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**PARTNERSHIP JOINS PEOPLE TOGETHER
TO PROTECT WATER QUALITY IN
SUWANNEE AND SANTA FE RIVERS**

LIVE OAK, FLA, Feb. 22, 2017– The Suwannee River Water Management District (District) and its partners are reinvigorating the Suwannee River Partnership (SRP, Partnership) program in 2017 to develop solutions for water resources in the Suwannee and Santa Fe Rivers. Advisory councils will be created to identify critical water issues within the environmental and agricultural communities and build consensus amongst the groups.

“We face many challenges in the Suwannee and Santa Fe Rivers concerning water quality and quantity and we can’t solve them alone. This is an opportunity for all parties to gather around the table and propose practical solutions for protecting our groundwater and reducing pollution,” said Noah Valenstein, executive director for the District. “There is no single answer and we need to bring people together to find common ground using science-based solutions.”

The primary focus and mission of the SRP will remain the same – help save and protect water in the Suwannee and Santa Fe Rivers using scientific methods to address resource concerns.

“I am excited to see the board and staff of the Suwannee River Water Management District get people together to propose practical solutions to water resource challenges,” said Eric Draper, director of Audubon Florida. “The district has stepped up its commitment to sharing information and collaboration with all stakeholders. The Suwannee River Partnership is based on the idea that people can work together to craft water solutions.”

The partnership currently focuses primarily on the reduction of nutrients and water use efficiency of agricultural practices through voluntary or incentive-based programs. Since its inception, SRP and its partners have provided financial and technical support for water-saving and nutrient-reduction programs, including over 850 irrigation system evaluations resulting in potential water savings of 4.3 billion gallons per year.

“The Partnership was the first of its kind to focus on solutions, not just problems,” said Valenstein. “Working together with producers and local governments, we generated valuable advice and then used that advice to save millions of gallons of water and reduce pollution. We need to continue that partnership and expand its reach now more than ever before.”

The guiding principles of the program focus on maximizing coordination of agency resources, using watershed management approaches to encourage problem solving, implementing incentive-based solutions, promoting management approaches that protect the environment and public health, gaining consensus for risk management issues, identifying research priorities, and developing education and outreach programs.

“Water quality and quantity is critical to the future of the agricultural industry, specifically this area,” said Rod Land, President of the Lafayette County Florida Farm Bureau. “I look forward to the opportunity to have round-table discussions with water users of all kinds to find common solutions.”

Established in 1999, SRP has historically been made up of governmental agencies and local agriculturalists, including the District, Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Natural Resource and Conservation Services, United States Environmental Protection Agency, Florida Department of Environmental Protection, University of Florida, Institute for Food and Agricultural Sciences, Florida Farm Bureau Federation, dairy and poultry industries and various associations.

“DEP is proud to be a member of the Suwannee River Partnership. The Partnership has a long history of success by bringing together land owners, researchers and government agencies to find solutions for complex issues that protect natural resources and support sustainable agricultural practices in the region,” said Thomas Frick, director of Environmental Assessment and Restoration for DEP. “The Partnership will continue to play a critical role in helping to address restoration activities for both the river and springs.”

SRP is expected to host meetings for the advisory councils in the coming weeks. If you are interested in participating, please contact Darrell Smith, Director for the Agriculture and Environmental Projects division at 386.362.1001.

The mission of the Suwannee River Water Management District is to protect and manage water resources using science-based solutions to support natural systems and the needs of the public. The District holds true to the belief of water for nature, water for people. Headquartered in Live Oak, Florida, the District serves 15 surrounding north-central Florida counties.

For more information about the District, visit www.mysuwanneeriver.com or follow us on Facebook and Twitter, search @SRWMD.

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