RiverFronts

February 2012

District spreads word on water supply strategies

Over the next two months, David Still and Hans Tanzler, the executive directors for the Suwannee River and St. Johns River water management districts respectively, and other senior staff will speak at county commission meetings within the Suwannee District's (SRWMD) region to inform the public about water resource issues.

Jon Dinges, SRWMD director of Water Supply and Resource Management, provided a preview of those meetings when he spoke to the Suwannee County Commission on Jan. 17 about water supply planning.

"The District is actively addressing water resource impacts that are occurring across north Florida as a result of groundwater withdrawals," Dinges said. "We believe the Alapaha River Basin, Upper Suwannee River Region, and Upper and Lower Santa Fe river basins may be short of groundwater within 20 years."

"We're working hard to find new water sources and ways to replenish the Floridan aquifer system to meet water demands in those areas," he added.

Dinges noted that as far back as 1988, the United States Geological Survey has documented significant declines in the aquifer.

"Though these water levels go up and down, there is a long-term declining trend felt in some areas within our District, and these statistics are significant," Dinges said. "Though we have been in a drought for some time, we don't believe lack of rainfall is totally responsible for the trends we're seeing. The only other possibility is pumping from the aquifer system."

A schedule of upcoming meetings is available on the District's calendar at www.mysuwanneeriver.com. For more information, call SRWMD at 386.362.1001 or 800.226.1066 (FL only).

An in-depth look at Florida's hydrology

SHARED WATER SOURCES

The District's water supply comes from the Floridan aquifer system. This source supplies water for much of Florida, and it serves as a major water source for the southeastern United States. In addition, more than half of the Suwannee River Basin lies in Georgia.

Because our water sources are regional in nature, the District is cooperating with the St. Johns River Water Management District and the State of Georgia on water supply planning to ensure a sustainable water supply.

White Sulphur Spring, once a key tourist attraction in Florida, no longer flows. Photo taken December 2010.

FLORIDAN AQUIFER SYSTEM

The Floridan aquifer system – a thick sequence of porous rocks riddled with cracks and cavities – stores and transmits groundwater. This groundwater system helps maintain the flow of our rivers, streams, and springs.

Even though the Floridan is very large in nature, when too much water is withdrawn from the aquifer system, it can have a local and regional impact on our water supply and natural systems.

RIVER-AQUIFER CONNECTION

The Floridan discharges through springs, and springs feed many of our rivers. In fact, springs sometimes provide 70 percent or more of river flow. When the aquifer system is drawn down beyond what it can sustain, it can impact the health of rivers and springs. Springs can even cease flowing.

FEBRUARY IS HIKING TRAILS MONTH

District provides 183 miles of nature trails to explore

The District encourages the public to explore nature by hiking on District or other public lands during the month of February in celebration of Florida Hiking Trails Month. The District provides 183 miles of trails for hiking, biking, and horseback riding.

On District lands you can bird watch, admire flora and fauna along the way, and enjoy unique features, such as whitewater rapids and a creek that funnels into a sinkhole. In addition, more than 50 miles of the Florida Trail traverses District land.

The Suwannee Chapter of the Florida Trail Association helps organize guided hikes and camping and canoeing trips, some of which take place on lands owned by the District.

"The District encourages hikers and others to take advantage of these recreational opportunities on District conservation lands," said Edwin McCook, District land management specialist.

"If you are unable to participate in a guided hike sponsored by the Florida Trail Association, you may take a self-guided hike on District property anytime," McCook added.

All District hiking trails are free and open to the public. Following is a list of some of the best hiking opportunities:

- Columbia County: Bell Springs, Falling Creek Falls, Little Shoals, and Gar Pond
- Hamilton County: Big Shoals, Holton Creek, White Springs Tract, and Camp Branch
- Lafayette County: Owens Spring
- Madison County: Ellaville Tract, Black Tract, Mill Creek North, and Mill Creek South
- Suwannee County: Anderson Springs
- Taylor County: Cabbage Grove and Steinhatchee Falls

Maps to each of the above tracts are available under the Best Recreational Opportunities link on the District's website at www.mysuwanneeriver.com/recreation. For more information, contact Edwin McCook at 386.362.1001 or recreation@srwmd.org.

For more information about planned hikes and other recreational opportunities hosted by the Suwannee Chapter of the Florida Trail Association call Sylvia Dunnam at 386.362.3256 or visit www.suwannee.floridatrail.org.

Participants enjoy walking under tree roots on a hike at Bell Spring in 2008.

Retrofit program will help schools save water and money

Representatives from Suwannee, Hamilton, Columbia, and Gilchrist county school districts visited the Suwannee River Water Management District's headquarters on Feb. 2 to hear about how their schools can save water through a facilities retrofit program that the District is offering, in partnership with the Florida Rural Water Association (FRWA).

The FRWA will conduct a water audit at participating schools to identify leaks in bathroom and kitchen facilities and to evaluate landscape irrigation systems, drinking fountains and other equipment. They will determine how much water each school can save, as well as recommend water conservation practices and water efficient upgrades to indoor plumbing fixtures and outdoor equipment.

District Executive Director David Still called the program a win-win.

"You can save money, and we can save water," he said. "If you're spending less money on water, you can spend more on education."

Brian Kauffman, District senior professional engineer, said the District's retrofit program saved one school in the City of Cedar Key nearly 32,000 gallons of water per month through a similar program last year.

"Their water use was reduced by 48 percent, saving taxpayers about $2,200 annually," Kauffman said.

The District will pay for the water audit and provide a matching grant of up to $10,000 per school district to pay for the upgrades. Through the grant program, the District will reimburse school districts for the cost of the water saving devices, and school districts will pay installation costs or install the equipment themselves.

Kauffman told school representatives that their investment should pay for itself within a few years.

The program is offered to schools within the District's 15-county region.

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Please register on our website to receive notification of each issue at www.mysuwanneeriver.com.

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