

Regional water supply meeting to be held March 7

The Suwannee River and St. Johns River water management districts and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) have worked together since September of 2011 to address water supply issues in north Florida. Now stakeholders will have a chance to provide input into that process.

The public is invited to a meeting on March 7 to learn about the North Florida Regional Water Supply Partnership (Partnership) — an initiative to protect natural resources and ensure cost-effective and sustainable water supplies. The meeting will be held from 6-8 p.m. at

Alachua City Hall at 15100 N.W. 142nd Terrace, Alachua.

The water management districts and DEP will announce at the meeting the formation of a stakeholder committee that will serve in an advisory capacity to the districts and DEP. The committee will include representatives of groups and entities from throughout the region. Input will be sought at the meeting on potential committee members.

“Partnerships are critical to protecting our shared water resources,” said Charlie Houder, SRWMD acting executive director. “Through our work with St.

Johns, DEP and the communities and stakeholders throughout the region, we will ensure long-term, sustainable water supplies.”

Houder, Hans G. Tanzler III, executive director of the St. Johns District, and Dr. Ann Shortelle, DEP director of Water Policy, are meeting with county commissions within the region to discuss water supply issues and to engage them in the Partnership. A schedule of those meetings is posted on the calendar at www.mysuwanneeriver.com. For more information about the Partnership, visit www.northfloridawater.com.

Santa Fe River MFLs scheduled for completion this year

The Suwannee River Water Management District (District) plans to finalize minimum flows and levels (MFLs) for the Lower Santa Fe River, Ichetucknee River, Lake Butler, and several springs this year.

The District has completed the data collection phase of the project and will now develop a river model to predict impacts to water resources and natural systems. Part of this process involves assessing how much water is needed to maintain fish passage, fish and wildlife habitat, and recreation on the water.

A final report will undergo peer review and a public comment period before the District’s Governing Board gives approval for the MFLs to be adopted into Chapter 40B-8, Florida Administrative Code.

“The District is committed to MFL development for the protection of our springs, rivers, and groundwater resources,” said Jon Dinges, District director of water supply and resource management.

MFLs determine the amount of water that can be removed from the natural system without causing significant harm to the resources and the ecology. Setting these limits allows the District to know



The Santa Fe River near Poe Springs in January 2012.

how much water is available for water use permitting and which areas to initiate regional water supply planning.

The District is statutorily required to establish MFLs under Chapter 373, Florida Statutes.

The District has also begun preliminary work to establish MFLs on the Upper and

Middle Suwannee River.

MFLs have been developed for the following rivers: the Upper Santa Fe, Lower Suwannee and Waccasassa rivers and for the following springs: Fanning, Manatee, Bronson Blue, and Madison Blue. An MFLs completion schedule is available at www.mysuwanneeriver.com.

New record lows set for water levels in January

Groundwater and surfacewater levels within the Suwannee River Water Management District (District) continue to decline as drought conditions persist.

Record low levels for January occurred at 65 District groundwater monitoring wells and all-time lows occurred at 18 wells. Levels dropped in nearly 70 percent of monitored wells, with an average drop of about 2 feet.

River flows at all Suwannee and tributary gages remained well below the 10th percentile of daily January flows, which means that 90 percent of the time they have been higher than they are now. The Santa Fe River at Fort White stayed in the lowest 1 percent of all records for daily, 7-day, and 60-day flows. The Aucilla, Econfina, and Steinhatchee rivers remained below the 5th percentile of daily flows.

The District received an average of 1.61 inches of rain in January, which is less than half of the long-term average for that time of year. The 12-month deficit rose to

12.7 inches; the deficit was 8.4 inches the previous two months.

“The District will continue to monitor hydrologic conditions closely,” said Jon Dinges, District director of Water Supply and Resource Management.

A water shortage advisory is in effect in response to drought conditions. The advisory urges residents within the District’s region to eliminate unnecessary uses of water. A mandatory landscape irrigation rule requires homeowners, businesses, and others to limit lawn and landscape watering to one day per week during Standard Time and two days per week during Daylight Saving Time. Irrigation should not occur between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.

The advisory and irrigation rule apply to residents within the District’s boundaries, which means all of Columbia, Dixie, Gilchrist, Hamilton, Lafayette, Madison, Suwannee, Taylor and Union counties, and portions of Alachua, Baker, Bradford, Jefferson, Levy and Putnam counties.



The Suwannee River at White Springs during drought conditions in June 2011. Current levels remain about the same.

What you should know before irrigating your landscape



Wright

the District is urging homeowners and businesses to water only one day per week or better yet, not at all. Kevin Wright, District professional engineer, answers questions about the regulations:

Q: Why does the District limit landscape irrigation?

A: All water users in the District play a role in protecting our water supply and

The District’s landscape irrigation rule allows for watering two days a week when Daylight Saving Time begins March 11. But given the region’s ongoing drought and water supply issues,

that begins with conservation. The rule will help address current and future water needs and protect our rivers, springs, and groundwater supply.

Q: How often can I water my lawn and landscape?

A: You may choose one day per week during Eastern Standard Time, which begins the first Sunday in November and two days per week during Daylight Saving Time, beginning the second Sunday in March. You may choose which days to water; however, irrigation should not occur between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.

Q: I have a private well. Does this exempt me from the regulations?

A: No. The rule applies to all residents within the District’s 15-county region who

receive water from a utility, private well, or surfacewater body. However, there is an exemption for irrigation using reclaimed water or water captured in rain barrels.

Q: Does the rule apply to irrigation of my vegetable garden at home?

A: The rule applies to irrigation of lawns and landscapes. Vegetable gardens are exempt.

Q: Do the regulations apply to farmers?

A: No. However, farmers and other permitted users must follow different water conservation rules.

For more information, contact Kevin Wright at 386.362.1001 or 800.226.1066 (FL only).