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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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Dispersed Water Management Program

Shallow water retention benefits water resources and the environment

Since 2005, the South Florida Water Management District has been working with a coalition of agencies, environmental organizations, ranchers and researchers to enhance opportunities for storing excess surface water on private, public and tribal lands. In addition to utilizing regional public projects, the Dispersed Water Management Program encourages property owners to retain water on their land rather than drain it, accept and detain regional runoff, or do both. Managing water on these lands is one tool to reduce the amount of water delivered into Lake Okeechobee during the wet season and discharged to coastal estuaries for flood protection. Shallow water retention also provides valuable groundwater recharge for water supply, opportunities for water quality improvement and rehydration of drained systems.

Program Components

- Dispersed water is defined as shallow water distributed across parcel landscapes using relatively simple structures.
- Private landowner involvement typically includes cost-share cooperative projects, easements or payment for environmental services.

Benefits of Dispersed Water Management

- Ongoing Lake Okeechobee and estuary ecological improvement projects are enhanced by providing an alternative to sending excess water into the lake during the wet season, reducing the volume of discharges to estuaries.
- Retained water reduces nutrient loading to receiving downstream systems by reducing the volume of water delivered.
- Detained water reduces the concentration of nutrients in the runoff as it slowly flows across the landscape.
- Shallow groundwater recharge opportunities are expanded.
- Habitats for native plants and wildlife are improved when wetlands are rehydrated.

Increased Water Storage Accounting – Current Status

- Through a combination of public and private projects, 131,500 acre-feet of water retention/storage has been made available to date. That total includes about 72,000 acre-feet from regional public facilities, which includes reservoirs, restoration projects and stormwater treatment areas.
- Under the Dispersed Water Management Program alone, there are more than 100 participating landowners providing water retention or storage ranging from 1 acre-foot to 30,000 acre-feet.
- Planned dispersed water projects that have been assessed for implementation may provide approximately 230,000 acre-feet of additional storage in the future, pending funding.
- The ultimate goal for the Dispersed Water Management Program is to provide 450,000 acre-feet of retention/storage throughout the Northern Everglades watershed.
- For comparison purposes, 450,000 acre-feet of additional storage equates to approximately 1 foot of water off of Lake Okeechobee.