

Big Florida Water Management Districts Changes Signed into Law by Governor Scott Yesterday

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Yesterday, Florida Governor Rick Scott flew to West Palm Beach and signed Florida Senate Bill 2142 into law at the offices of the South Florida Water Management District, enacting big, big changes to Florida's five water management districts as it eases the property tax burden on Florida homeowners and Florida business.

This is the same bill that conservationists were asking the Governor to veto - for details on their failed challenge, read our earlier post on May 19, 2011, "Governor Scott Asked by Conservationists to veto SB 2142 Which Gives Legislative Power Over Water District Budgets."

The Governor's press release focuses not upon the shift in power issue, but instead highlights the savings that result from reducing the property taxes previously levied by the water management districts, which his office estimates to be \$210.5 million in total savings to Florida homeowners.

These are the taxes levied by four of the five Florida water management districts, a part of the Florida Department of Environmental Protection in charge of administering flood protection programs and overseeing state water resources, including implementing plans for managing water needs during droughts, watching over aquifer recharge, well construction, surface water management, and buying lands under the Florida Save Our Rivers program.

Florida has five water management districts (see a map of the districts here), and the new law impacts them as follows:

- *Southwest Florida Water Management District* – **36%** reduction
- *South Florida Water Management District* – **30%** reduction
- *St. Johns Water Management District* - **26%** reduction
- *Suwannee River Water Management District* – **8%** reduction
- *Northwest Florida Water Management District* – No change

Of course, as the *Orlando Sentinel* points out, the savings to the individual Florida homeowner may not be significant, since the Water District's taxes weren't that high before the change. And, as the *Miami Herald* reports, conservation groups remain adamant that Governor Scott's action only serves to doom the Florida Everglades as well as other Florida environmental concerns.