

## **DISPERSED WATER MANAGEMENT – PROGRAMMATIC PERSPECTIVE**

*Anthony Betts, Jonathan Madden, and Manuel Zamorano*

South Florida Water Management District, West Palm Beach, FL, USA

Much of South Florida's historic wetlands have been altered to facilitate population growth and economic development. To reverse unintended consequences, the Northern Everglades and Estuaries Protection Program (NEEPP) was established to improve hydrology, water quality, and aquatic habitats within the Lake Okeechobee, Caloosahatchee River, and St. Lucie River watersheds. These three Northern Everglades watersheds comprise nearly five million acres and serve as headwaters to the Greater Everglades ecosystem.

In coordination with Florida Department of Environmental Protection and Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) implements watershed construction projects to accomplish NEEPP objectives. These include large-scale storage and treatment projects and "dispersed" storage located throughout the watershed. Launched in 2005, the SFWMD Dispersed Water Management Program is based on a payment for ecosystem services framework and incentivizes landowners to retain direct precipitation and divert regional runoff for storage and treatment on private property. The primary objective of the DWM program is to cost-effectively manage stormwater in the Northern Everglades to restore beneficial flow patterns and improve surface water quality.

Currently, twenty-eight DWM projects provide storage and treatment on more than 76,000 acres of private property. Collectively, these projects provide 200,000 acre-feet of storage and retain 45 metric tons of phosphorus and 260 metric tons of nitrogen annually. In addition to these demonstrated benefits, DWM projects provide a myriad of secondary benefits, including economic support for low-intensity land uses, wetland and habitat restoration, groundwater recharge, and more.

As a governmental agency, the SFWMD is tasked with furthering NEEPP objectives, and public-private partnerships through the DWM program are one tool which has been successfully implemented. A programmatic perspective requires the SFWMD collaborate with stakeholders to maintain cost-effective benefits to the public and identify new opportunities necessary to meet urgent environmental restoration goals in the Northern Everglades.

PRESENTER BIO: Anthony Betts is a principal scientist with the South Florida Water Management District Everglades and Estuaries Protection Bureau. He has extensive experience with the Dispersed Water Management Program (DWM) management and implementation, including project development, operation, and evaluation for the District's twenty-eight DWM projects.