

The South Florida Water Management District – A Balancing Act

Donna Spencer attended the UNEP/IW:LEARN Information Technology Workshop which took place 2 – 6 June 2008 at Florida Atlantic University's Center for Environmental Studies in Boca Raton. While the training itself focused upon Plone open source software and website building, on Friday 6th June, participants in the Workshop visited the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) in nearby West Palm Beach.

This regional, governmental agency oversees the water resources in the southern half of the state of Florida which has one of the most diverse ecosystems in the world. It is the oldest and largest of the state's five water management districts and a centre of excellence. Its mission is to manage and protect water resources of the region by balancing and improving water quality, flood control, natural systems and water supply.

This broad mission is achieved through a number of programs which include:

Coastal watersheds – the restoration of coastal watersheds and receiving water bodies through local initiatives and partnerships and applied scientific research; decreasing flood damages District-wide through flood management planning.

The Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP), an unprecedented State-Federal partnership which aims to restore, conserve and protect South Florida's ecosystem while providing for other water-related needs of the region, including water supply and flood protection.

Protection and restoration of natural systems in the northern Everglades (Kissimmee, Lake Okeechobee, Caloosahatchee and St. Lucie watersheds) by increasing storage capacity and water quality treatment.

Land Stewardship – the provision of natural resource protection, effective land management and reasonable opportunities for appropriate agricultural use, while allowing compatible recreational uses on designated public lands.

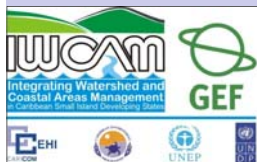
SFWMD's responsibilities also include: modeling and scientific support; operations and maintenance; regulation; and, ensuring an adequate supply of water to protect natural systems and meet all existing and projected reasonable-beneficial uses, while sustaining water resources for future generations.

Agnes Ramsey, Deputy Department Director, Everglades Restoration Planning, elaborated on SFWMD's ambitious 10 billion dollar, 35 year implementation plan to restore the Everglades. CERP is already helping to reduce the problems which for years have plagued the area: too much or too little water in the South Florida ecosystem; massive reductions in populations of wading birds; degradation of water quality; repetitive water shortages and salt water intrusion; declining estuary health; and as much as 1.7 billion gallons of water a day wasted to tide.

Department Director, Operations Control, Susan Sylvester, gave an overview of SFWMD's Water Management System. Part of this is the state's primary flood-control system, the Central and Southern Florida (C&SF) Project, which includes approximately 2,000 miles of canals and levees, hundreds of water control structures, dozens of pump stations, and numerous other facilities. Finally, the group was given the opportunity to tour the Operations Control Center – Science and Technology in Action!



Touring SFWMD's lobby and Operations Control



Participating Country Focal Points, Demonstration Projects and others are invited to submit articles. Please contact Donna Spencer at dspencer@cehi.org.lc

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