

## **No Duplication of Services September 2021**

The Lake County Water Authority is a special taxing district created by the legislature in 1953 to protect and conserve the fresh-water resources of Lake County. The Water Authority is strategically sized to react rapidly, provide county-specific focus and address issues that larger agencies or local governments have not. For example:

- The Water Authority built the Hickory Point Recreational Facility in 1992 - the Lake County Board of County Commissioners just began to develop regional parks in 2007;
- The Water Authority implemented a GIS system in 1992 - the Lake County Board of County Commissioners started their program in 1996; and
- The Water Authority began an environmentally-sensitive land acquisition program in 1988 - the Lake County Board of County Commissioners started land acquisition in 2005.
- Since 1996, the Water Authority has provided \$9,422,000 in matching funds for water quality improvement elements of stormwater projects. Lake County is limited in the cooperation with local governments to fund stormwater projects.

The Water Authority provides a focus on only Lake County, recognizing that the two chains of lakes and thousand of other water bodies provide a unique benefit and are of critical economic and environmental importance to Lake County; provides an inter-agency checks and balance mechanism (Lake Lowery, Lake Apopka CUP); and has addressed issues that other agencies or local governments were not able to or chose not to (cyanobacteria).

The Water Authority partners with local governments and other state and local agencies to share the cost of numerous projects. Sharing the costs allows for agencies to accomplish more through unified effort. Interagency coordination prevents duplication of effort and insures that the unique services provided by each agency are justifiable and maintained. The Water Authority's 2021-22 Rolled-Back Millage Rate of 0.3229 is **4.19% below** last year's rate, thus reducing taxes since an elected Board back in 2000 with a .5000 millage rate.

The following are illustrations of the division of efforts regarding lake management issues or topics.

**Navigation** – The Water Authority maintains navigability, navigational aids, and speed zone signage within the lakes of the major chain of lake systems in the County. The Water Authority removes downed trees blocking navigation and has removed accumulated sediment restricting navigation between lakes on the Harris Chain (Carlton-Beauclair, Helena Run, Lake Yale public boat ramp canal) and on the Clermont Chain (Winona-Minnehaba, Minneola-Hiawatha, Crescent-Minnehaba). The Water Authority removed approximately 1.5 million cubic yards of sediment from Lake Beauclair that accumulated from the Apopka-Beauclair Canal that was severely limiting navigation between Lake Beauclair and Lake Apopka particularly during low water conditions. The Water Authority completed a project to provide access from residential canals on Lake Griffin to facilitate the implementation of a revised fluctuation schedule. The Water Authority has funded construction and improvements to public boat ramps. The SJRWMD does not view maintaining navigation as

part of its purposes. Lake County Board of County Commissioners has no role in maintaining navigability.

**Water Quality Improvement Projects** - The Water Authority devotes the majority of its budget to activities and projects that improve water quality, maintain navigability or access to the lakes and chain of lake systems in the County. Often these projects are cooperative with local governments (stormwater retrofit projects) or with other state and local agencies (NuRF, Lake Beauclair Restoration) and with the state (Lake Griffin Access Dredging). Without the assistance or lead role of the Water Authority these projects would not be performed.

Water resource and cooperative stormwater projects represent 66.7% of the FY 2021-22 budget.

**Stormwater** – Using the Water Authority \$9.4 million as project seed money, local agencies could complete \$28.2 million in stormwater projects. The Water Authority has assisted many local governments, including Lake County, to construct these projects. Lake County have only funded projects that are located in the unincorporated areas of Lake County. Furthermore, while Lake County has a Stormwater Program, much of (if not the majority of) the available funds are used for drainage, parks and trails or other non-water quality related efforts. The SJRWMD provides some funding for stormwater projects however spreads \$400,000 over (19) counties.

**Structure Operations** – The Water Authority owns six (6) water control structures on the Palatlahaha River. The structures on the Palatlahaha River were constructed to hold water back to provide water for freeze protection for the citrus industry. These structures have very limited ability to act as flood control but, nevertheless, must be maintained to prevent environmental damage and loss of property. Water can be moved only as a series of cascading pools. The Lake County Board of County Commissioners has no role in structure operations.

The SJRWMD maintains and operates the Burrell structure on the Harris Chain of Lakes. In addition to the Burrell structure the SJRWMD operates and maintains two other flood control structures, the Apopka-Beauclair Lock and Dam and the Moss Bluff Lock and Dam. These structures are operated based on a federally approved schedule to limit the potential for flooding.

**Water Supply/Water Conservation Issues** – The Water Authority has been involved in some water supply related issues. During the drought from 1998 to 2003, the Water Authority Board supplemented the SJRWMD's water conservation public messages with local media. The Water Authority collaborated with the SJRWMD to fund a water patroller program for enhanced enforcement of water restrictions focusing specifically on Lake County. The Water Authority continued the program after the SJRWMD stopped funding the water patrollers. The Water Authority funded irrigation audits in an effort to encourage water conservation, while the County and SJRWMD did not participate in this program.

The Water Authority Board challenged SJRWMD's intent to issue a permit to withdraw surface water from Lake Apopka to supplement a reclaimed water system with no Technical Staff Report (TSR) available for review. The action on the permit was withdrawn pending the completion of the TSR.

#### **Land Acquisition -**

The SJRWMD looks to acquire extremely large parcels over a 19-county area and maintains 67,000 acres in Marion, Orange, Lake, and Seminole Counties. Many parcels of local importance would not meet the SJRWMD's acquisition criteria. The Water Authority Board became involved in acquisition because no other local entity was identifying important parcels or acquiring land. Lake County citizens and taxpayers approached the Water Authority in 1989 requesting that the board establish an acquisition program to preserve vulnerable areas previously identified in a 1985 report. Through a citizen committee and public hearings, the Board exercised its acquisition ability to acquire parcels to preserve and protect locally significant water resources such as sinkholes connected to the Floridan aquifer, shorelines along the Harris and Clermont Chain, wetlands in northern Lake Yale, (Flat Island, Lake Denham Restoration Area, Hidden Waters, Wolf Branch Sink, Crooked River, Sawgrass Island etc.) Currently of the 7,523-acres managed by the Water Authority, 79% of the acreage is associated with these significant water features. The Lake County Water Authority manages these lands with the use of prescribed fire, non-native species control, trimming trails, mowing and managing vegetation.

The Water Authority has significantly reduced or limited its acquisition efforts, particularly since the Lake County Board of County Commissioners has become involved in acquisition of Natural Lands as a result of a voter approved referendum.

**Cyanobacteria Monitoring** – The Water Authority became involved with cyanobacteria (bluegreen algae) at a time when there was very little technical information available about this potentially serious situation. Management decisions were being considered based on information reported in the media. The Board wanted to make decisions based on scientific monitoring rather than by what is reported in the newspaper. A data set was generated over a three year period. An independent researcher reviewed the data set and suggested potential problems with the sampling protocol and the statistics. The contractor claims the protocols are consistent with the way it is done in other monitoring programs and stands by their work. Warts or not, it remains the largest, longest duration, most robust data set of its kind for cyanobacteria/toxin presence in freshwater lake systems.

**Communication or Education** – Both the County and SJRWMD have communication staff to handle their programs; however, the Water Authority is the only agency that has established an annual program for local teachers to receive grants that fund local water resource education. Local media representatives look to the Water Authority to provide current water level information, updated status on the precipitation outlook, understanding local hydrology, and where to find out information on state programs. Citizens look to the Water Authority to provide information on maneuvering state agency bureaucracy, permitting contacts, concern about water levels, and information to share with students, family members, neighbors and

boaters. The Water Authority is the only agency to provide recreational boaters information about the lakes and water safety through the Sheriff's Marine Patrol Unit. In fiscal year 2020-21 the Water Authority added two additional marine patrol deputies to the Sheriff's staff (4 total) and in FY21-22 the Water Authority will add two marine patrol deputies to the City of Clermont to enhance water safety in the Clermont Chain of Lakes.

**Unification not Duplication** - The Water Authority has advanced projects that would otherwise be neglected due to lack of resources or local interest. The Nutrient Reduction Facility (NuRF), for instance, fills an important gap in Total Maximum Daily Load reduction goals that would not be met otherwise. Lake Beauclair dredging would not currently be proposed because, although it is expected to have water quality benefits, its main purpose is outside the scope of the SJRWMD. Without canal dredging in Lake Griffin, the SJRWMD could not proceed with enhanced fluctuation aimed at environmental restoration. The LCWA protects local interests through maintaining a vigilant focus on the activities within and adjacent to Lake County which may affect the water resources of Lake County.