Introduction

On July 16 the South Florida Water Management District Governing Board will meet to discuss the proposed 2016 millage rate and budget. The board faces a choice of either a fifth year of crippling cuts or getting back on the path to reliable revenue to meet its legal responsibilities.

The South Florida Water Management District’s budget is important because the agency manages and protects water resources and provides flood control. Nearly half of Florida’s people benefit from the Water Management District’s programs and projects. The District is also the lead agency for Everglades restoration – locating, building, maintaining and sharing the costs of the projects that improve and better manage water supply and natural systems.

Everglades restoration has gone slower than initially envisioned. Insufficient and inconsistent funding have contributed to slowing restoration progress. Governor Scott recognized the need for consistent funding and proposed a $5 billion, 20 year commitment to Everglades restoration with $150 million requested for this year. This proposal is linked to a set of projects that will accomplish most of the goals of Everglades restoration. A dedicated revenue stream for restoration efforts will guarantee steady progress.

“Dwindling tax revenues and reserves, along with inconsistent state appropriations, create uncertainties for Everglades restoration, water supply and flood protection”

- Dr. Tabitha Cale, Everglades Policy Associate

In the FY 2015-2016 budget, the Legislature only appropriated $82 million dollars for Everglades restoration, far short of requested funds. This shortfall leaves the District without adequate sources for the Everglades, estuaries and other water projects.

Tax Shortfalls Undermine the South Florida Water Management District’s Mission

The Florida Constitution allows the South Florida Water Management District to levy property taxes of up to 1 mill ($1 per $1000 of property value after exemptions). Since 2011,
when the Legislature imposed a 1/3 tax cut on the District, annual tax collections have dropped. Yet the costs of maintaining and repairing the network of pumps and canals that provide for water supply and flood protection are not adequately funded.

The District is also failing to keep up with the costs of managing natural systems and is struggling to keep up with the growing costs of improving the system to meet the goals Everglades restoration, estuary protection and Lake Okeechobee recovery.

Most of the District’s budget comes from state appropriations and from property tax revenue. Appropriations from the legislature can change from one year to the next, and do not represent a consistent source of funding.

**Audubon Florida’s Recommendations**

- The Governing Board should use its authority to set the millage rate to make up for the funding shortfalls in the 2015-2016 budget.
- An additional 60 million dollars in revenue could allow the South Florida Water Management District to provide:
  - $48 million for Everglades and estuary projects to make up for the shortfall in state appropriations.
  - $3 million for the Land Acquisition Trust Fund to be used for land management.
  - $5 million for Dispersed Water Management projects including Brighton Valley.
  - $4 million for staff merit increases to retain staff.

**For more information, please contact:**

**Tabitha Cale, Ph.D.**  
Everglades Policy Associate  
Audubon Florida  
[tc@audubon.org](mailto:tc@audubon.org)  
@EvergladesTabby  

**Audubon Florida**  
4500 Biscayne Blvd  
Suite #205  
Miami, FL 33137  
305-371-6399