts SFWMD 07-10-08

SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

Reporter's Name: Curtis Morgan

Media Outlet: Miami Herald

Reason for Call: Governing Board Meeting

Agency Response: [Randy Smith] 07/10/2008 4:34 PM (GMT - 4:00): Stories from today's Governing Board meeting include preliminary budget and a recommendation to hold the current millage rate, an early strategic prioritization of Everglades projects and a resolution regarding the NRDC lawsuit which reinforces a resolution from 2007 that commits to the allocation of the right amount of water to the Everglades.

Reporter's Name: Eliot Kleinberg

Media Outlet: Palm Beach Post - South Palm Beach County Bureau

Reason for Call: Governing Board Meeting

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Reporter's Name: Andy Reid

Media Outlet: South Florida Sun-Sentinel - West Palm Beach Bureau

Reason for Call: Governing Board Meeting

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Total Clips: 25

Headline	Date	Outlet	Reporter
Water managers say U.S. Sugar buyout won't hike tax rates	07/11/2008	Miami Herald - Online	CURTIS MORGAN

<u>Water district says Glades reservoir should be completed, but perhaps scaled back</u>	07/10/2008	Palm Beach Post - Online	Kleinberg, Eliot
<u>Water district's budget doesn't include U.S. Sugar deal - yet</u>	07/10/2008	Palm Beach Post - Online	Kleinberg, Eliot
<u>Bigger water district budget, scaled-back construction part of U.S. Sugar deal</u>	07/10/2008	South Florida Sun-Sentinel - Online	Andy Reid
<u>Cost of U.S. Sugar deal may end plans for Caloosahatchee reservoir</u>	07/11/2008	News-Press	Hiraki, Ryan
<u>Florida's sugar town deserves extra hand</u>	07/11/2008	Miami Herald	
<u>Lake Okeechobee water rises, slowly</u>	07/11/2008	News-Press	Hiraki, Ryan
<u>WATER POLLUTION: Groups sue EPA over transfer rule</u>	07/11/2008	Environment & Energy Daily	Boyle, Katherine
<u>Conservation plan for Shingle Creek moves forward</u>	07/10/2008	Orlando Sentinel	Pino, Mark
<u>Water managers approve \$67K for cleanup of Kreamer Island tires</u>	07/10/2008	Palm Beach Post - Online	Kleinberg, Eliot
<u>Boca Raton: City gets 20-year renewal for water use permit</u>	07/11/2008	South Florida Sun-Sentinel	
<u>Water Managers Question Everglades Cleanup Standard</u>	07/10/2008	Florida Trend	
<u>Pearce Canal dredging plan OK'd by Corps</u>	07/11/2008	WOKC-AM	Murphy, Charles
<u>Canal weir to help return Alligator Alley acreage to wetlands</u>	07/10/2008	Naples Daily News	

- [!\[\]\(6302aad5aed157b291fddf37b4870784_img.jpg\) Lake level is still low](#) 07/10/2008 Okeechobee News Gawda, Pete
- [!\[\]\(a9ca2c237943a6d0a9f22252f295b6f3_img.jpg\) SFWMD says June brings average rainfall](#) 07/10/2008 Okeechobee News
- [Beneficial Rainfall/US](#)
- [!\[\]\(9a01a64e0b4ff865df7d32ee7991fe8b_img.jpg\) Sugar agreement offers many benefits](#) 07/10/2008 Okeechobee Times
- [!\[\]\(6aefe9a3d997eb8b55c40ecd5fa7053f_img.jpg\) FEMA Re-Evaluating Flood Zones](#) 07/11/2008 Highlands Today Pinnell, Gary
- [State Makes Hickory Hammock User Applications Available Online](#) 07/10/2008 Lake Placid Journal
- [!\[\]\(baa8f8ba8c970db55300f5bb45bb3460_img.jpg\) State parks offer fun for area families](#) 07/10/2008 Okeechobee News Harden, Tonya
- [!\[\]\(a6e28495607b2299466d3d5d3193848c_img.jpg\) Taxable land values drop almost 10% in Martin County](#) 07/10/2008 Jupiter Courier George Andreassi
- [!\[\]\(ed205fcb6e75c95529564351570724d7_img.jpg\) US Sugar](#) 07/10/2008 Okeechobee Times
- [!\[\]\(27a992a1de9d3e89591e2e26256c5a71_img.jpg\) WATER: Interior's 'Water for America' initiative aims to prepare nation for strapped future](#) 07/10/2008 Land Letter Reese, April
- [!\[\]\(4e3fbe2ef35291baab7a42cb80921f3b_img.jpg\) Protect snail kite](#) 07/11/2008 Miami Herald
- [!\[\]\(7e07afcbfd46dd92c708e363ec417c00_img.jpg\) Lawmakers examine issue of red tide](#) 07/10/2008 Naples Daily News CANDACE BRAUN

Water managers say U.S. Sugar buyout won't hike tax rates

07/11/2008
Miami Herald - Online
CURTIS MORGAN

[Return to Top](#)

Water district says Glades reservoir should be completed, but perhaps scaled back

07/10/2008

Palm Beach Post - Online
Kleinberg, Eliot

[Return to
Top](#)

Eliot Kleinberg-Palm Beach Post

WEST PALM BEACH- Water managers today reaffirmed they want to finish a giant Glades reservoir project now mired in a lawsuit, but said it might not be completed as originally envisioned, depending on the proposed U.S. Sugar agreement.

When completed, the 26-square-mile, 27-foot-deep reservoir on 16,700 acres of former sugarcane land would hold 62 billion gallons to help replenish the Everglades and nearby farms.

Citing concerns over the suit, the 's governing board voted May 15 to halt digging what would be the world's largest free-standing reservoir and one of the nation's largest man-made water storage projects. The district agreed to pay a flat \$1.9 million a month, starting June 1, to the two contractors to recover costs related to the delay.

After the U.S. Sugar deal was announced, district manager said acquiring all that land for marsh filters might make the reservoir unnecessary, or at least the reservoir in its proposed size.

The board, holding its monthly meetings this week, met in private attorney-client session, then passed a resolution affirming that its overall goal is to preserve water supply, flood control and the health of the Everglades, however that plays out.

Water district's budget doesn't include U.S. Sugar deal - yet

07/10/2008

Palm Beach Post - Online
Kleinberg, Eliot

[Return to
Top](#)

Eliot Kleinberg-Palm Beach Post

A \$1.7 billion buyout of U.S. Sugar might be in the works, but that won't be in the South Florida Water Management District's 2008-2009 budget.

The district's preliminary \$1.29 billion operating budget calls for a tax rate for Palm Beach, Martin and St. Lucie counties of 62.4 cents per \$1,000 of taxable value.

It had been 69.7 cents for several years, but was reduced to the 62.4-cent rate for the 2006-2007 budget year, budget director Doug Bergstrom said.

Everything is pending the district's analysis of the property assessments in the 16 counties the district covers.

The 16 were to turn in assessments July 1, but three - Glades, Okeechobee and Martin - received 10-day extensions to Friday.

The district governing board set the tentative tax rates today . It holds hearings Sept. 10 and votes Sept. 23.

Bergstrom told today's governing board meeting the big U.S. Sugar Buyout already is part of the calculations for the 2009-2010 budget year.

Like other agencies, the district - reeling from a one-two punch of state-ordered tax cuts and a suffering real estate market - finds its tax condition 'upside down.'

In the past, because property values were increasing, the district's 'rollback rate' - the rate it would charge to collect the same amount as in the previous year - was lower than the standard rate. This year it's expected to be higher.

Bigger water district budget, scaled-back construction part of U.S. Sugar deal

07/10/2008

South Florida Sun-Sentinel - Online

Andy Reid

[Return to](#)
[Top](#)

Andy Reid-South Florida Sun-Sentinel

Doubling the budget for South Florida water managers and potentially shelving some Everglades restoration projects are among the ways proposed to pay for the state's bid to buyout U. S. Sugar. The on Thursday revealed a plan for a \$2.9 billion agency budget up from the \$1.3 billion expected that includes paying for U.S. Sugar's 187,000 acres, mill, offices and other holdings.

The budget boost comes from adding in costs for the \$1.75 billion deal proposed to move the sugar giant out of the way in a plan to reconnect Lake Okeechobee to the Everglades. 'These are hard numbers to swallow, by us and the public,' district board member Charles Dauray said. The district proposes taking on more debt to pay for the U.S. Sugar deal without increasing taxes.

The district's governing board on Wednesday gave an initial endorsement to keeping property taxes about 62 cents per \$1,000 of taxable value for most of its 16-county region. For a \$150,000 home, factoring in a \$50,000 homestead exemption, that would cost residents in Broward and Palm Beach counties \$62.40 a year. 'We did it within our means,' district Executive Director Carol Ann Wehle said about the U.S. Sugar deal's budget repercussions. Doing so required 'difficult decisions,' Wehle said. The preliminary budget proposal includes:

Continuing to suspend construction of a massive reservoir in western . Since June, the district has been paying contractors \$1.9 million a month to stand by while water managers decide whether to proceed. Taxpayers already have invested about \$250 million in the 16,700-acre reservoir that was being built along U. S. 27.

Shrinking a much-anticipated reservoir and water treatment area east of Lake Okeechobee, planned to hold water that now gets drained to the coast with damaging environmental effects. What once was a 12,000-acre project would shrink to 8,000 acres.

Holding off on building a similar reservoir on the west side of the lake, calling on the federal government to take over construction.

As negotiations with U.S. Sugar continue, the district plans to spend the summer looking for ways to prioritize construction projects before giving final approval to a spending plan in September.

One of the biggest ticket items with a future that remains in doubt is the Everglades Agricultural Area reservoir in western . The district in June stopped construction on it, citing a lingering legal challenge over how the water would be used. The agency must decide whether the reservoir with a price tag projected to hit \$800 million is needed in the new plan to use U.S. Sugar land to store, treat and move water to the Everglades.

The Natural Resources Defense Council filed the legal challenge over the reservoir, seeking guarantees that the water would be used for Everglades restoration. On Thursday, the district's governing board passed a resolution stating that whatever happens with the U.S. Sugar deal, the agency 'remains committed to restoring the Everglades' and that 'the District will ensure that

water will be identified for the natural system.' The U.S. Sugar deal calls for closing on the purchase by Nov. 30.

The district's proposed budget comes up for a vote again on Sept. 10, with a final decision scheduled for Sept. 23.

Andy Reid can be reached at abreid@sun-sentinel.com or 561-228-5504.

Cost of U.S. Sugar deal may end plans for Caloosahatchee reservoir

07/11/2008

News-Press

Hiraki, Ryan

[Return to
Top](#)

Ryan Hiraki-News-Press

A plan for a \$500 million reservoir along the Caloosahatchee River could be killed because the state might not spend any more on it.

Water managers said during a Thursday meeting that a plan to buy U.S. Sugar Corp., possibly for \$1.75 billion, might dilute the money for the C-43 reservoir just east of the Lee County line.

A final decision could come next month.

The reservoir is a 10,500-acre plot intended to store and treat water to limit pollutants flowing into the Caloosahatchee. The pollutants can cause algal blooms along the county coast and chase away beachgoers.

Completing the sugar deal would give the state 187,000 acres that could help cleanse southbound water from Lake Okeechobee that has gone west down the Caloosahatchee.

But Kurt Harclerode, Lee's natural resources operations manager, said C-43 should remain a priority to complement the rest of the Everglades plan.

"The bottom line is the health of the Caloosahatchee," he said.

The South Florida Water Management District, which covers 16 counties from Orlando to the Keys, will discuss the C-43 reservoir again in the next couple of months, as its governing board sets its tax rate.

The rate is 48 cents to 62 cents per \$1,000 of taxable property value, depending on location. It is supposed to remain unchanged, despite the \$3.5 billion state officials might need when they factor in interest for the money they would borrow to close the U.S. Sugar deal.

Now pressure could fall on Congress to finish C-43. U.S. Rep. Connie Mack IV, R-Fort Myers, believes it's too early to tell.

"As it progresses, we will continue to work side by side with our

state and local leaders to fight for the resources we need to preserve and restore the Everglades - whether that includes the C-43 reservoir project or other comprehensive approaches to ensuring a lasting solution that will protect this vital treasure."

Florida's sugar town deserves extra hand

07/11/2008
Miami Herald

[Return to
Top](#)

OUR OPINION: GOVERNMENT IS CREATING ECONOMIC PROBLEMS FOR CLEWISTON

Many small and not-so-small American towns have suffered hugely when their major employers shut down. So will Clewiston and the surrounding areas in Hendry County when the state buy-out of U. S. Sugar is completed in six years.

The 300-square-mile, \$1.75 billion purchase is lauded as key to restoring water flow to the Everglades. But the announcement had an immediate impact on Clewiston's economy, which is still recovering from U. S. Sugar's previous job cuts.

Clewiston is a town of 6,500 people on the southwest rim of Lake Okeechobee. It has been a company town from birth in the 1920s, serving U. S. Sugar and other farming interests.

Largest employer

It is the major town in Hendry County, population 40,000. U. S. Sugar's 1,700 jobs make it Hendry's largest employer; the next largest has 250.

Clewiston's claim to be in the middle of everywhere means that it is in the middle of nowhere. It takes an hour and change to reach any sizable city such as West Palm Beach to the east and Fort Myers to the west via lonesome stretches of U. S. 27.

All is not woe, though. Some Clewiston folk may keep their jobs if the state can find buyers for U. S. Sugar's mill and citrus-packing plant. Some may find work with Everglades restoration, and a healthier Lake O and 'Glades may spur more tourism for bass fishing and bird watching.

Some Clewiston folk may do somewhat well from the sale; employees own an estimated 38 percent of the company and are expected to get \$350 a share from the sale. They'll also get one to two years' pay in severance. But few likely will escape a drastic downsizing of life as they know it.

Eventual benefit

Clewiston and Hendry also may benefit eventually from being part of a state economic development program for rural areas.

After several years of bureaucratic mumbling and data gathering,

the program has decided its first project will be in Sebring, 60 miles from Clewiston, but its officials plan a July 21 meeting with Clewiston residents.

The state should put some extra and intensive focus on Clewiston because it has an extra obligation there. It is government that is casting the town into trouble. And it is government that needs to ensure that whatever Clewiston and Hendry County build to aid their economies does not conflict with the Everglades restoration plan.

Pollyanna might paint pretty pictures of a "win-win" dream for Clewiston's future. Nice but not realistic. Those who will benefit from a cleaner Everglades all of us owe a helping hand to those who will pay an extra price for it.

Lake Okeechobee water rises, slowly

07/11/2008

News-Press

Hiraki, Ryan

[Return to
Top](#)

Ryan Hiraki-News-Press

Levels still choke ecosystem's health, recreation

The filtered daylight fighting through the early morning fog reveals recent rainfall has helped the water level rise in Lake Okeechobee.

Rainfall is up slightly and so is the lake - to 9.99 feet, a foot higher than a year ago, when a record low of 8.8 feet was set. But the water is 4 feet below average and not high enough to improve boating access into the lake or to allow engineers to flush the salty buildup in the Caloosahatchee River with the right amount of water.

"It's still pretty low and hazardous, low and sandy in some areas," said Vicky Nowlan, a spokeswoman for the South Florida Water Management District. "We're still in a drought. We're not lifting water restrictions anytime soon."

State officials have cleaned 400 acres of muck, a boost for plant life and fish. But only four accesses to the lake are open: Port Mayaca in Martin County, Clewiston in Hendry County and the Okeechobee Pier and Okeetantie Marina in Okeechobee County. Even there, the water is low.

Such is the challenge at Lake Okeechobee: An excess of water can end up in the Caloosahatchee, causing algal blooms that pollute Lee County's beaches; too little can allow salinity to build up in the river, killing plant and marine life, while limiting inland recreation.

"There's only two things to do in Okeechobee: Go for a boat ride or go bowling," said Don Barber, a guide with Eagle Bay Airboat

Rides & Tours in the tiny town just north of the lake.

He said during the winter season, with snowbirds and tourists, he once had a waiting list. Now he gives four tours on his best days.

"They've flat ruined the economy out here, by letting the water out two years ago."

Hurricanes in 2004 and 2005 sent the lake level past 17 feet, a record high, and stirred the muck below the dark water. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which manages water releases, sent the murky liquid down the Caloosahatchee and St. Lucie. The 140-mile Herbert Hoover Dike around the lake is fragile, and could collapse during a hurricane, according to federal studies.

There is no water to send now, not when there is no desperate need yet for water downstream, and rainfall has not been heavy, said Luis Alejandro, an Army Corps engineer.

"We're not planning to make any releases in the near future either," he said.

The lake is the heart of a 16-county area from Orlando to the Keys, an area covered by the water management district.

Just over 24 inches of rain has fallen in this area so far this year, on pace for more than 48 inches, according to district statistics. Last year, the area got 42.88 inches, up from 40.75 in 2006 but down from 59.99 inches in 2005.

While more fresh water would help, it is not essential, said Kurt Harclerode, Lee County's natural resources operations manager.

"With all the rainfall here, we're getting adequate water into the system" to help control salinity, he said.

Rain gauges, tracked by volunteers throughout Lee County, showed 13.7 inches of rainfall in east Fort Myers and 10.87 in east Lee last month. The National Weather Service, which keeps official statistics, only has a gauge at Page Field in Fort Myers, and it recorded 7.14 inches, below the June average of 9.77.

The rain helps restore tape grass that provides a habitat for fish and blue crab, popular menu items in Southwest Florida.

"You have healthy seagrasses, you have a healthy ecosystem," Harclerode said. "It's certainly important for that segment of our economy."

Driving along State Road 80 in eastern Hendry County as the sun rose, the view was promising for inland communities. The open Florida fields dotted with lonely lollipop palm trees were bright green from the rain, with a fog comforter resting atop the lush earth.

Then at the lake, the water remained more than 20 yards from the Okeechobee Pier parking lot, a parched, sandy edge.

Samuel Cenatus, 71, pointed and insisted the water usually creeps toward the parked cars, his experience in 20 years living there.

David Morrison shrugged. He's ready to leave for Tennessee, after

10 years in Okeechobee.

"I haven't been out on the boat in a couple of years," said Morrison, 66. "The lake's been down. That's why we're moving, I guess."

WATER POLLUTION: Groups sue EPA over transfer rule

07/11/2008

Environment & Energy Daily

Boyle, Katherine

[Return to](#)
[Top](#)

Katherine Boyle, E&ENews PM reporter

A coalition of environmental groups sued U.S. EPA today over a rule they say will allow the pumping of polluted water from farms and suburbs into the Everglades and other pristine water bodies.

The rule exempts water transfers from Clean Water Act permitting if pumping is not for industrial, municipal or commercial purposes.

Environment America, Environment Florida, Environment New Hampshire and Environment Rhode Island filed the lawsuit in the 1st U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Boston. The National Environmental Law Center is representing them.

Christy Leavitt of Environment America said the rule violates the Clean Water Act. "EPA once again listened to the special interests and finalized a rule that puts the environment and public health in danger," Leavitt said in a statement. "We are challenging the rule in court to ensure that our clean waterways stay clean."

EPA finalized its rule last month amid a court battle over the legality of pumping water from canals into the Everglades and Lake Okeechobee. Prior to the final rulemaking, appeals courts for the 1st, 2nd and 11th U.S. Circuits had ruled the water transfers are regulated under the Clean Water Act permit program.

The Environment America lawsuit is the second filed over the rule. Earthjustice filed a lawsuit in the 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Atlanta on behalf of the Florida Wildlife Federation last month (E&ENews PM, June 27).

The battle over the permits began with the Miccosukee Tribe and environmental groups filing lawsuits against the South Florida Water Management District over pumping operations along the Everglades in Miami-Dade County and along the south shore of Lake Okeechobee. The district contended it should not be subject to the Clean Water Act provision because the water is moving within the same basin (E&ENews PM, June 1, 2006).

The Miccosukee case went to the Supreme Court in 2004. The high court remanded the case to federal district court, which ruled water transfers require a permit if they move pollution from canals to the receiving water body.

EPA has declined to comment on the lawsuit, citing agency policy (E&ENews PM, June 27).

[Click here to read the lawsuit.](#)

Conservation plan for Shingle Creek moves forward

07/10/2008

Orlando Sentinel

Pino, Mark

[Return to
Top](#)

Mark Pino - Orlando Sentinel

KISSIMMEE -- City commissioners have approved a cooperative agreement with Osceola County and the South Florida Water Management District for the Shingle Creek Regional Park. County commissioners and water managers also must approve the deal. The park is part of a quest to preserve Shingle Creek and its watershed.

COLUMN: Regional Report

Central Florida in 60 seconds

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Water managers approve \$67K for cleanup of Kreamer Island tires

07/10/2008

Palm Beach Post - Online

Kleinberg, Eliot

[Return to
Top](#)

Eliot Kleinberg-Palm Beach Post

WEST PALM BEACH- Water managers have approved money to pull out the remainder of thousands of tires dumped over decades on Kreamer Island. The had already paid a contractor \$45,000 to pull some 2,000 tires off the 1.8-square-mile island at the south end of Lake Okeechobee. But managers later determined as many as 3,000 more tires remain.

Today, the district's governing board approved another \$67,500 for the rest of the work.

The contractors will start right away and the district hopes to have all the tires gone by the end of July. The district and Belle Glade officials want to clear the island to make way for a park.
eliot_kleinberg@pbpost.com

Boca Raton: City gets 20-year renewal for water use permit

07/11/2008

South Florida Sun-Sentinel

[Return to Top](#)

South Florida Sun-Sentinel

Agreeing to recycle more wastewater for irrigation, Boca Raton on Thursday received a 20-year renewal for a water use permit that allows up to 19 billion gallons per year.

The permit, an increase of 1.4 billion gallons per year, was approved by the South Florida Water Management District despite concerns about Boca Raton's high per capita water use. City water users consume more than 300 gallons per day, compared to the South Florida average of about 170 gallons per day.

A big reason Boca Raton's per capita use is higher than average is because the city uses more drinking water for irrigation than other parts of South Florida, the district said. Other communities use wells, canals and other supplies not tracked by water meters.

The permit calls for the city to provide more treated wastewater as an irrigation alternative.

Water Managers Question Everglades Cleanup Standard

07/10/2008

Florida Trend

[Return to Top](#)

Florida Trend

Water Managers Question Everglades Cleanup Standard [Sun-Sentinel]

Trying to clean water by building filter marshes on phosphorus-rich farmland hasn't gotten the water quality to levels set after years of legal wrangling, according to the South Florida Water Management District.

Pearce Canal dredging plan OK'd by Corps

07/11/2008

WOKC-AM

Murphy, Charles

[Return to Top](#)

By Charles M. Murphy -Okeechobee News

Okeechobee News The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers recently approved the permits that are necessary to begin dredging the Pearce Canal in Buckhead Ridge, Glades County Manager Wendell Taylor said. The project is now in the hands of the South Florida Water Management and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection.

Just because the permit is on the way doesn't mean the work will get done this summer. Mr. Taylor reports that the County is yet to see any money that the State promised, over \$4 million, to do the job. He noted Tallahassee officials have told him that the money could arrive in October.

"As far as I know there fiscal year begins July 1," he noted.

He asked the County Commission this week if they would support using County funds to begin the work and then get reimbursement when the state funds are delivered. There was no action taken on his request.

Buckhead Ridge residents lobbied hard for state assistance this year as they conducted a letter writing campaign to Tallahassee. State Representative Denise Grimsley, (Rep., Lake Placid) said the letter writing campaign made a real difference in the state's decision to send money to dredge the Pearce Canal and the Moore Haven Canal.

Canal weir to help return Alligator Alley acreage to wetlands

07/10/2008

Naples Daily News

[Return to
Top](#)

WEST PALM BEACH - Thousands of acres of wetlands will be returned to a more natural state through a project requested by the Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida and supported by the South Florida Water Management District.

Construction of a water-control weir in the L-28 canal near Interstate 75 in Broward County will improve rainfall retention in the wetlands, re-hydrating about 8,000 acres within a triangular area bordered by I-75 and two canal levees, according to the water district. The SFWMD Governing Board this week approved \$220,000 in additional funding for the project, on top of \$600,000 previously approved in October 2007. "This project represents cooperation between the district and the Miccosukee Tribe to benefit the Everglades and South Florida's environment," said SFWMD Governing Board Chairman Eric Buermann. "It is an opportunity to return another section of Everglades wetlands to a more natural state." The L-28 canal runs under Alligator Alley. A pump station moves water into the water conservation area but also has impacted drainage within the triangular wetland area. About 800 acres of the property is within the Big Cypress Preserve, while the rest is owned by the Tribe. "The Miccosukee Tribe is voluntarily restoring over 8,000 acres of land, which could have been developed, back to the Everglades," said Gene Duncan the Tribe's water resources director.

Water managers and the Tribe believe the land will be improved by installing a weir in the canal south of the pump station, according to a water district news release. The device, a simple wall across the canal, will hold water in the triangle at depths closer to historical conditions but will allow water to flow north to the pump station during extremely wet times.

The Tribe is responsible for the final design, permitting, construction and monitoring of the project. The project is expected to be completed next year.

Lake level is still low

07/10/2008

Okeechobee News

Gawda, Pete

[Return to
Top](#)

See attachment for copy

SFWMD says June brings average rainfall

07/10/2008

Okeechobee News

[Return to
Top](#)

See attachment for copy

Beneficial Rainfall/US Sugar agreement offers many benefits

07/10/2008

Okeechobee Times

[Return to
Top](#)

See Attachment for copy

FEMA Re-Evaluating Flood Zones

07/11/2008

Highlands Today

Pinnell, Gary

[Return to
Top](#)

By GARY PINNELL-Highlands Today

SEBRING - If your home mortgage is federally insured - and most are - and you live in a flood-prone area, you may have to buy flood insurance.

Even if you're not living in a flood zone now, you may be one day, because FEMA is updating its Flood Rate Insurance Maps.

On July 1, Federal Emergency Management Agency officials met with South Florida Water Management engineers to examine the levees on the north border of Spring Lake, which divert water into Arbuckle Creek.

"We're not here to make a decision; we're just gathering information," said Angela Prymas, a senior engineer with the district, told Spring Lake Improvement District Manager Joe DeCerbo in a meeting last week. The West Palm Beach water management district is constructing models of how water flows into Lake Istokpoga, she said.

But if Spring Lake's levees are not certified, said Stephen Partney, the water district's section leader for dam safety, residents with federally insured mortgages will be required to buy flood insurance.

"The Corps of Engineers is doing an inventory," said Jody Cottrill, a public information officer for FEMA Region 4 office in Atlanta. "We're trying to make sure people living in flood-prone areas know that flood insurance is available to them."

The last flood map in Highlands County was issued in 1983. Since then, the population has doubled, and so have commercial areas. All those streets and parking lots change the path of rainwater runoff.

South and Southwest Florida Water Management Districts have received FEMA grants to update flood maps, Cottrill said. "They're getting together to decide what information to collect and how to collect it."

Within the next two to three years, they'll produce preliminary digital maps, Cottrill said, which can be updated more easily in the future.

Here's the upshot, Cottrill said: "What it means to the community is that it could move people in or out of a flood zone."

People who live in a flood zone and have FHA mortgages, or notes guaranteed by FreddieMac or FannieMae, have already gotten letters requiring them to buy flood insurance, she said. But their neighbors, who live in areas of moderate risk, should check to decide if they want to buy flood insurance.

"Florida has the largest number of policies in force in the nation," Cottrill said. The National Flood Insurance Program has 5.4 million flood insurance policies in force nationally, and 2.2 million are in Florida, where most land is just a few hundred feet above sea level, Cottrill said.

DeCerbo isn't sure what the evaluation of the stability of Spring Lake levees will mean to residents. "We have a pump station. We

can pump out any flood water," he said.

But the federal government and water districts often make decisions he doesn't understand, which include unfunded mandates.

Highlands County planner Zane Thomas said flood mapping will be on the Local Mitigation Strategy Working Group agenda at the 8 a. m. July 23 meeting in the Government Center.

WHAT IS YOUR FLOOD RISK?

Go to www.floodsmart.gov to estimate how much flood insurance would cost

Gary Pinnell can be reached at gpinnell@highlandstoday.com or 863 386-5828

State Makes Hickory Hammock User Applications Available Online

07/10/2008

Lake Placid Journal

[Return to
Top](#)

See attachment for copy

State parks offer fun for area families

07/10/2008

Okeechobee News

Harden, Tonya

[Return to
Top](#)

See attachment for copy

Taxable land values drop almost 10% in Martin County

07/10/2008

Jupiter Courier

George Andreassi

[Return to
Top](#)

George Andreassi-Stuart News

STUART Reflecting the declining market, the taxable value of Martin Countys real estate dropped by almost 10 percent in the past year, Property Appraiser Laurel Kelly said Thursday.

Based on the sales of homes and businesses in the first six months of this year, Kelly said she expects the downward trend to continue next year.

There arent many sales and the sales we do see are dropping (in price), Kelly said.

The taxable value of the countys real estate is one of the two main factors in determining property tax bills. The other is the property tax rates set by the County Commission, the School Board, the Stuart City Commission, the Childrens Services Council and South Florida Water Management District, among other taxing agencies.

Recently built subdivisions with many unsold homes saw the largest declines in taxable value, Kelly said. The taxable value of many commercial properties also went down as a result of the new \$25,000 exemption for tangible property.

The countys tax base lost almost \$2.2 billion in value, dropping to \$20.5 billion, Kelly said. The unincorporated areas of Martin County lost \$1.9 billion in taxable value, or almost 11 percent.

The City of Stuart lost about \$205 million in taxable value, or almost 9 percent, and the Town of Sewalls Point lost about \$15 million in taxable value, or a little more than 2 percent, Kelly said.

Meanwhile, the tax base in the Town of Jupiter Island increased by almost \$7 million, Kelly said.

The values in Sewalls Point and Jupiter Island remained relatively stable because so many of the homeowners are so affluent that there is less pressure to sell when the market turns down, said Assistant County Property Appraiser Mike Fribourg.

US Sugar

07/10/2008

Okeechobee Times

[Return to
Top](#)

See attachment for copy

WATER: Interior's 'Water for America' initiative aims to prepare nation for strapped future

07/10/2008

Land Letter

Reese, April

[Return to
Top](#)

April Reese, Land Letter Western reporter

With water supplies in many regions of the country facing unprecedented demands -- and unprecedented shortages -- the Interior Department is launching a new initiative aimed at assessing the status of the nation's water resources and helping local water managers stretch increasingly limited supplies.

The "Water for America" initiative, which Interior hopes to fund through a \$21.3 million request in the fiscal 2009 budget now being vetted by Congress, is designed to create a comprehensive picture of water supplies, usage and ecosystem requirements nationwide. Understanding how much water is available, how it is being used and how those uses are changing will aid communities in meeting increasing demands, according to the department.

The initial influx of funding for the initiative would support efforts by state, tribal and local governments to improve conservation, management and development of their water resources, according to Interior.

A key part of the Water for America initiative is the completion of a water census that will document water availability and use -- a crucial step in figuring out how to manage water resources effectively, said Kempthorne, whose responsibilities include serving as the water master for the Lower Colorado River Basin and overseeing federal water storage projects.

"We haven't had a water study in 30 years," he said in discussing the program at the annual meeting of the Western Governors' Association in Jackson, Wyo., June 29. About \$9.5 million of the \$21.3 million requested in the fiscal 2009 budget will fund the assessment, which is to be completed in 10 years and repeated every decade, along with stream gauge upgrades and improvements, to be carried out by the U.S. Geological Survey.

USGS lays out its to-do list

Eric Evenson, coordinator for the USGS portion of the initiative, said the agency plans to spend \$750,000 annually to bring 50 gauges back online each year, essentially shifting the funding obligation for operating the gauges from water users to the federal government. Many gauges have fallen out of use because municipalities or counties can no longer pay for them, Evenson said.

This dock now hangs in mid-air. The water's edge has crept away in the distance. Courtesy of the Department of Interior.

The 7,000 gauges now in use will be upgraded to be able to measure flows every hour instead of every four hours, which will

greatly aid water management by providing near-real time data, Evenson added. About \$2 million will be spent to upgrade 250 gauges each year through 2013.

While much is known about water budgets at the basin level, USGS will assess water supplies and uses at the watershed level, which will help local water managers and elected officials address water and development concerns, he said.

The data-gathering will also help fill gaps in scientific knowledge about how much water needs to be left in streams to support aquatic ecosystems, Evenson added. That information will aid fish and wildlife managers in protecting and recovering riparian species -- another key in averting water crises.

Evenson declined to answer whether the \$9.5 million budget request is enough. "We'll work with those resources," he said.

At a May 1 hearing, Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee members expressed support for the initiative, with Chairman Jeff Bingaman (D-N.M.) drawing parallels to the "SECURE Water Act" he introduced last year (E&E Daily, May 1).

Both proposals call for improving monitoring and data collection to support long-term planning of water use, although Interior officials have said they would need to see some changes to the bill before they would fully support it.

Jennifer Pitt, who works on water issues in the West for Environmental Defense, said she was not familiar with the initiative and could not comment on it. Calls to Water Resource Advocates and Trout Unlimited were not returned by press time.

The initiative was spurred in part by a 2006 report from the National Science and Technology Council, which concluded that supplies of clean, fresh water can no longer be taken for granted, as well as a 2001 USGS report commissioned by Congress that laid the groundwork for a national water assessment.

Three existing Bureau of Reclamation programs will be rolled into the new initiative, including Water 2025, an effort established by Interior in 2002 to avert water wars in the West through grants for water conservation, efficiency improvements and technology development. That program has been criticized by environmental groups for focusing too heavily on irrigation improvements at the expense of river restoration (Greenwire, April 4, 2005). The other two programs that will be rolled into the Water for America initiative are Water Conservation Field Services and Investigations.

Water conflicts plague many areas

While water conflicts were once the bane of the West, "water wars have spread to the Midwest, East and South," said Secretary Dirk Kempthorne in announcing the initiative in February. "Competition for water is increasing because of rapid population growth and burgeoning environmental and energy needs." (See related story.)

Water conflicts are occurring "within states, among states, between states and the federal government and among environmentalists and state and federal agencies," he noted. Population growth, along with prolonged drought and climate

change impacts, are exacerbating those conflicts, he added.

At a House Interior Appropriations Subcommittee hearing in February, Kempthorne emphasized the importance of Interior water programs, including the Water for America initiative. "You can't get around the scarcity of water," he told the committee (Greenwire, Feb. 8).

April Reese writes from Santa Fe, N.M.

Protect snail kite

07/11/2008
Miami Herald

[Return to
Top](#)

Miami Herald

The National Parks Conservation Association agrees that the Everglades snail kite is a critical endangered species that should be recovered through Everglades restoration (A rare bird all but vanishes from Everglades, July 5).

Along with the decline in Cape Sable seaside sparrows, that of snail kites tells us that vital restoration projects must be implemented to save beloved bird species. In particular, bridging a one-mile span of the Tamiami Trail in order to pass more water into the park is a small step in the right direction to improve habitat conditions for both the kite and sparrow.

We urge the Miccosukee Tribe to withdraw its lawsuit over Tamiami Trail in order to prevent further delay in moving forward with this beneficial project. The Modified Water Deliveries Project is almost 20 years old, and every day Everglades National Park gets worse. The Tamiami Trail changes would help save the sparrow and the snail kite. We cannot wait any longer.

We must ensure restoration projects remain on track to protect America's Everglades and endangered species for our children and grandchildren to enjoy.

SARA FAIN, Everglades Restoration Program Manager, National Parks Conservation Association, Hollywood

Lawmakers examine issue of red tide

07/10/2008
Naples Daily News
CANDACE BRAUN

[Return to
Top](#)

CANDACE BRAUN-Naples Daily News

It kills marine life. It irritates beachgoers' lungs. It's smaller than the size of a dime, though collectively it can span miles. It's red tide, a nuisance Southwest Floridians are all too familiar with.

And today, a House subcommittee gathered to further familiarize themselves with it, calling upon the guidance of four red tide experts as well as U.S. Rep. Connie Mack, R-Fort Myers.

The hearing, which ran from 10 a.m. to noon, addressed the damaging effects harmful algal blooms - or HAB, as red tide and its various types of organisms are commonly referred to - on the United States, and what federal legislators can do to combat it.

Money proves root of all research

Time and again, the proposed solution rang clear: "Funding, funding, funding. I think that's the primary answer," Dan Ayres, lead biologist at Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife's region six office, told the subcommittee. That's where Mack, and the bill he introduced in February 2007, comes into play. Known as the Save Our Shores Act, his bill proposes \$90 million in HAB research to be distributed over the course of three years. It also calls for all research to be authorized through a peer review process administered by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), as well as an annual report of the researchers' progress to be presented to Congress.

Though the 2008 Consolidated Appropriations Act included the part of the Save Our Shores Act which authorized \$90 million toward HAB research, it didn't incorporate requirements for peer review or annual updates, which is why Mack continues to fight for the bill to reach the floor. "I hope the members of the Committee can come together to pass meaningful legislation - whether through my Save Our Shores Act or as part of a larger bill - that improves how we fund red tide research on a federal level and strengthens the peer-review process," Mack said to the subcommittee.

Troubleshooting bad HAB-its

After Mack spoke, the subcommittee paused for a moment to switch to its panel of experts, who then focused on the impacts of red tide and its possible solutions, all of which would require additional research first.

While HAB can be very damaging to freshwater and marine water - NOAA estimates it costs the United States more than \$80 million a year - subcommittee members questioned whether it could benefit the nation by being harvested offshore and made into biofuel. "I don't think one can do that with natural blooms; they're too sporadic," said Dr. Donald Anderson, senior scientist and director of the Coastal Ocean Institute at Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution. Though he cautioned against the idea, he also said harvesting blooms would be more advantageous in some respects than other forms of biofuel, such as ethanol production from corn crops, because these blooms could be harvested anywhere.

HABs require four elements in order to blossom: nutrients,

warmth, sunlight and quiescent, stagnant water, said Dr. H. Kenneth Hudnell, vice president and director of science at SolarBee, Inc. "We can't do anything about sunlight and warmth, but we can do something about quiescent, stagnant water," he said, noting earlier that the government can also do something to regulate nutrients as well.

He stressed that reducing nutrient input into bodies of water will play an important role in getting HAB under control, and machinery can be developed to help circulate water and prevent HAB formation, such as the units in place in the Houston reservoir.

A call to action

One key reason Mack wants to see a peer review board is to increase the efficiency of tax payers' dollars, as the current system allows legislators to acquire research funding for projects in their own backyards. This can cause project duplication, which would be eliminated if all proposals were going through one board composed of scientific minds that could weigh and evaluate the projects before agreeing to fund them, he said.

Hudnell saw additional need for the federal government to take control of the issue, as he said he experienced a sort of power struggle in Florida over fertilizer usage restrictions, where local governments tried to rush legislation before the state could. "We really need some kind of national leadership to show states and localities the best way to do things," he said.

