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Water Resource  
Fact Sheet Series

### Available Fact Sheets

- *Florida's Water Resource Management System*
- *Minimum Flows and Levels*
- *Water Use Trends in Florida*
- *Water Conservation*
- *Alternative Water Supplies*
- *Regional Water Supply Planning*
- *Water Reservations*
- *Drought and Water Management*
- *Climate Change/Water Management Connections*
- *Local Sources First*
- *Per Capita Water Use*
- *Desalination*
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### For More Information

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<http://www.dep.state.fl.us/water/waterpolicy/index.htm>

## Florida's Water Resource Management System

### Who's Responsible for Managing Florida's Water?

The Florida Water Resources Act, Chapter 373, F.S., establishes that all water in Florida, on the surface or in the ground, is a public resource managed by the Department of Environmental Protection and five regional water management districts. Water resources include rivers, streams, wetlands, lakes, springs, aquifers, and estuaries. The state has exclusive authority to regulate the withdrawal of Florida's water resources, and no local government may enact ordinances that interfere with the state's exclusive authority.

### How Does the System Work?

Florida's water management program is unique in that it combines regional management of local water resources with state level oversight. Regional management activities are carried out by the water management districts, which are established along natural watershed boundaries. The five districts are: the Northwest Florida, Suwannee River, St. Johns River, Southwest Florida, and South Florida water management districts. The activities of each district are directed by a Governing Board made up of citizens from within the district appointed by the Governor.

The Department of Environmental Protection has general supervisory authority over the districts, and can exercise any power granted to the districts. The department provides state level oversight of the districts through several means, both formal and informal. This includes coordinated planning and rulemaking, and executive level coordination among the Executive Directors of the water management districts and the Secretary of the Department of Environmental Protection.

The primary formal oversight mechanism is the Water Resource Implementation Rule (Chapter 62-40, F.A.C.). All district policies, programs, and rules must be consistent with Chapter 62-40, and it is the department's responsibility to ensure compliance.

This approach combines state-level oversight with regional decision making. It facilitates appropriate statewide consistency in the application of Florida water law while maintaining regional flexibility to address differing priority issues and to accommodate the wide-ranging climatic, hydrogeological, and environmental conditions that affect the state's water resources.

## What is Water Management?

The water management activities of the department and districts are divided into four areas of responsibility that must be integrated to be effective. The four areas sometimes overlap or conflict, requiring that they be implemented in a balanced way to ensure that human needs are met while protecting water resources from harm. One of the strengths of Florida's system is this integrated, comprehensive management approach. The four areas of responsibility are:

- **Water Supply:** promoting the availability of sufficient water for all existing and future reasonable and beneficial uses while protecting natural systems. This involves activities such as water use permitting, water supply planning, helping fund water supply projects, promoting water conservation, and promoting the use of reclaimed wastewater and stormwater where it can safely be used as a substitute for potable drinking water.
- **Flood Protection and Flood Plain Management:** preventing or minimizing damage from floods, and protecting and enhancing the natural system values of floodplains. This includes activities such as land acquisition, restoration of surface waters, wetlands and adjacent uplands, management of flood control structures, and regulation of activities that impact wetlands or surface waters.
- **Water Quality Management:** improving, protecting, and maintaining the quality of surface and groundwater. This includes activities such as protecting water supply wells from pollution and saltwater intrusion, regulating land uses that could harm water quality, regulating discharge of wastewater, establishing water quality standards, restoration of degraded waters and wetlands, and water quality monitoring.
- **Natural System Management:** preserving, protecting and restoring water dependent natural systems. "Natural systems" include various combinations of waterbodies, wetlands, marshes, floodplains, and estuaries that together form a connected and interdependent structure or "system" that provides essential ecological services such as fish and wildlife habitat, natural flood control, water quality improvement, climate moderation, erosion control, recreation, and scenic value. Management activities include land acquisition and restoration, regulation of dredging, filling and other land alterations, water use permitting, control of harmful exotic species, and controlled burning of fire-dependent habitats.