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CONTACT: Abby Johnson, Office of Communications
Suwannee River Water Management District
386.362.1001 or 800.226.1066 (FL)
www.mysuwanneeriver.com



Conserving water for the future with partnerships today

Live Oak, FL, April 13, 2016 – April is water conservation month. The Suwannee River Water Management District (District) is tasked with maintaining the delicate balance of protecting natural resources while ensuring sustainable water supplies for current and future reasonable-beneficial water uses. Public awareness and engagement is a significant component to that balancing technique. Water conservation is the most cost-effective means to expand water supply sources.

Successful water conservation requires participation and commitment from all users including residential, commercial and agricultural users. A variety of water saving programs are available to residential users that reduce consumption both inside and outside the home including Florida Water Star SM, Turf Swap and Florida Friendly Landscaping TM. Options for public suppliers include conservation rate structures, water audits to ensure system efficiencies and rebate programs. Agricultural producers can retrofit irrigation systems and install advanced irrigation management tools to reduce consumption.

Since 2012, the District's Governing Board has designated \$1.5 million annually for agricultural cost-share projects to save water and reduce nutrient loadings. Opportunities to participate are still available.

In 2015, the District partnered with the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) to assist producers with implementing water protecting measures related to the Suwannee River and the Santa Fe River Basin Management Action Plans (BMAP). Irrigation and fertigation efficiency initiatives are being implemented that are estimated to save more than 6.0 million gallons of water per day and reduce nutrient loadings to the Suwannee and Santa Fe River Basins by 592,000 pounds annually

District permits for agricultural water use contain requirements for water use reporting. During fall of 2012, the District established criteria for providing assistance for agricultural water use reporting on wells of 8" diameter or greater. The intent is to assist agricultural water users on a voluntary basis as a convenient and unobtrusive alternative to recording, compiling, and transmitting data to the District. To date, farmer agreements authorizing the District to receive power usage reports directly from the cooperatives or using direct monitoring devices are in effect on over 550 monitoring points. Roughly 62% of existing active wells with water use permit monitoring conditions are being monitored.

“The collaborative efforts demonstrate the power of teamwork, trust-building and a commitment to protect our natural resources. We are pleased to have such partnerships,” stated Noah Valenstein, District Executive Director.

Partnerships are providing water quantity and water quality benefits to springs and other natural systems. Many of these projects are designed to restore groundwater levels within priority water bodies and springsheds. Various agencies, local governments, landowners, and organizations are committed through cost-share programs and projects to conduct restoration activities at numerous springs.

Examples of effective partnerships to conserve water include the District’s Agricultural Cost-Share program, the Regional Initiative Valuing Environmental Resources (RIVER) program, the Columbia County Water Conservation Initiative and the North Florida Regional Water Supply Partnership Water Conservation Program. These initiatives will benefit our springs and rivers.

With gratitude to our community partners, the District has accomplished numerous milestones over the past year. There’s much more work to do. We look forward to a continued collaboration to protect natural systems and the quality of life for current residents and future generations.

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