



WATER

MAKE WATER CONSERVATION A PRIORITY

Florida needs bold leadership on water issues to ensure the long-term health of our natural resources and economic well-being of our communities in the years to come.

Clean, abundant water is critical for Florida's future

Water is the linchpin of our environment and our economy, sustaining natural systems, public health, tourism, recreational and commercial fishing, agriculture, and development. Making bad water-use decisions now will only result in costlier and more contentious challenges in the future.

With population estimated to grow by 25% between now and 2040, there is an urgent need for state and local governments, water managers, utilities, industry, agricultural interests, and all Floridians to address the continued depletion of our water supplies. A balanced approach to water supply planning must assure the sufficient availability of water for natural systems and beneficial uses that serve the public interest.

Prioritize water conservation and efficiency

In terms of water resources, two options exist and are often defined as water conservation (to decrease demand) or development of alternative water supplies (using untapped sources to increase supply).

The only way to meet our long-term water needs is through a sophisticated mix of aggressive water conservation followed by sustainable alternative water supply development.

A growing body of research shows that water conservation offers significant advantages over alternative water supply development including:

- lower capital and incremental costs;
- reduced energy consumption, which minimizes greenhouse gas emissions;
- improved water quality by reducing

- runoff from inefficient irrigation;
- increased flow and levels in springs, rivers, lakes, and aquifers;
- greater predictability and sustainability for all water users.

We cannot afford to rely on surface water supplies

Surface waters, which are identified as the primary “alternative water source” by the Central Florida Water Initiative and other regional water supply plans, are dependent upon adequate rainfall. By relying upon surface water withdrawals to meet Florida’s future water needs, policymakers would lock our state into an unavoidable clash between the needs of our natural systems and the needs of water users during times of decreased rainfall.

For instance, during droughts, when our rivers and lakes most need to



BY 2040, FLORIDA'S POPULATION WILL REACH 30 MILLION, PLACING ENORMOUS PRESSURE ON OUR NATURAL SYSTEMS.

Photo by Norman Taylor



To ensure a clean and abundant water supply for Florida's communities, agriculture, and natural areas, policymakers can:

- make water conservation a statewide priority and require all water permits (consumptive use permits) to include measurable and enforceable goal-based water conservation plans;
- price water to promote conservation. Placing a reasonable price on the quantity of water used would create incentives to conserve water and direct water towards higher value uses;
- expedite the establishment and adoption of Minimum Flows and Levels and incorporate them into water supply planning statewide;
- establish statutory consequences for failure to meet standards so that restoration of water resources will not become more difficult and more costly for future generations;
- meet future water supply needs by knowing how much water is being used today. All groundwater withdrawals of 100,000 gallons or more per day should be monitored;
- minimize and regulate the amount of public money transferred to private interests through capital expenditures, especially in cases where there is no assurance of the cost effectiveness of projects;
- prohibit unilateral inter-basin transfers of water. For example, water management districts should not make water allocation decisions beyond their jurisdictional boundaries;
- allow local governments to regulate the use of urban fertilizers;
- implement water-use planning and reasonable and common-sense best management practices in the agricultural sector.

A RECENT SURVEY BY THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA CENTER FOR PUBLIC ISSUES FOUND THAT 83% OF FLORIDA RESIDENTS RATED WATER AS HIGHLY OR EXTREMELY IMPORTANT, MAKING ONE OF THE TOP THREE ISSUES VOTERS ARE MOST CONCERNED ABOUT.¹

maintain their flows and levels for sustaining wetlands, fisheries, and estuaries and to reduce saltwater intrusion, water users (particularly agricultural and residential users), would withdraw the greatest amounts of water.

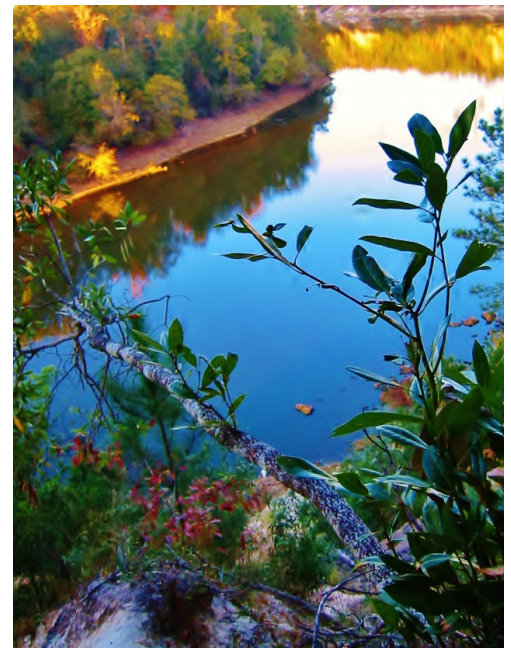
The Florida-Georgia water wars and the dramatic decline of Apalachicola Bay serve as vivid examples of the devastating impacts to our waterbodies, fisheries, and downstream communities that result from the mismanagement of water resources and the reliance on unsustainable sources, like surface waters, to meet unchecked demand.

Relying on surface water withdrawals to meet Florida's future water needs is unsustainable in the long-term and unwise in the short-term. Policymakers should focus more attention on decreasing demand through aggressive conservation and increased efficiency.

Prioritizing water conservation reduces the need for expensive, unsustainable water withdrawals while protecting downstream users and ecosystems. Responsible demand management will ensure that the needs of reasonable and beneficial water users are met today and into the future.

¹ *Public Opinions of Water in Florida*, Center for Public Issues Education in Agriculture and Natural Resources, Erica Odera, Aleha Lamm, Ph.D., Feb 2014.

Photo by Jo Shaw



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