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ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION**

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FROM:  Gregory Munson, Deputy Secretary
Water Policy & Ecosystem Restoration

DATE: February 7, 2013

SUBJECT: Water Quality Monitoring Guidance

This guidance emphasizes the importance of coordination between the Department and each water management district regarding water quality monitoring. Knowing the state of our waters is critical to protecting our environment and economy, so this topic deserves particular attention. Maximizing coordination will ensure that we are effectively using our resources to obtain and use the best available data to make our water management decisions.

Many agencies monitor water resources in the State of Florida, and where public funding is utilized, it is critical that we not duplicate monitoring activities with other entities, whether public or private. Eliminating such duplication allows everyone to maximize the amount of monitoring that can be done. To that end, Water Management Districts should be querying other sources of water quality data before launching monitoring activities, and doing its best to ensure WMD monitoring is not duplicative of other efforts. The Department is initiating a number of activities to assist the Districts, local governments, universities, and any publically funded organization to increase the efficiency of their monitoring efforts in collaboration with the Department.

As you may recall, we reinitiated activities of the Florida Water Resources Monitoring Council (FWRMC, Council) in 2011, with the specific goal of better coordinating monitoring efforts at all levels of government so that we could maximize our monitoring resources. Each District has identified representatives for the Council, and the representatives are providing excellent input about the best ways to monitor our water resources.

The objectives adopted by the Council are based on providing communication regarding the full scope of monitoring efforts in Florida, whether conducted by federal, state, regional (WMDs), or local governments as well as volunteer groups. Charges also include:

1. Coordinate fresh and marine quality monitoring;
2. Support DEP's development of the STORET replacement, called the Watershed Information Network (WIN) for sharing water quality data;
3. Provide opportunities for data sharing;
4. Create tools such as a catalog of monitoring programs to provide information about statewide monitoring to all monitoring stakeholders;
5. Form regional Councils to engage other monitoring entities with regard to sampling coordination, Quality Assurance rules and Standard Operating Procedures, and data sharing.

We have already begun the work of evaluating whether there is overlap of your monitoring efforts with those of the Department and others engaged in monitoring. Sharing data and sampling efforts, whenever possible, will provide a platform that will be both more efficient and effective in characterizing the quality of our water resources, as well as provide a foundation for science based management actions.

We appreciate your agency's agreement to populate and maintain information about your district's monitoring activities in the Florida catalog of monitoring programs (catalog), and want to emphasize that there are many details to be coordinated. Your representative's continued cooperation is essential to meeting our goal of completing the catalog within the year. Please continue this level of engagement and support. In addition to better coordination of our monitoring efforts, these efforts will assist many others that need water quality data or details about who is collecting water quality information within your region.

Of course, monitoring efforts are only meaningful if the data from those efforts are accessible and of an established quality that can be used by all. To address data quality, we actively worked with monitoring entities on updates to our Quality Assurance (QA) rule (Chapter 62-160, Florida Administrative Code) and DEP Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). By standardizing methods and data expectations, the current QA Rule and DEP SOPs promote the usability and transferability of environmental data, allowing significantly increased efficient use of private, local, and state sampling resources for making environmental decisions.

The QA Rule will provide better cost efficiency by a) providing for paperless submittal of electronic data, b) clarifying record keeping requirements (which had been interpreted to be longer than necessary), c) allowing for new, more cost effective groundwater sampling techniques, and d) allowing more flexibility to use alternative methods. I encourage monitoring entities to visit <http://www.dep.state.fl.us/water/sas/training/listserv.htm> and subscribe to the Quality of Science Newsletter, where valuable information on QA Rule changes and upcoming technical training opportunities will be announced. New training will include bioassessment methods, which will be critical for implementation of the new Numeric Nutrient Criteria.

While we promote efficiencies in monitoring, we must also ensure effective access to the data from those efforts, and DEP is actively working to improve our environmental data management system. DEP has statutory and rule authority and responsibility to provide a central repository for surface and groundwater data from DEP, Water Management District, state agency and local government water monitoring activities to improve data and reduce costs. DEP's Florida STORET database has been that repository, but must be updated in order to meet current and future data management needs.

To that end, analysis and design for the Watershed Information Network (WIN), the replacement environmental data management system for STORET, currently is underway at DEP. Among other things, WIN will provide:

- A web-based interface for providing data to DEP rather than maintaining and supporting locally installed software;
- Data quality screening and correction before data are “published” in WIN; and
- Public access for data query and retrieval.

We are in the process of documenting DEP and EPA requirements for the fundamental information needed to meet statutory and federal requirements and to assure data usability by others. We currently are soliciting input from Water Management Districts and other data providers on those requirements. As WIN progresses from analysis and design to construction and implementation, we will engage you further on implementation and training for use of the new system.

If you have any questions about the Council's efforts, changes to Quality Assurance rules or WIN, please do not hesitate to call me at (850) 245-2029 or Drew Bartlett at (850) 245-8446.

cc: Herschel T. Vinyard Jr., Secretary, FDEP
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