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### **Cattail treatments protect emerging native plant communities in Lake Okeechobee**

Lower lake levels in the past two years have been a boon to the native plant communities important to the health of Lake Okeechobee. However, low lake levels also created conditions that are favorable for cattail expansion.

Cattails have become reestablished in some areas along the marsh edge and also have expanded into new sites especially in the south end of the lake. Cattail communities in the Bay Bottom and the King's Bar area of the Lake Okeechobee's marsh have threatened to shade out hundred's of acres of more desirable plants including eel grass, pepper grass and spikerush. Replacing diverse native plant communities with dense cattail has a negative impact on water quality and wildlife habitat. In addition, access to recreational boaters and anglers also can become restricted.

Over the next few weeks, herbicide treatments of dense cattail populations similar to treatments that occurred last year will again be required. These treatments will occur in areas where dense stands of cattail have become established in Bay Bottom, Cody's Cove and the mouth of the Pearce Canal, and at Tin House Cove. A future cattail treatment may also be required in the Monkey Box. This will protect beds of spikerush, lilies, and other desirable native vegetation growing in the area, delay the reestablishment of a dense cattail wall and help maintain access for anglers.

Beginning in late July 2002, contractors for the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) aerially treated 1,700 acres of the more than 20,000 acres of cattail in Lake Okeechobee. On the north end of the lake, 400 acres of cattail were treated near

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Kings Bar and Cody's Cove in areas where knot grass and eelgrass were in danger of being replaced. On the west side of the lake, 200 acres of new cattail were treated to preserve and widen boat trails connecting the Monkey Box and Fisheating Bay. Near South Bay, 1100 acres were treated with herbicide in the Bay Bottom region where cattails were overtaking beds of musk grass, spikerush, eelgrass, knotgrass, peppergrass and hydrilla. Contractors using boats treated an additional 200 acres of cattail between Pearce Canal and the Mayaca Cut.

In the area where treatments occurred in 2002, plant communities that have returned include dense pondweed (peppergrass), chara, vallisneria and other highly valued submersed plants. Numerous reports of tournament and other fishermen using the treated areas for successful angling have been reported. Such fishing would not have been possible without the treatments. Cattail re-growth has been minimal since the treated plants were new populations that established during low water, and therefore, don't have the massive rhizome reserves of older, more resilient stands.

For additional information, please visit our website at [www.sfwmd.gov](http://www.sfwmd.gov) or contact the SFWMD Okeechobee Service Center at 800-250-4200 or 863-462-5260. Herbicide treatment schedules are posted by the US Army Corps of Engineers at public boat ramps and are provided to most local bait and tackle shops and motels.

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