

November 2014



## just the FACTs

This fact sheet is provided as a reference to encourage a greater understanding of the various issues related to managing water in South Florida.



For more information on this subject, scan this QR code using a barcode reader app on your smartphone.



[sfwmd.gov](http://sfwmd.gov)  
 South Florida Water Management District  
 3301 Gun Club Road  
 West Palm Beach, Florida 33406  
 561-686-8800 • 1-800-432-2045  
[www.sfwmd.gov](http://www.sfwmd.gov)  
 MAILING ADDRESS: P.O. Box 24680  
 West Palm Beach, FL 33416-4680

## Water Reservation for the Kissimmee Basin

*The Kissimmee Basin encompasses more than two dozen lakes in the Kissimmee Chain of Lakes and the Kissimmee River and its floodplain. The basin forms the headwaters of Lake Okeechobee and the Everglades.*

*To protect fish and wildlife in the Kissimmee Basin and support ongoing efforts to restore the Kissimmee River and its floodplain, the District is developing a water reservation rule, in accordance with subsection 373.223(4), Florida Statutes. The water reservation rule will support the Kissimmee River Restoration Project, a 50-50 partnership between the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to return flow to the meandering river's historic channel.*

*When the restoration project is completed, more than 40 square miles of river-floodplain ecosystem will be restored, including almost 25,000 acres of wetlands and approximately 44 miles of historic river channel.*

### Defining water reservations

A water reservation is a legal mechanism to set aside water for the protection of fish and wildlife or public health and safety, making it unavailable for allocation to consumptive uses. Water reservation rules specify the locations, quantities, timing and distribution of the water being reserved for the natural system. Determining the necessary quantity, timing and distribution of the water is accomplished through evaluation of data and information linking the local hydrology to water needed for protection of fish and wildlife.

Reservations are subject to periodic review and revision in light of changed conditions. All presently existing legal uses of water are protected so long as those uses are not contrary to the public interest.

### Reservation water bodies proposed

Water bodies to be protected under the rule include:

- The Kissimmee Chain of Lakes (Upper Chain and Headwaters Lakes) including: Lakes Kissimmee, Cypress, Hatchineha, Tohopekaliga, East Lake Tohopekaliga, Ajay, Hart, Mary Jane, Myrtle, Joel, Preston, Alligator, Brick, Lizzie, Coon, Center, Trout, Gentry and Fell's Cove (see Figure 1)
- The Kissimmee River and its floodplain
- Tributaries and related ground water bodies may also be addressed.

### Reservation benefits to the environment

Long-term success of ecosystem restoration in the Kissimmee Basin is measured, in part, by the ability of native fish and wildlife to thrive in habitats of the Kissimmee Chain of Lakes, the Kissimmee River and its floodplain. These water bodies support breeding, shelter and foraging habitats for dozens of Florida animals that depend on the year-round availability of water for survival, including:

(more)

- 52 species of fish, including largemouth bass, black crappie, red ear sunfish and bluegill
- 98 species of wetland-dependent and wading birds, including ducks, the snail kite, wood stork, sandhill crane and whooping crane and birds identified as endangered or threatened
- 24 species of amphibians and reptiles, including the American alligator and several species of frogs, toads, salamanders and turtles
- 4 mammal species, including the river otter and round-tailed muskrat

### **Background and conditions**

- The Kissimmee River – a key component of the Kissimmee Basin – once meandered 103 miles through central Florida, providing broad wetland habitats for a rich diversity of plants and animals.
- Changes to the natural flow of water through the basin occurred in the 1960s and 1970s as the result of deepening and straightening the river to reduce flooding. These modifications achieved flood reduction benefits but also harmed the river-floodplain ecosystem.
- Realizing this, the Kissimmee River Restoration Project was authorized by Congress in the 1992 Water Resources Development Act to restore the historical configuration and integrity of the river.
- Three construction phases are now complete, and continuous water flow has been re-established to 24 miles of the meandering river. Seasonal rains and flows now inundate the floodplain in the restored area.
- The entire Kissimmee River Restoration project is currently projected to be complete by 2019.
- Key factors and major issues considered in developing the water reservation include:
  - Providing sufficient flows to protect fish and wildlife in the Kissimmee River ecosystem in support of the Kissimmee River Restoration Project.
  - Ensuring adequate future quantities of water for fish and wildlife in a rapidly developing part of Florida, including portions of Orange, Osceola, Polk, Okeechobee, and Highlands counties (see Figure 1).
  - Protecting threatened and endangered species living in the ecosystem, including the American alligator, snail kite and wood stork.
  - After the quantification of water needed for fish and wildlife, determine if excess water is available for water supply purposes

### **Developing the reservation and gathering public input**

A multistep process is in place to ensure that the proposed water reservations are thoroughly studied and considered by scientific experts, officials, stakeholders and the public.

- The SFWMD Governing Board initially authorized water reservation rule development to protect water for fish and wildlife in the Kissimmee Basin on June 12, 2008.
- Several public rule development workshops were held in 2009 to solicit input from stakeholders and to develop draft rule language. Other public input opportunities occurred during 2009 at Water Resources Advisory Commission (WRAC) and Governing Board meetings.

- The supporting document, titled *Technical Document to Support Water Reservations for the Kissimmee River and Chain of Lakes*, was completed on March 20, 2009. A favorable peer review of the document, by an independent panel of experts, was received on April 17, 2009.
- Rule development efforts were placed in abeyance in 2009 as work continued with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers on anticipated regulation schedule changes for the Kissimmee Upper Chain of Lakes.
- The Kissimmee Basin water reservation was included in the District's 2014 Priority Water Body List and Schedule, which was approved by the Governing Board on October 13, 2013, and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection on May 5, 2014.
- A briefing on development of a water reservation for the Kissimmee Basin was presented to the Central Florida Water Initiative (CFWI) Steering Committee on April 25, 2014.
- The first public workshop to reintroduce rule development occurred in Kissimmee on July 30, 2014.

#### **Next Steps**

- The SFWMD Governing Board authorized a Notice of Rule Development at its June 12, 2014, meeting.
- The District is hosting a series of public workshops to solicit participation in the rulemaking effort.
- Status updates will be provided to the CFWI Steering and/or Management Oversight committees and CFWI project teams.
- Draft documents associated with the rule development process and public notices for workshops are posted on the District's website at [www.sfwmd.gov/reservations](http://www.sfwmd.gov/reservations) (click on Kissimmee Basin).
- The water reservation rule is anticipated to be adopted in 2015.

For more information about this water reservation rule or other previously adopted reservations, please visit [www.sfwmd.gov/reservations](http://www.sfwmd.gov/reservations).

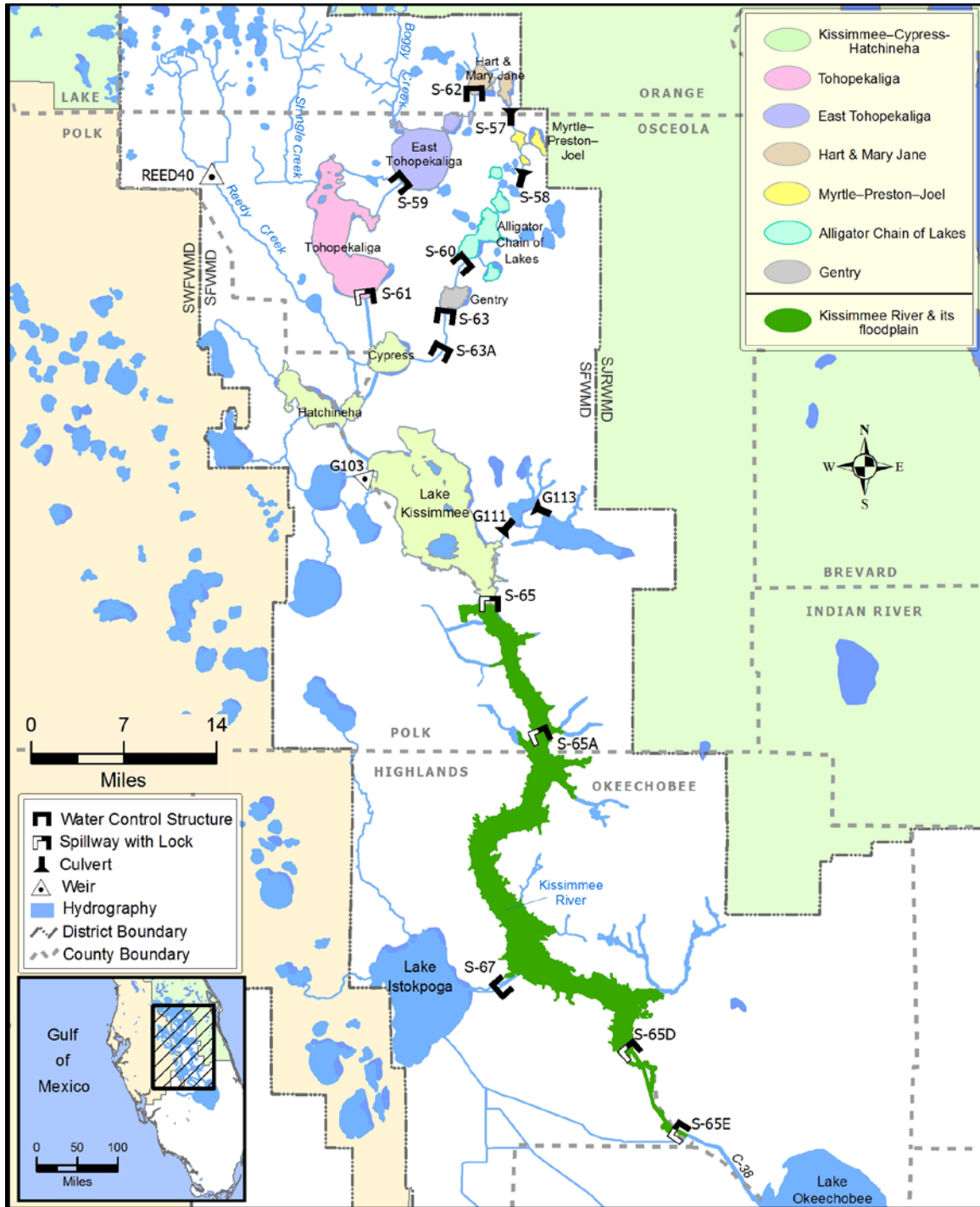


Figure 1: Location and components of the Kissimmee Basin water reservation rule.