



Central Florida Water Initiative Rules Ratified

The new Central Florida Water Initiative (CFWI) rules for consumptive use permitting in the CFWI region have been ratified by the Florida Legislature, signed into law by Gov. Ron DeSantis and are now in effect.

The legislature required the CFWI to establish consistent rules and regulations for the three water management districts to ensure the region's current and future water needs are met while protecting the water resources and natural systems. The rules apply to the CFWI area, which consists of all of Orange, Osceola, Seminole and Polk counties and southern Lake County, covering approximately 5,300 square miles.

The Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) initiated rulemaking in 2016 and the proposed rules were published in 2020. Following challenges to the rules, DEP and the water management districts worked collaboratively with stakeholders to reach a settlement agreement so the rules could be ratified during the 2021 legislative session.

The new rule chapter:

- Limits water users in the CFWI area to their currently permitted groundwater quantities, or the quantities necessary to meet their needs in the year 2025, depending upon the use type.
- Requires all new and expanded Upper Floridan Aquifer uses to be offset.
- Requires consistent adoption of MFLs.
- Requires more permittees and applicants to evaluate the use of the lowest quality water source when applying for a permit.
- Expands evaluation of harm from saline water intrusion criteria to protect fresh groundwater as well as brackish sources.
- Adds environmental harm criteria for wetlands and address cumulative impacts.
- Avoids issuing emergency water shortage orders to meet current needs and implement alternative water supply projects.
- Requires all water users to meet certain water conservation goals.
- Maintains the consistent uniform rules for application within the CFWI, as directed by statute.

To address legislative language relating to certain conditions on agricultural water users in a drought condition, DEP will conform the rules through rulemaking after July 1, 2021.