



Water Resources Planning and Comprehensive Watershed Management

Priority Statement:

The Florida League of Cities SUPPORTS legislation establishing a statewide coordinated planning and prioritization approach for water resource investments that funds Florida’s current and projected water needs in an equitable manner and authorizing Comprehensive Watershed Management projects to qualify for funding under the state Water Protection and Sustainability Trust Fund.

Background:

Statewide Water Resources Planning

Florida faces significant challenges in meeting its increasing needs for drinking water while also managing wastewater and protecting natural resources. The Office of Economic and Demographic Research estimates a gap between the state’s water needs and available funding exists in “every future year, growing to \$840.69 million by the end of the 10-year forecast period (excluding resiliency needs)”. State funding is subject to shifting legislative priorities and local perspectives rather than a strategic approach, which is leading to inefficiencies and a growing backlog of needed infrastructure. The fractured responsibility for water resources planning among state, regional and local governments and the uncoordinated investment of funds to meet various water needs are additional obstacles to addressing these challenges.

To address these issues, the League supports a comprehensive review of state water policy with the goal of developing recommendations relating to both governance and long-term funding. A review of governance issues would examine the current delineation of responsibilities between state, regional and local governments. An examination of funding issues would contemplate the development of long- and short-term plans to address the growing funding gap, which may further require revising existing funding sources, developing new funding sources and developing new procedures for accessing state funding.

Comprehensive Watershed Management

The Florida Water Protection and Sustainability Program Trust Fund was established in 2005 and later modified. The Trust Fund now provides a way for the Florida Department of Environmental Protection to make wastewater grants, provide cost-share assistance for alternative water supply projects and invest in water storage projects. Funding is appropriated by the Legislature. Florida law specifies that proceeds from the Trust Fund may be used for the following purposes:

- The alternative water supply program
- The water storage facility revolving loan fund

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- The wastewater grant program.

As growth and increasing demands for water supply strain traditional water sources, utilities are beginning to develop new approaches that incorporate water supply, wastewater, stormwater and natural systems into integrated water management or “One Water” strategies. This comprehensive approach can be more cost-effective than traditional alternative water supply development because it results in additional benefits to the watershed, natural systems and the surrounding population.

Rule 62-40.425, Florida Administrative Code, promotes a comprehensive watershed management approach for managing the cumulative impacts of human activities on Florida’s water resources, accounting for myriad issues such as water quality, water supply, natural systems and floodplain management and flood protection. Despite the state’s expressed policy preference for a comprehensive watershed management approach, comprehensive watershed management projects do not have a dedicated source of state cost-share assistance. State funding sources are broken into specific silos that make it difficult to successfully plan and construct projects that incorporate comprehensive watershed management strategies. A project might receive funding for one aspect of such a project but not receive funding for other components because each component must pursue funding through a separate grant program.

To overcome this siloed approach that stymies such projects, the League proposes an amendment to Section 403.890, Florida Statutes, the Water Protection and Sustainability Program, to include watershed management projects as a purpose eligible for funding from the Water Protection and Sustainability Program Trust Fund.