

**CENTRAL FLORIDA WATER INITIATIVE -  
A REGIONAL RESPONSE TO AVOID A PENDING CRISIS**

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**I. Background**

Central Florida is projected to almost double in population over the next 40 years with an increase of almost 3,000,000 new inhabitants bringing the total population to 6.6 million. Recognizing that:

- (i) the potable water supply utilized by the Central Florida Region relies almost exclusively upon groundwater withdrawals from the upper and lower Floridan aquifer; and
- (ii) the early warning signs that this is a diminishing supply which is incapable of re-charging rapidly enough to provide a sustainable water source to meet the future needs of this growing population,

community leaders initiated a process to develop a strategic plan for future water needs. This process began with a community dialogue undertaken in 2006-2007 by myregion.org (one of the lines of business of the Central Florida Partnership) entitled “How Shall We Grow” which was designed to develop a shared regional vision for Central Florida.

Three water management districts govern water use in the region – St. Johns River Water Management District, Southwest Florida Water Management District and South Florida Water Management District. During the period from 2007 – 2012, the water management districts undertook to develop an assessment of the available groundwater relative to current demand and propose new water use permitting rules in accordance with that assessment. The area involved was referred to as the Central Florida Coordination Area (“CFCA”) which includes Seminole, Orange, and Osceola counties and South Lake County from within the St. Johns River Water Management District; Orange, Osceola and Polk counties from within the South Florida Water Management District; and Polk county from within the Southwest Florida Water Management District. Through CFCA, the Districts issued a joint statement in 2008, that sustainable quantities of groundwater were insufficient to meet additional water demands beyond 2013 and that aggressive conservation, use of reclaimed water, and development of alternative water supplies were essential.

The Congress of Regional Leaders, a regional organization consisting of sixteen (16) elected officials representing city and county governments and the school boards of the seven (7) Central Florida counties (Brevard, Lake, Orange, Osceola, Polk, Seminole and Volusia) took up this issue and listed two over-arching goals it wanted this regional community effort to achieve:

1. Create a regional water strategy for Central Florida; and
2. Avoid the use of any public money to litigate over water.

In early 2009, the Congress of Regional Leaders engaged myregion.org and ULI Central Florida to address these goals. Through a consensus-building process, a white paper was issued in December 2010 entitled “Creating a Sustainable Water Supply for Central Florida; A Regional Strategy – Recommendations.” The conclusions reached during this process were as follows:

1. Water is undervalued;
2. Water users will not be able to use groundwater from the Floridan aquifer to supply all future needs without causing unacceptable environmental impacts;
3. Conservation must be a central part of any regional water use strategy;
4. Alternative water sources are available, but at much higher costs. Tapping them economically will require a substantial investment and a coordinated regional effort.

Phase One of this regional effort identified the challenges ahead:

1. How to reduce consumption while building infrastructure requirements for sustainable future supply; and
2. How to accomplish this without placing undue financial burden on utilities.

The second phase of this regional community effort was undertaken in the Summer of 2011, during which myregion.org and ULI Central Florida convened a Technical Assistance Panel of public and private sector, local, state and national subject matter experts to undertake the task of:

“Explore how the region can rise above political boundaries and find a way to approach future water use as a cohesive team. What kinds of political infrastructure will have to be put in place to make this happen? Who would oversee the effort? How would every county municipality, water distributor and other stakeholders be brought into the project and have a voice?”

To ensure all stakeholders work as a region to address future water supply, the Steering Committee for Phase Two established the following problem statement at the outset:

Today, Central Florida is made up of a collection of seven counties and 86 cities, some of which will

experience growth beyond that which can be sustained by traditional water resources.

As documented in the Creating a Sustainable Water Supply for Central Florida: A Regional Strategy white paper, it is essential that the water utilities serving the region, in cooperation with the water management districts, continue to plan together to develop the water conservation, supply programs, and associated infrastructure necessary to provide a sustainable water supply, and balance this with current sources.

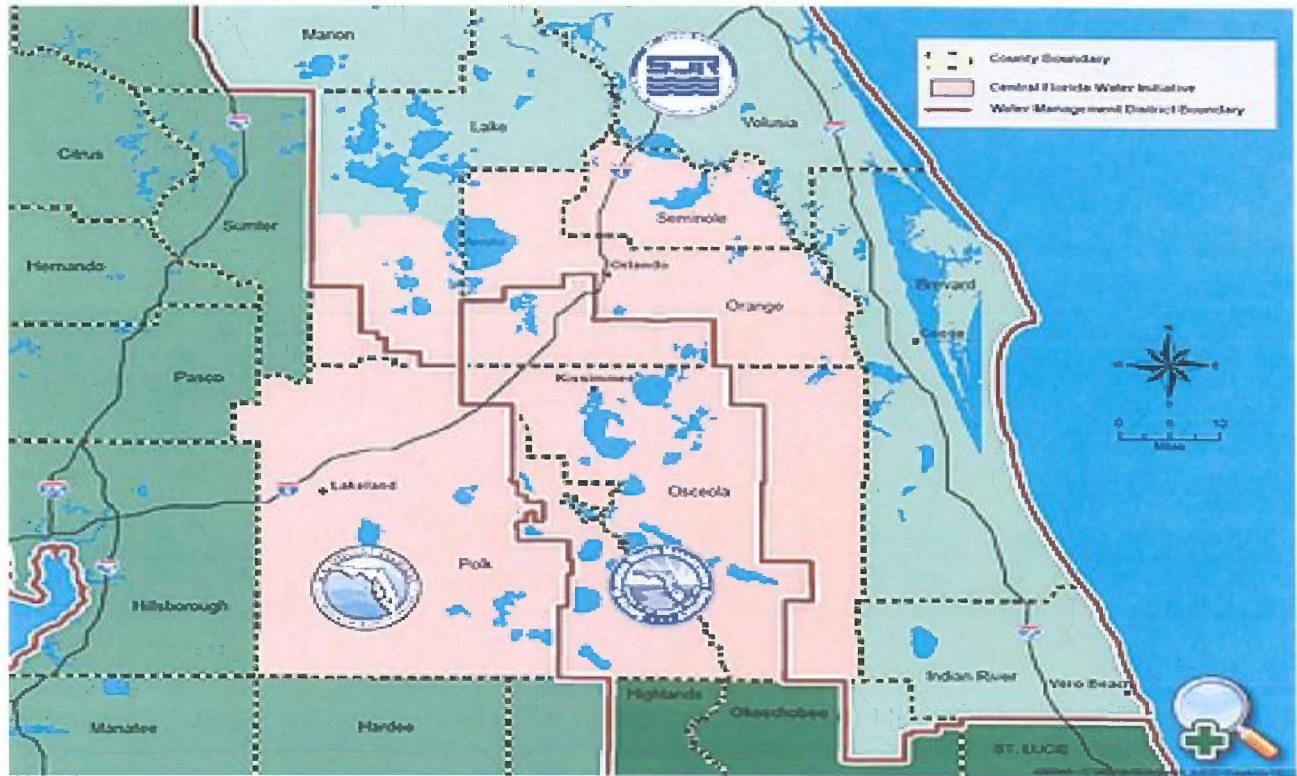
The challenge we face is how to facilitate the formation of the multi-jurisdictional entities needed to ensure the future planning, construction and operation of alternative water supply programs and projects to meet future water supply needs.

I had the pleasure of serving on this Technical Assistance Panel that developed the report that was entitled “Creating a Regional Water Civic Architecture for Central Florida”.

While this regional process was being undertaken by community leaders, the three water management districts between which the Central Florida region is divided by political boundaries drawn to mimic the surface watersheds, without consideration of the overlapping groundwater supply, concluded through CFCA that sustainable quantities of groundwater in Central Florida were insufficient to meet all future public water supply demand, and declared that there was an immediate need to develop and implement supplemental water supply projects. The three water management districts individually implemented interim rules limiting withdrawals of groundwater to meet the 2013 demands. Water demands after 2013 would require alternative water supplies. The interim rules sunset at the end of 2012.

Today, the CFCA effort has transitioned into the Central Florida Water Initiative (“CFWI”), a collaboration involving the three water management districts, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (“DEP”), the Florida Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services (“DACS”), and the major public water suppliers in Central Florida. The CFWI effort involves the parties working collaboratively to develop the technical knowledge base for evaluating the groundwater availability, assess potential environmental impacts associated with withdrawals, and then develop policies and rules to govern the use of the remaining groundwater while protecting the environment. The culmination of these efforts have resulted in the current format being utilized by CFWI.

II. A Map of the Planning Area is as follows:



### **III. Guiding principles**

The guiding principles of the CFWI are to:

- A. Identify the sustainable quantities of traditional groundwater sources available for water supplies that can be used without causing unacceptable harm to the water resources and associated natural systems.
- B. Develop strategies to meet water demands that are in excess of the sustainable yield of existing traditional groundwater sources.
- C. Establish consistent rules and regulations for the three water management districts that meet their collective goals, and implement the results of the Central Florida Water Initiative.

### **IV. Steering Committee**

The Steering Committee oversees the CFWI process and provides guidance to the technical teams and technical oversight/management committees that are developing and refining information on all aspects of Central Florida's water resources. The Steering Committee includes the following:

- A. Public water supply utility representative;
- B. Governing Board member from each of the three water management districts;
- C. Representative from DEP; and
- D. Representative from DACS.

### **V. Groundwater Availability Team ("GAT")**

One of the first technical teams assembled was the Groundwater Availability Team. The findings of this Team are central to the content of the mission of CFWI. To my knowledge, this is the first time all three (3) WMD's have agreed on the method to model and estimate the available groundwater for this region for planning purposes. To summarize the most salient points of the GAT report:

- A. Estimated available groundwater from traditional sources (upper & lower aquifer) for utilization as water supply without requiring mitigation or other operational controls is 850 MGD (million gallons per day);
- B. Current use from these traditional sources is about 800 MGD;
- C. Current permitted use is about 1 BGD ( billion gallons per day);
- D. Estimated demand by 2035 is 1.1 BGD.

There may be an additional 75 MGD that can be extracted from traditional groundwater sources with operational controls and other mitigation efforts ( which the Solutions Team will explore), but the Solutions Team was directed by the Steering Committee to assume for our planning purposes that there is a deficit need to be filled of 250 MGD ( 1.1 BGD- 850 MGD ).

## **VI. Regional Water Supply Plan.**

One of the other truly ground breaking efforts currently underway, the results of which will affect the Solutions Team findings, is the development of a regional water supply plan applicable throughout the region and which is consistent with the three WMD water supply plans that divide the region. This is a historic undertaking. The draft plan is on the website, it is currently the subject of public meetings, and comments are being accepted until January 31, 2014. [Website: <http://cfwiwater.com>].

## **VII. Minimum Flows and Levels (“MFL’s”)**

Another technical team providing input that will be of importance to the Solutions Team effort consists of representatives from the three water management districts and the utilities within the region charged with analyzing the impact of withdrawals upon Minimum Flows and Levels (“MFL”) to develop a coordinated strategy for the region. The work of this team is extremely important in focusing the recommendations coming from the Solutions Team upon those options that will not cause unacceptable impacts upon the environment. This will also be helpful in identifying what mitigation or management steps need to be taken to minimize the impact of withdrawals where additional groundwater withdrawals are necessary to meet the increased demand. It is also anticipated that the effort undertaken to develop this strategy will also play an important role in the development of future regulations for the region.

Water management districts use a variety of information to scientifically establish the point beyond which additional withdrawals would cause significant harm. Usually the districts select a peer review committee to evaluate the scientific principles and methods used to establish an MFL. Once an MFL is calculated and is adopted by rule, implementation is undertaken by the districts. For more information please see the website for CFWI [<http://cfwiwater.com>].and view the page for Minimum Flows and Levels and Water Reservations.

## **VIII. Solutions Team.**

I serve on the Solutions Team. Much of the discussions to date on the Solutions Team have focused on the Scope of Work (“SOW”) of our Team and establishing our technical Sub-Teams described below. The Chair of our Team, Robert Beltran, the Exec. Director of SWFWMD presented this SOW to the Steering Comm. for approval on Oct. 25, 2013.

The SOW generally provides that our Solutions Team will focus on identifying projects that are large scale, multi-jurisdictional and of regional significance to serve more than one utility. We will establish water resource Sub-Teams to analyze different “ buckets” of available water such as surface water, reclaimed water, non-traditional sources of groundwater, desalinization, etc. in addition to discussing conservation efforts to better utilize what we currently have available. We also plan to identify potential regional interconnect opportunities between the Districts and

basins. Our work will progress through 2014 and culminate with our Report due next winter - the 2035 Water Resources Protection and Water Supply Strategies Plan.

The following is the list of Sub-Teams:

1. Surface Water (Dispersed storage and Reservoirs)
2. Groundwater
3. Reclaimed Water
4. Conservation and Other Management Strategies (Agriculture and Urban Landscape)
5. Recovery/Prevention Projects (Coordinated with other teams as needed)
6. Other (Stormwater, etc...)

## **IX. Conclusion**

As you might expect, the CFWI is a very dynamic process with really challenging issues to address. The public should avail itself of every available opportunity to become better educated and participate in this very important initiative.

### Quote from Tom Peters:

“If you’re not confused, then you’re not paying attention!”

## **X. Sources**

The sources used for these materials are:

1. the CFWI website [<http://cfwiwater.com>]
2. Creating a Sustainable Water Supply for Central Florida; A regional Strategy – Recommendations – White Paper published by myregion.org and ULI Central Florida, December, 2010
3. Creating a Regional Water Strategy for Central Florida – Report published by myregion.org and ULI Central Florida, August, 2011