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New Water Rule Announced To Protect Everglades

(CBS4) WEST PALM BEACH A groundbreaking rule was announced on Monday that will guarantee water to protect and restore America's Everglades. Following its passage last month by the South Florida Water Management District, the Regional Water Availability Rule went into effect.

The rule prevents water users from tapping the famed River of Grass for new or additional supplies of water, which will set aside the water in the Everglades for environmental restoration.

Permitted users like urban water utilities along Florida's southeast coast will now have to find alternative sources to supply regional growth.

"This rule reverses a century-long trend of tapping the Everglades to accommodate South Florida's growth," said April Gromnicki, Assistant Director of Public Policy for National Audubon. "It is an essential step if Everglades restoration is going to succeed. It's also a model for other states to consider, because no region of the country can afford to endlessly drain water from environmentally sensitive areas."

In South Florida, water suppliers in Miami-Dade, Broward, Palm Beach and Monroe counties currently depend on an estimated 500 million gallons of water per day from the Everglades to recharge and sustain the Biscayne Aquifer, which is their primary drinking water source.

"This rule is a big win for the environment," said Kevin McCarty, Governing Board Chairman of the South Florida Water Management District. "South Florida is a different place than it was just 30 years ago, and our water resources are not unlimited. This rule boldly addresses regional growth and the need to protect the natural system for future generations."

Cities needing additional water supplies will now be required to seek sources that are not dependent on the Everglades for recharge.

Some methods proposed for these cities include recycling water, using reclaimed water to recharge the Biscayne Aquifer or drawing water from the deeper Floridan Aquifer, which requires treatment to remove saltwater content.

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