

SRWMD evaluates need for mandatory water restrictions

In the meantime, all water users are asked to conserve

WATER CONSERVATION

All water users within the Suwannee River Water Management District (District) are urged to curb any unnecessary uses of water in response to the ongoing drought.

The 12 months ending in March were the driest since 1932; and the rainfall deficit, now at 15.7 inches, continues to take its toll on rivers, springs, and groundwater levels.

RIVERS AND GROUNDWATER

By the middle of April flows at all Suwannee River gages fell back to the lowest 10 percent of flows, with many gages setting new low flows for the time of year. Seventy percent of groundwater monitor wells reported record low levels for March and nine wells reported all-time lows, including a well with data beginning in 1948.

“In most areas in our District groundwater levels are near or below those seen in the 2002 drought, which until this past year was the worst drought on record in terms of groundwater,” said Megan Wetherington, District senior professional engineer.

SPRING FLOWS

Low groundwater levels resulted in low flow in springs across the area.

“The lowest flow on record was recorded at Poe Springs, and Levy Blue Spring currently is no longer flowing,” Wetherington added. “Manatee and Fanning springs are also low.”

Wetherington said there is little chance of the District coming out of the drought in the next several months, short of an unusual weather event or tropical system.

“We have entered the dry season, and what rainfall we typically get is less effective in terms of groundwater recharge



The flow at Levy Blue Spring dropped so low in March that tannic water from downstream wetlands flowed back into the spring pool causing the spring to turn brown. Photo taken April 13, 2012.

because of losses to heat and vegetation,” Wetherington said. “We can expect to see the rivers set new lows by June, as well as further decreases in spring flows if we don’t get some help from the weather.”

POSSIBLE DISTRICT ACTION

Jon Dinges, District director of Water Supply and Resource Management, said residents and others within the District are under mandatory limits on lawn and landscape irrigation and water use permit holders are required to implement water conservation plans. However, during these drought conditions, the District may need to put in place additional measures to reduce demands on water supplies.

District staff is evaluating the need to require mandatory water use restrictions for all users in response to drought conditions.

“There is a need for everyone to reduce water use,” said District Acting Executive Director Charlie Houder. “We will continue to monitor hydrologic conditions closely and will prepare to declare a water shortage order if conditions do not improve quickly.”

WATER SHORTAGE ORDER

Under the water shortage order, restrictions, and some exemptions, would apply to residential, agriculture, commercial, and industrial users. Water shortage restrictions are intended to reduce the demand on water supplies during drought. Once drought conditions have improved, the District would remove the restrictions.

For now, a water shortage advisory is in effect, which urges all users to eliminate unnecessary uses of water.

SRWMD honored for assistance with treatment plant

The Suwannee River Water Management District was recognized on April 17 for assisting the City of Fanning Springs with the development of its wastewater treatment plant. Fanning Springs Mayor Cheryl Nekola presented a plaque to District Acting Executive Director Charlie Houder and District Governmental Affairs Director Steve Minnis at the city's Earth Day Celebration and Groundbreaking Ceremony.

The District provided the City of Fanning Springs \$263,000 to assist in purchasing 23.27 acres of land for a wastewater treatment plant and spray field.

The plant will provide service to Fanning Springs in both Gilchrist and Levy counties. Currently, residents and others in the area utilize septic tanks.

"The District is proud to be one of the city's partners in a project that will remove excess nutrients from Fanning Springs and the Suwannee River," Houder said.

In phase II of the project, the city will



LEFT: District Acting Executive Director Charlie Houder, far right, and District Governmental Affairs Director Steve Minnis, far left, accept a plaque from Mayor Cheryl Nekola on behalf of the District.

upgrade the plant with the ability to produce, store, and transmit reclaimed water to be reused by a local farmer for irrigation to offset groundwater withdrawals. The District will provide up to \$400,000 on a reimbursement basis to

the city for the necessary upgrades to treat wastewater to meet public access reuse standards.

"We are extremely grateful that the District has come along side us to help with this project," said Nekola.

Water quality project enhances public use of Aucilla River

Fishermen and canoers will have better access to three areas along the Upper Aucilla River thanks to a water quality improvement project. The Suwannee River Water Management District (District) recently completed the improvements on its Cabbage Grove Tract in Taylor County and Mt. Gilead Tract in Madison County.

Improvements were made to offset erosion problems along the river, which was causing water quality issues.

"Stormwater runoff and vehicular traffic on the river bank was causing erosion, and the introduction of sediment into the river was creating water quality issues," said Patrick Webster, District senior professional engineer.

The areas were regraded to alter stormwater flow patterns to prevent further erosion into the river. Parking areas were relocated away from the river bank. Native vegetation was planted to stabilize the areas. Steps were added for easy access to



Before

the river.

Edwin McCook, District land management specialist, called the project a win-win for water quality and recreational enhancement.

"Not only does this project have the benefit of mitigating erosion, it will improve public use of the river at the Flat Rock Boat Launch at Cabbage Grove, at Reams Boat Ramp at Mt. Gilead, and at



After

another access point at Mt. Gilead for the long term," said McCook.

The District paid for the \$46,640 project with funds provided by the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) to mitigate for water quality impacts associated with the FDOT bridge replacement on US 98 over the Aucilla River.