



1.0 Drivers and Goals for This Evaluation

In 2017, the governing boards of the St. Johns River Water Management District (SJRWMD) and Suwannee River Water Management District (SRWMD) approved the North Florida Regional Water Supply Plan (NFRWSP). The NFRWSP encompasses 14 counties: Alachua, Baker, Bradford, Clay, Columbia, Duval, Flagler, Gilchrist, Hamilton, Nassau, Putnam, St. Johns, Suwannee, and Union. The purpose of the plan is to protect natural resources and water supplies in north Florida. The water management districts have updated the plan, in accordance with Section 373.709 of the Florida Statutes, which requires the districts reevaluate their determinations concerning the need for a water supply plan at least every five years. The NFRWSP identified impacts to the Lower Santa Fe and Ichetucknee Rivers (LSFIR) as water resource constraints and efforts are now underway to identify large-scale groundwater recharge projects that work in conjunction with conservation and other projects to recover the LSFIR to their previous levels. The Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) and SRWMD are developing proposed MFLs for the LSFIR which are expected to be adopted in 2026. The MFLs must be accompanied by a recovery and prevention plan to achieve compliance with the proposed targets.

The four public utilities—JEA, Gainesville Regional Utilities (GRU), St. Johns County Utility Department (SJCUD), and the Clay County Utility Authority (CCUA)—have developed independent Integrated Water Resource Plans (IWRPs). These public utilities developed their IWRPs with planning horizons tied to projected population growth and capital infrastructure investment. The public utilities want their respective IWRPs to integrate with regional water supply development projects to protect vital environmental resources and sustainably manage the region’s water resources in perpetuity.

The water management districts, and the public utilities understand that to address the long-term sustainability of important water resources (such as the Lower Santa Fe, Ichetucknee, and Suwannee Rivers) large-scale cross-district and cross-utility projects will likely be necessary. To address this need, the FDEP, water management districts, and public utilities agreed to work together to develop this NFRWSP Projects Conceptualization Partnership.

Ultimately, the principal goal of this Partnership is to provide full recovery and prevention flow benefits to the Lower Santa Fe and Ichetucknee Rivers, thereby addressing the impacts from all water users, including utilities.

The MFLs for these rivers use streamflow gauges as measurements of improvement, and as proxies for restoration of flow in upstream aquifer-fed springs.

The MFLs established for both the Santa Fe and Ichetucknee Rivers have two components:

- Recovery target represents the amount of flow that needs to be restored for the river based on impacts of baseline average groundwater pumping from 2014–2018.
- Prevention target represents the amount of flow that must be provided to offset the anticipated reductions in flow due to projected impacts of anticipated groundwater withdrawals in the northern Florida region from 2019–2045.