

October 2010



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*
- *Reclaimed Water*

For More Information

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

Minimum Flows and Levels

Florida faces many challenges in meeting future demands for water. Demand for fresh water is expected to increase by about 2.0 billion gallons per day over the next 20 years. It is critical that we are able to meet our water needs while maintaining the healthy natural systems essential to Florida's economy and quality of life. One way to ensure that the water resources are protected is to establish minimum flows and levels (MFLs) for priority water bodies.

Why Are Minimum Flows and Levels Established?

They are established to protect water resources from significant harm that might result if too much water is withdrawn for human use. Minimum flows and levels are used both in planning where new water sources could be developed and in regulating water withdrawals.

How are Minimum Flows and Levels Developed?

The water management districts use a variety of information to scientifically establish the point beyond which additional withdrawals would cause significant harm. Usually, the water management districts select a peer review committee to evaluate the scientific principles and methods used to establish an MFL. Once an MFL is calculated, it is adopted by rule and implemented by the water management districts.

What If a Water Body Is Already Below Its Minimum Flow or Level?

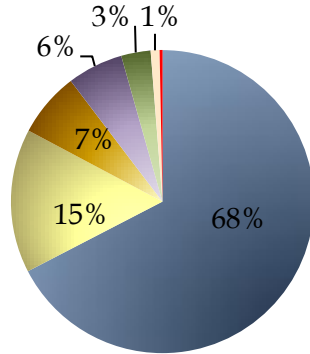
For water bodies that are below their minimum flow or level, or are projected to fall below it within 20 years, the water management district is required to implement a recovery or prevention strategy to ensure the MFL is maintained over the long-term. The strategies may require a reduction in permitted withdrawals, but also need to include a timetable to allow for the provision of sufficient water supplies for existing and projected uses, including the development of additional water supplies, and the implementation of water conservation measures.

Can New Permits Be Issued if There Is a Recovery or Prevention Strategy?

Additional withdrawals for new applicants and existing users may be approved if they otherwise meet all permitting criteria and are consistent with the MFL recovery or prevention strategy.

How Many MFLs Have Been Established?

As of January 2010, 319 minimum flows and levels have been established statewide. Approximately 68% of the adopted MFLs have been for lakes. MFLs have been established for many of the state’s significant water bodies such as: Lake Okeechobee, portions of the St. Johns River, Wekiva Springs and River, portions of the Suwannee River, Peace River, Florida Bay, and the Everglades.

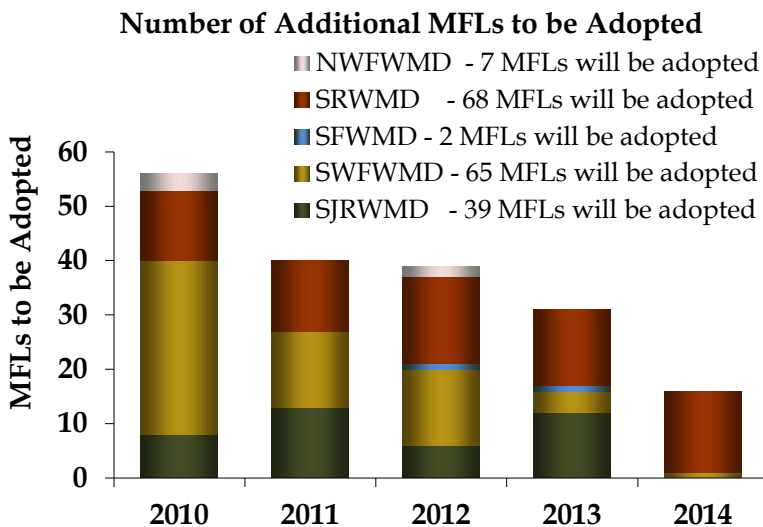


Number of MFLs Adopted by Water Body Type

- Lakes = 215 MFLs Adopted
- Wetlands = 49 MFLs Adopted
- Springs = 22 MFLs Adopted
- Rivers/Canal = 19 MFLs Adopted
- Aquifers = 10 MFLs Adopted
- River/Estuary Systems = 3 MFLs Adopted
- Estuary = 1 MFL Adopted

Total MFLs Adopted = 319

How Are Priorities For Minimum Flows and Levels Set?



Priorities are established based on the environmental, cultural and historic importance of the water body to the state or region, and the potential for significant harm from current and planned water withdrawals to meet existing or projected future needs. Additionally, with some exceptions, all 1st magnitude springs and 2nd magnitude springs within state or federally owned lands purchased for conservation must be on the priority list. Each year the

Districts submit a priority list to the Department of Environmental Protection for review and approval. By 2014, the Districts are scheduled to establish 181 additional MFLs.