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FS# 7104SG

## Importance of Water as a Resource

The University of Florida IFAS Center for Public Issues Education (PIE Center) released a report in February based upon the “Public Opinions of Water in Florida” survey. Taken by 749 Florida residents, the survey assessed public opinions related to water quality and quantity issues in Florida. When asked how important they considered ten different Florida issues, water is listed as #3 after healthcare (#1) and the economy (#2) in order of importance.

Water quality is an important issue in Florida. Overall, clean water was viewed as being highly or extremely important to Florida residents and, in terms of clean water, drinking water topped the list of importance. Water quantity and having plentiful water for various purposes is also an important issue in Florida. Residents believed that having plentiful water for cities was the most important purpose, followed closely by plentiful water in aquifers, springs, rivers, and lakes and water for agriculture. Having plentiful water for cities and for our natural areas both relate to the importance of clean drinking water.



Photo credit: Tyler Jones, UF/IFAS Communications

Where does our drinking water come from? Depending on where you live in Florida, your drinking water most likely comes from a local river or lake or from a Florida aquifer. The main source of water for most residents in northeast and east-central Florida is from the Floridan aquifer, which is the primary source of groundwater for most of the state. There are many layers in this aquifer and residents may get their water from deeper or shallower (or surficial) parts of the aquifer. An excellent visual showing the many different layers and complexities of the Florida aquifer system can be found at <http://floridaswater.com/aquifer/>.

The water stored in the aquifer is replenished by rainfall. On average, Florida receives 54 inches of rainfall per year. The amount of rainfall Florida receives varies from one part of the state to the other, from one season of the year to the other, and from one year to the next. Of course not all of this rain reaches the aquifer; some of it evaporates and some of it runs off the land into other water bodies like rivers, lakes, and even the Indian River Lagoon before it gets a chance to soak into the ground. One important thing to remember with withdrawing water from the aquifer, whether it's for drinking, irrigation, or for other uses, is that if you pump water out of the ground faster than it's being replenished, then there can be some long-term problems. One of those that we have to worry about in Florida, is salt water intrusion.

Saltwater intrusion occurs when either wells are drilled too deep trying to reach clean water, or when too much freshwater is pumped from the aquifer, which allows saltwater to replace the freshwater. Once saltwater infiltrates the freshwater part of the aquifer, it can be difficult, if not impossible, to remove the salt from the water so it can be used for things like drinking water or irrigation. About 59%

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of the respondents to the survey, either agreed or strongly agreed that saltwater intrusion was an important issue in Florida. So, we're already aware that this is something we, as Florida residents, have to think about as we use water.

Luckily there are many things you can do in your own home to help conserve water. Things like repairing and replacing leaky faucets, pipes, or toilets, operating the dishwasher and washing machine only when you have a full load, installing and using low-flow showerhead and faucet aerators, and replacing older model toilets with low-flow models that use 1.6 gallons per flush or high-efficiency toilets that use 1.0 to 1.28 gallons per flush. Outside the home, you can conserve water by watering your lawn only as needed, as indicated by a rain gauge. If you have an irrigation system, make sure it's working properly and install a rain sensor if you don't have one to prevent watering your lawn unnecessarily. Taking even one small step can help both conserve water and save you money.



Photo credit: Marisol Amador, UF/IFAS Communications

For more information, please view the following websites

My Brevard Yard Program <http://brevard.ifas.ufl.edu/horticulture/index.shtml#mby>

Sustainable Floridians Program <http://brevard.ifas.ufl.edu/communities/susfl.shtml>

PIE Center website <http://www.piecenter.com/water>

Odera, E. & Lamm, A. (2015). Public Opinion of Water in Florida. PIE2012/13-06. Gainesville, FL: University of Florida/IFAS Center for Public Issues Education. [http://www.piecenter.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Water\\_Year3\\_ReportFINAL1.pdf](http://www.piecenter.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Water_Year3_ReportFINAL1.pdf)

Borisova, T. and Carriker, R. Florida's Water Resources. EDIS Publication #FE757. <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdffiles/FE/FE75700.pdf>

Florida's aquifers <http://floridaswater.com/aquifer/>

Groundwater depletion <https://water.usgs.gov/edu/gwdepletion.html>

Water Conservation Quick Tips [http://livinggreen.ifas.ufl.edu/water/water\\_conservation.html](http://livinggreen.ifas.ufl.edu/water/water_conservation.html), [http://solutionsforyourlife.ufl.edu/hot\\_topics/sustainable\\_living/water\\_conservation.shtml](http://solutionsforyourlife.ufl.edu/hot_topics/sustainable_living/water_conservation.shtml), and <http://floridaswater.com/waterconservation/savingwater/>