

GOOD NEWS FOR THE EVERGLADES

Improving water management supports roseate spoonbill nesting

The health of Florida Bay's roseate spoonbill population is a good indicator of the health of the Southern Everglades and a measure of whether water management and restoration efforts are achieving ecological benefits.



While roseate spoonbill nesting success in Florida Bay the past two seasons was the poorest on record since the 1960s, conditions have improved this year. Nesting failures have been avoided because Audubon scientists have collaborated with water managers to improve water flows from the complex system of management structures that comprise the C-111 canal. Collaborative management efforts, and favorable weather conditions, enable wet and dry

cycles to more closely mimic the natural conditions that coincide with successful wading bird nesting.

Operating the first phase of the C-111 Spreader Canal project for maximum ecological benefit will further improve nesting conditions for roseate spoonbills. Located in southern Miami-Dade County, this canal system has contributed to the decline of the health of Florida Bay by changing natural water flow into the bay and surrounding wetlands.

While the Southern Everglades was once part of a connected ecosystem where water flowed slowly in sheets and wildlife was abundant, flood control efforts altered the River of Grass using massive man-made engineering structures. Currently, water flows into Everglades National Park through culverts under Tamiami Trail, or through enormous pumping or spillway structures along Tamiami Trail. The result is too much water where historically there was little, and too little at the heart of historical flow. The ecology of the region is suffering with a 90% decline in the population of wading birds, an influx of invasive exotic species, and other harmful impacts.



The S-12D structure along Tamiami Trail controls flows into Everglades National Park
Photo by Robert V. Sobczak, Big Cypress Nat'l Preserve Hydrologist



May 2009 South of Tamiami Trail near Big Cypress Nat'l Preserve.
Photo by Robert V. Sobczak, Big Cypress Nat'l Preserve Hydrologist

Although the Everglades is a system in need, there is good news. The resiliency of Florida Bay's roseate spoonbills demonstrates that when water management and ecosystem restoration work is focused on providing ecological benefits, wildlife respond positively. Continuing and accelerating the state and federal partnership to restore the Everglades, including raising Tamiami Trail, completing the Modified Water Deliveries Project, and the C-111 Spreader Canal project will provide more natural water flows that mimic the Everglades' historic conditions to

restore the ecological connectivity and abundance throughout Everglades National Park and Florida Bay.