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WSP and Partners Complete Largest Environmental Restoration Project in U.S. History

Florida Everglades' man-made wetlands in C-44 Reservoir/Stormwater Treatment Area will restore, protect and preserve wildlife and communities.

INDIANTOWN, Florida, November 23, 2021 — Today the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) will mark the completion of the C-44 Reservoir/Stormwater Treatment Area (STA), a 6,300-acre man-made wetland area designed to restore, protect and preserve water resources in the region.

The $100 million C-44 Reservoir/STA is the largest environmental restoration project in U.S. history, and included construction of several miles of canals, reservoirs and new wetlands in Martin County. It is part of the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP), designed to create a natural filter capable of cleaning billions of gallons of freshwater before it hits the St. Lucie Estuary and other waterways.

"The CERP project is a big solution for a big problem," said Angel Martinez, project manager and principal supervising construction coordinator for WSP USA, a leading engineering and professional services consultancy. "By releasing cleaner water into the river, the C-44 STA will enhance the quality of life of the community by providing an improved environmental condition – reducing the algae bloom toxicity levels – as well as accommodating better and safer water-related activities, such as fishing, boating and beach access."

WSP managed construction on behalf of the SFWMD, ensuring the stormwater treatment area was built to the design requirements and met established water quality goals.

The C-44 has three project components: a reservoir built by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, a pump station, and the STA, which is the largest component.

Once a vast area of natural wetlands, much of the land transitioned to agricultural use in the mid-20th Century following the completion of the Herbert Hoover Dike in 1937, which almost completely enclosed Lake Okeechobee and sharply reduced the flow of water into the region. Orange orchards and cattle farms altered the natural habitat, and the by-products of pesticides and fertilizer infiltrated the water. Runoff carrying those pollutants entered the freshwater supply, damaging the ecosystem in the St. Lucie River estuary and threatening the habitat for more than 4,000 species of animals – including 60 on the endangered list – and placed the livelihoods of residents and businesses at risk.

The main C-44 pump station pumps water from the C-44 canal into the reservoir, where it is directed into the distribution canals and then into the six STA cells composed of man-made wetlands, which absorb excess nutrients from the water, such as phosphorous and nitrogen.

After the nutrients have been successfully removed, the cleaner water is discharged back into the C-44 canal that connects to the St. Lucie River estuary, and eventually discharges into the southern Indian River lagoon. The pumping station will be capable of pumping water in and out of the reservoir at a rate of 1,100 cubic feet per second, or about 717 million gallons per day.

The site is already providing new wetlands for water birds and other wildlife, most notably the return of the endangered Everglade Snail Kite, a bird of prey that feeds on apple snails, found primarily in the lowland freshwater marshlands of Florida.

About WSP USA

WSP USA is the U.S. operating company of WSP, one of the world's leading engineering and professional services firms. Dedicated to serving local communities, we are engineers, planners, technical experts, strategic advisors and construction management professionals. WSP USA designs lasting solutions in the buildings, transportation, energy, water and environment markets. With more than 12,000 employees in 200 offices across the U.S., we partner with our clients to help communities prosper. wsp.com

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