

Statewide, Florida averages between 48 to 60 inches of rain annually. How is it, then, that we experience such major water shortfalls?

The reason is that the state's water management system does not manage. It drains.

To keep land usable for commercial and residential development, agricultural purposes and other needs, the system was designed to drain rainfall from inland areas to the coast as rapidly as possible. It performs this function very well. However, the original federal flood-control plans also called for creating retention areas or reservoirs to capture water during heavy rainfall — but most of these were never built.

If we continue with our current water policy, key regions of Florida will experience even more severe water shortages.

But there is hope.

Ever since 2006 — with the “How Shall We Grow?” planning effort of myregion.org — the state's three water management districts have been teaming up with community leaders to study Florida's water issues. This has now evolved into developing potential solutions through the Central Florida Water Initiative (CFWI), a conservation-minded collection of state agencies, cities and utilities.

Already, we're seeing encouraging progress on the political front.

In November, voters across the state approved Amendment 1, also known as the Florida Water and Land Conservation Initiative, by a 3-1 margin. Now, 33 percent of revenues from the documentary stamp tax on real estate transactions will be earmarked for water conservation and management projects over the next 20 years.

These funds serve a two-fold purpose. First, they enable the state to manage and maintain existing properties. Second, they provide a dedicated revenue stream to service bonds, the proceeds from which the state can use for projects such

AMID UNCERTAINTY, ENCOURAGING PROGRESS IN CENTRAL FLORIDA'S WATER CONSERVATION EFFORTS

water wise



as large regional water projects necessary to implement CFWI.

Looking forward to the 2015 legislative session, other water-management efforts must be addressed as well. For instance, why is water flow decreasing at some springs, and what solutions can be found? Also, the health and preservation of the Everglades continues to be an issue. It is necessary to provide distribution

of water from Lake Okeechobee to the Everglades, and we must stop frequent freshwater discharges to the estuaries, an act that causes environmental harm.



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In Central Florida, most everyone relies on groundwater for supply. But groundwater, which is derived from the upper and lower Floridan aquifer, no longer has the capacity to sustainably meet current or future needs. Until recently, Florida's water management districts had never reached consensus on modeling the available groundwater.

To resolve the state's water problems, we must also address conservation, retention and better utilization of surface water. A prime example lies a short distance from Central Florida, where the Treasure Coast region has an abundance

of water. Unfortunately, it is discharged into the estuary and Indian River Lagoon, causing harm to native habitats. But for the drainage system, much of this water would naturally drain north, up the St. Johns River Basin.

Meanwhile, Central Florida is running short on water to meet the ever-increasing demands of a burgeoning population — an estimated growth of 6.6 million people within 40 years. Common sense would dictate that the resolution of one region's overabundance may help solve another's water supply deficit, thus benefitting both regions.

This is but one out-of-the-box, forward-thinking proposition under consideration.

On paper, the solutions are simple. In reality, the implementation of these solutions will be expensive and take time and cooperation.

The key to success is whether all parties — on the local, regional, state and federal levels — can work together. We must find ways to best meet the needs of all Floridians, current and future, in balance with our delicate environment.

CFWI is a bold step to achieve these goals and objectives.

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