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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.



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sfwmd.gov
South Florida Water Management District
3301 Gun Club Road
West Palm Beach, Florida 33406
561-686-8800 or 1-800-432-2045 in Florida
www.sfwmd.gov

MAILING ADDRESS: P.O. Box 24680
West Palm Beach, FL 33416-4680

Managing South Florida's Water Conservation Areas

Goals, responsibilities and challenges

South Florida's three Water Conservation Areas (WCAs) are vast tracts of remnant Everglades sawgrass marsh located adjacent to Everglades National Park. Spanning 846,387 acres, the WCAs serve multiple water resource and environmental purposes, including flood control, water supply and habitat for South Florida's plant and animal communities. Renowned for their clean water, unique landscape and birds and wildlife, the WCAs are popular for recreational activities such as fishing, hunting and bird watching.

Shared Goals for WCA Management

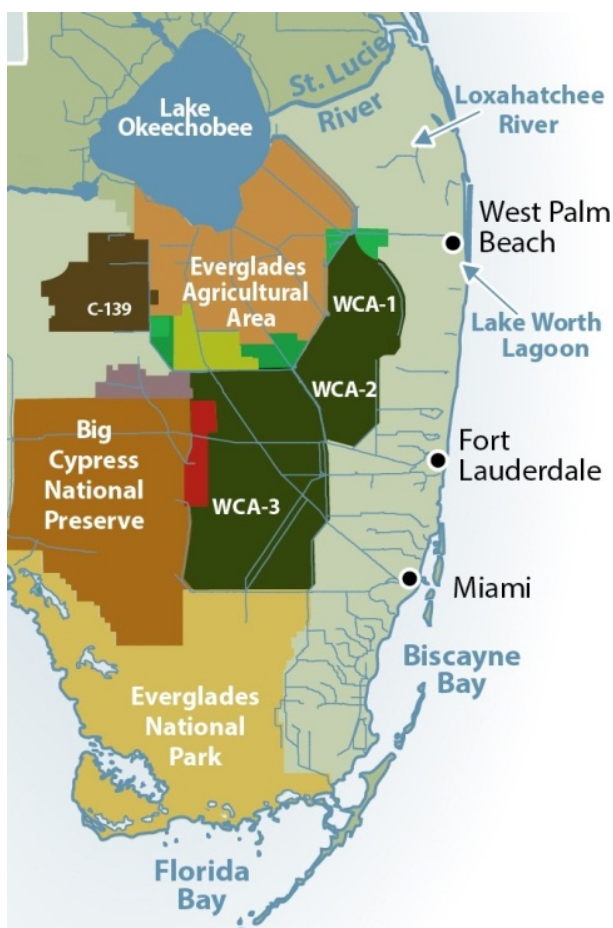
- Construction of the three Water Conservation Areas was authorized by the U.S. Congress in 1948 as part of legislation creating the Central and Southern Florida Project, the massive public works system that provides flood control and water supply for South Florida.
- A series of levees, along with associated water control structures, separate the wetlands in the WCAs from agricultural and urban areas of South Florida.
- Managing water levels in this vast area — 58 times larger than the island of Manhattan — is a responsibility of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. A host of federal and state agencies, including the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, have related water resource management roles.
- Today, water levels within the WCAs are managed using federal regulation schedules, adopted by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Based on computer models and hydrological and ecological science, the schedules are designed to keep water levels at optimal heights to balance the multiple demands and uses of the system, including:
 - Providing flood protection to approximately 5.7 million people living in Palm Beach, Broward and Miami-Dade counties
 - Maintaining the integrity of the levees containing the WCAs
 - Storing water for dry times and recharging groundwater supplies utilized by urban areas and natural systems
 - Delivering water to Everglades National Park and other natural systems

Operational Challenges

- Florida's weather extremes can quickly shift from drought to deluge.
- Water flows from the WCAs to other parts of the water management system or to tide are constrained by several factors, including:
 - Capacity of outflow structures, such as pumps and gates
 - Ability to move local basin runoff from communities to the east before water can leave the WCAs
 - Roadways, such as Tamiami Trail, separating the WCAs from Everglades National Park
 - Dense native vegetation that provides wildlife habitat in key areas

(more)

- Discharges from WCA-3 to Everglades National Park through the S-12 structures are limited to protect the endangered Cape Sable seaside sparrow during certain times of the year.
- Soil oxidation and peat fires in the early part of the 20th century altered the slope of the land, causing the northern regions of each WCA to be too dry and southern regions to be too wet.
- During high water events such as Tropical Storm Isaac in August 2012, the District assists its partners by taking a variety of emergency flood control operations, including:
 - Emergency coordination meetings, in addition to regular briefings, with appropriate partner agencies
 - Removing an earthen plug to allow up to 300 cubic feet per second of additional water to flow from WCA-3 to the L-67 Canal in Everglades National Park
 - Moving water to tide through the regional canal system



Water Conservation Areas

WCA-1 (Arthur R. Marshall Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge)

- Location: Palm Beach County
- Area: 221 square miles
- WY2013 Inflow: 363,897 acre-feet
- WY2013 Outflow: 483,713 acre-feet

WCA-2

- Location: Palm Beach and Broward counties
- Area: 210 square miles
- WY2013 Inflow: 1,074,320 acre-feet
- WY2013 Outflow: 938,199 acre-feet

WCA-3

- Location: Broward and Miami-Dade counties
- Area: 915 square miles
- WY2013 Inflow: 1,322,042 acre-feet
- WY2013 Outflow: 1,225,088 acre-feet

* Water Year 2013 (WY2013) = May 1, 2012, to April 30, 2013