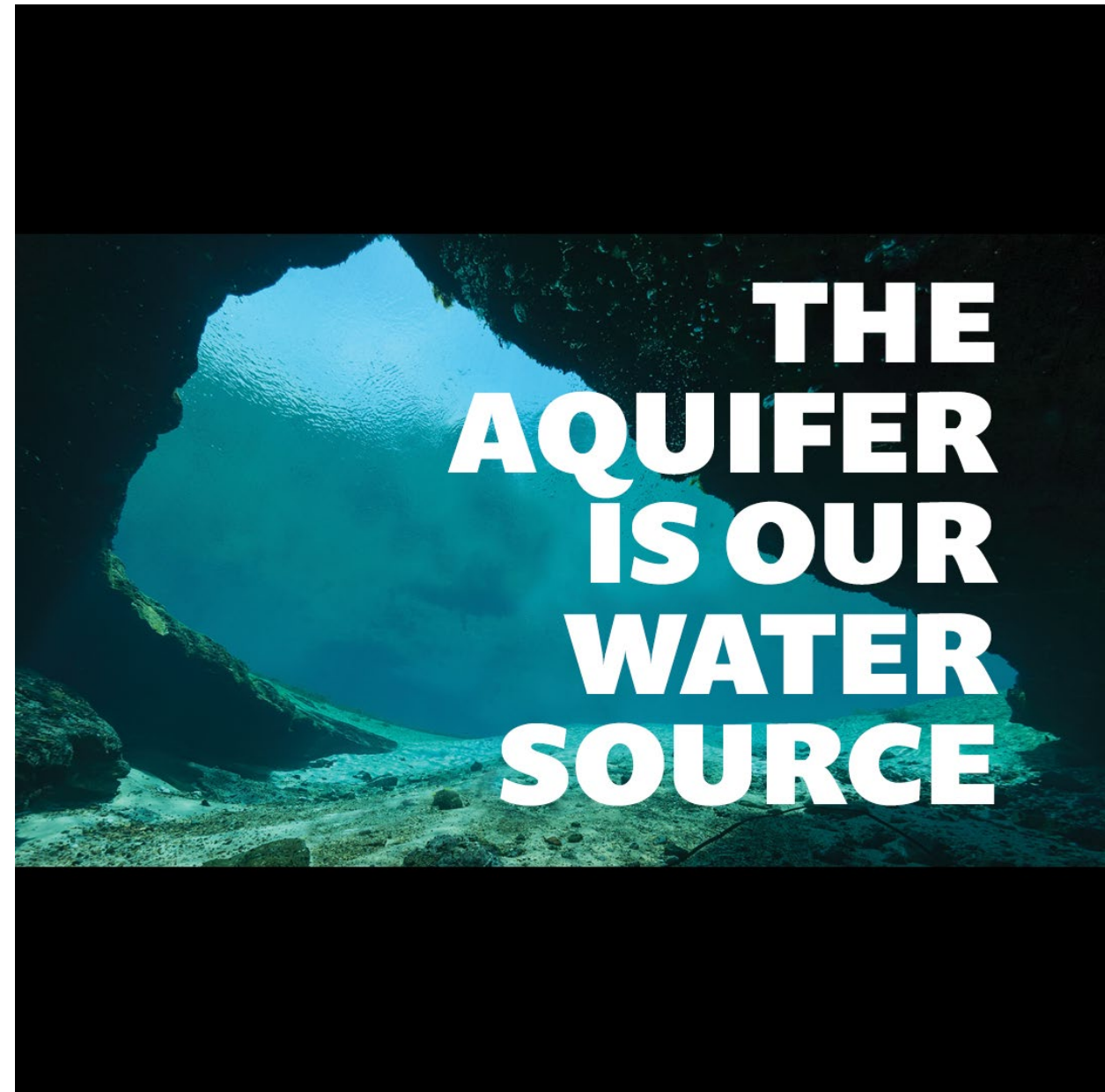




Lower Santa Fe and Ichetucknee Rivers and Associated Springs Minimum Flows and Levels Update

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The Big Picture

2023 North Florida Regional Water Supply Plan

- Population projected to increase by 1 million people (49%) by 2045
- 32% increase in water demand - 135 Million Gallons a Day (MGD)

Projects

\$2.17 BILLION

143.6 MGD

\$15 million/MGD



Conservation

\$57.7 Million (2%)


16.8 MGD

\$3.4 million/MGD



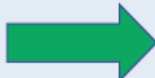


Not meeting Minimum Flows and Levels (MFLs)
with **CURRENT** pumping/permits!

Minimum Flows and Levels (MFL)

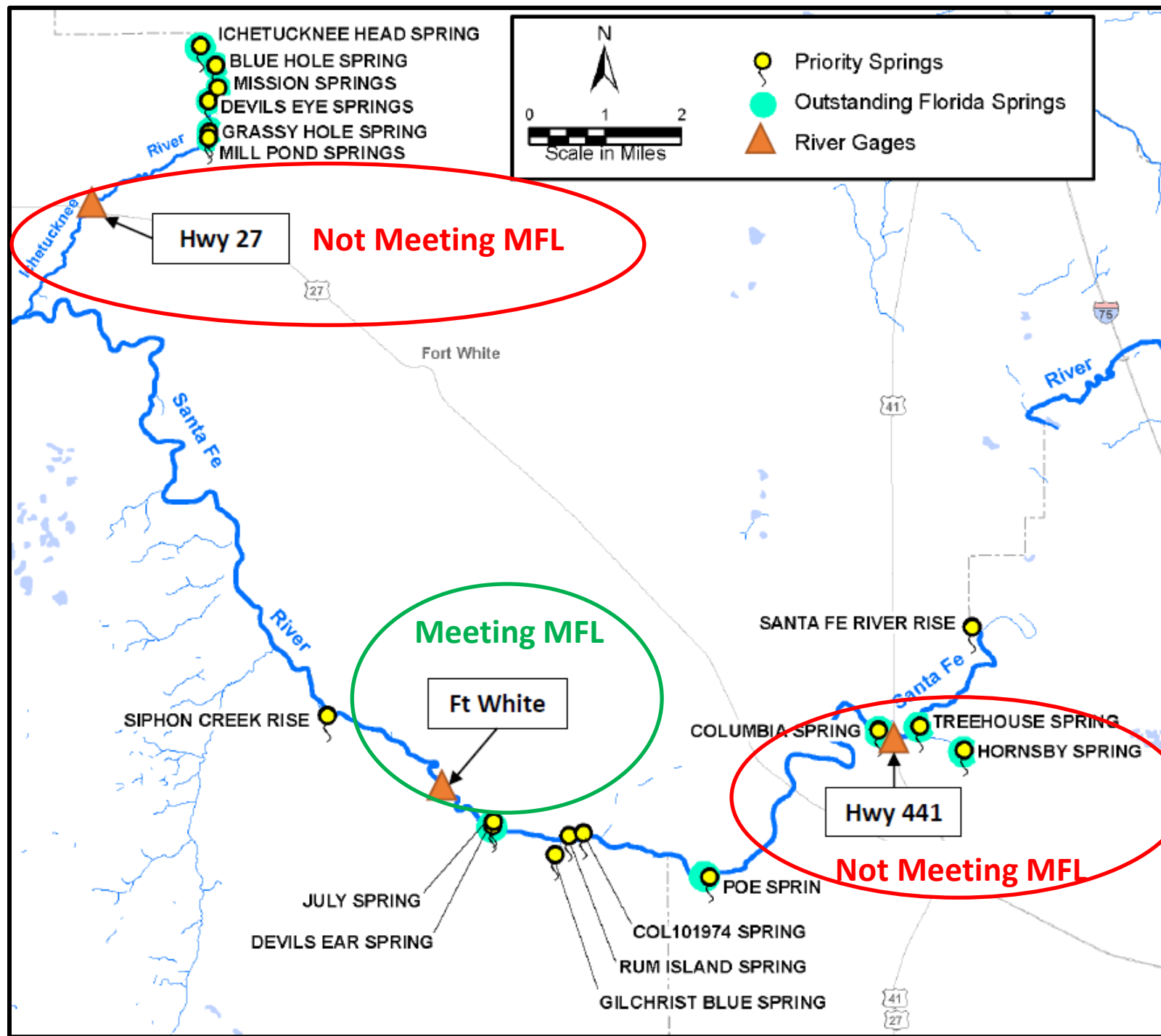
- MFLs are developed by the Water Management Districts and adopted by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection.
 - MFLs set water levels and flows to prevent significant harm to the water resources or ecology from water withdrawals.
 - MFLs protect non-consumptive uses of water that include navigation and recreation, fish and wildlife habitat, and for other natural resources (wetlands, etc.).
- 

Minimum Flows and Levels (MFL)

MFL Outcomes		
MFL not met		Recovery Strategy needed
MFL met, expected to fall below MFL during the next 20 years		Prevention Strategy needed
MFL met, expected to be met for next 20 years		No Recovery or Prevention Strategy needed

Current Lower Santa Fe and Ichetucknee Rivers and Associated Springs (LSFIR) MFL

- The Suwannee River Water Management District (SRWMD) established the first MFL for the LSFIR in 2014.
- The Lower Santa Fe and Ichetucknee Rivers were determined to be in **Recovery**.
- The 2014 Recovery Strategy for the Lower Santa Fe River Basin outlined projects and policies to meet the MFL.
 - Requires new permits provide reasonable assurance of offsetting impacts & Limits permit renewals to five-years.




Re-evaluation of Lower Santa Fe and Ichetucknee Rivers and Associated Springs (LSFIR) MFL


2022 Status Assessment:

- The Lower Santa Fe Ft. White gage was determined to **Meet the MFL.**
- The Santa Fe HWY 441 and Ichetucknee SR27 gages were determined to be in **Recovery.**


Re-evaluation of Lower Santa Fe and Ichetucknee Rivers and Associated Springs (LSFIR) MFL

- EPD conducted a peer review of the revised MFL and re-evaluation and provided feedback.
 - Staff recommends at this point to focus on the resulting projects and policies, rather than the science of the MFL and re-evaluation.
 - The current **draft** regulatory strategies are an improvement on the current Prevention and Recovery Plan.
 - We should push to make sure these stronger strategies are adopted
- 

FDEP Rule Making and Regulatory Strategies: February 2024 DRAFT

- Existing permits must offset portion of use that impacts the Lower Santa Fe and/or Ichetucknee Rivers
 - Some questions about how impact will be determined
 - Latest draft allows for a 20 year time frame, which staff thinks is too long
 - New permits, or a renewal with an increased allocation, must offset their entire impact
 - Again allows for a 20 year time frame
- 

FDEP Rule Making and Regulatory Strategies: February 2024 Draft

- Allowances for temporary allocations prior to offsets
 - Staff does not support, as it would allow further impact
 - Methods for offsetting impacts
 - Implement water resource or water supply development projects
 - Retire existing water use permits
 - Other means to reduce impact
- 

FDEP Rule Making and Regulatory Strategies: February 2024 Draft

- Highlights of utility water conservation plan requirements
 - Demonstrate meeting requirements by achieving a 75 gallons/day/person for residential customers
 - Staff thinks this is too high (2.4 persons per house = 180 gallons/day or 5.4 kgal/month)
 - For permits greater than 1.0 MGD- Plan must include landscape irrigation audit/evaluation for highest quartile of water use customers
 - Staff supports this and suggests requiring annually

FDEP Rule Making and Regulatory Strategies: February 2024 Draft


- New private residential irrigation wells are prohibited in the Floridan aquifer
 - Staff strongly supports this element




FDEP Rule Making and Regulatory Strategies: February 2024 Draft

- Highlights of Agricultural water conservation
 - Maximize best available water efficient practices
 - Mobile Irrigation Lab evaluations during permitting and every 5 years
 - Irrigation system management requirements


Updated Prevention and Recovery Plan

- It is unclear when the draft Recovery and Prevention Strategy will be published.
 - Should outline projects and policies for reducing consumptive uses and/or increasing water levels at the two gages that triggered such.
 - WMD and FDEP staff are soliciting projects and regulatory suggestions for inclusion in the plan.
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Conclusion

- There is over consumption and water use needs to be reduced or recharge needs to be increased to reverse impacts and prevent new ones.
 - The 2023 updates to the North Florida Regional Water Supply Plan illustrate the fiscal advantage of conservation.
 - Staff has concerns with the MFL and Status report, but believes the best path is to continue to engage with the state and push for aggressive Regulatory Strategies and Prevention and Recovery Plan.
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Next Steps

- EPD will continue to monitor the Regulatory Strategy and Prevention and Recovery Plan and will provide comments as needed.
 - EPD and Growth Management will work with GRU and Gainesville to create an updated Facilities Work Plan to identify conservation opportunities and projects as required by the 2023 North Florida Regional Water Supply Plan.
 - Florida Springs Council is working on an analysis of consumptive use permits (CUP) within Alachua County.
 - Summary of current permits
 - Analysis of WMD review process for six month period
 - Infographics to help inform the public
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The Santa Fe River RECOVERY STRATEGY

Should **REDUCE** water use to restore the river
to basic healthy levels. So why has water use **INCREASED**?

Because
in the 8 years since
the Recovery was adopted:

0 permits
denied

28 NEW
permits
approved

6 MILLION

MORE gallons per day are being withdrawn
by NEW water permits

Water Permitting data since 2015 within Alachua County

Next Steps

- County Attorney's Office researching:
 - What could be done within the Recovery Strategy rule to give local governments more power to reduce water use and mandate conservation?
 - Under what circumstances could WMDs deny a Consumptive Use Permit?