

## Florida Water Management District Bare Bones Budget: Did They Cut Too Much? Expect Debate at Tonight's South Florida WMD Public Hearing

By Rosa Schechter

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*This afternoon at 5:15 pm, the first public hearing of the [South Florida Water Management District](#) on its 2012 Budget will begin. If you want to go, then plan to be there at SFWMD offices located at 3301 Gun Club Road ([map](#)) later today.*

### ***Stripped Budgets for Florida Water Management Districts***

As previously discussed, money is tight and getting tighter for Florida's state government, and the state's water management has been the target of a lot of belt-tightening. (See earlier post, "[Florida Water Management District Swiftly Cuts Budget With 120+ Employee Bailouts, Does This Really Hurt the Everglades?](#)")

On August 24, 2011, the Secretary of the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) issued a news release ([read it here](#)) that Florida's five water management districts would have budget reductions of \$700+ million year-over-year. Money is to be limited to only their "core mission responsibilities" of water supply, flood protection, water quality and natural system protection.

### ***South Florida Water Management District Budget Cut By Approximately 50%***

For the Miami area, the South Florida Water Management District [will be operating on a 2012 budget that is almost half that of the prior year](#). And, it is true that some of those cuts were easy enough to do: getting rid of cushy perks -- like employees being paid for unused vacation days or board members getting plane rides on the district's plane to SFWMD board meetings -- really shouldn't get anyone's criticism, and new District head Melissa Meeker should be credited for her efforts in scaling back the payroll (including taking [her own \\$40K cut](#) in salary).

### ***Is There Enough Money Left for the Core Mission? Some Are Wondering.***

Meeker built the budget for SFWMD and its goal is to cover the district's needs in meeting its "core mission responsibilities." However, there are those that are concerned that the South Florida Water Management District has cut too much and now, there isn't enough money left to meet those "core mission responsibilities."

And these aren't just the usual suspects, like the [Executive Director of the Audobon Society](#). Consider the recent opinion piece published in the *Sun Sentinel* by Amy Evans, a senior at Weston's Cypress Bay High School, where she worries about the long run impact of the budget cuts ("[Cutting costs, and water safety, too?](#)").

### ***Let's Not Second Guess SFWMD's Melissa Meeker Just Yet***

It's true that water is very, very important to our community and our state. Land developers and real estate investors recognize the importance of water issues here just as conservationists and environmentalists do.

However, Melissa Meeker's work in cutting the fat out of the South Florida Water Management District is to be respected - cutting those perks was a good thing, and [Ms. Meeker's own willingness to leave her position as the state's water czar and take the local position, only to cut her own pay significantly right off the bat](#), demonstrates that Ms. Meeker is one of the good guys.

*Perhaps we need to trust her efforts and not start second-guessing her with "What If" questions. Florida is in dire economic straits and both the private and public sectors are going to have to operate lean and mean to get out of this mess.*