

MEMORANDUM

TO: Governing Board

FROM: Hugh Thomas, Executive Director

Date: March 10, 2026

RE: **Public Hearing** for Approval of Order Number 26-002, Phase II Water Shortage

RECOMMENDATION

Conduct a public hearing and approve Order Number 26-002, Phase II Water Shortage.

BACKGROUND

The District is observing drier than average conditions for surface conditions, groundwater, and surface water Districtwide. On January 13, 2026, the Board adopted Water Shortage Advisory Order Number 26-001 based on ongoing drought conditions within the District boundary.

District staff have continued monitoring the hydrologic conditions around the District and have determined that a drought-ending storm event from early spring and into summer is unlikely based on current climatology. Therefore, it is likely that the current drought conditions will persist and possibly intensify. Monitoring indicates that flows throughout the District are all below average (less than the 25th percentile) for this time of year. Additionally, monitoring indicates that the Aucilla, New, Santa Fe, Suwannee, and Withlacoochee rivers have at least one gage with daily flows at or below the 10th percentile. Districtwide mean Upper Floridan aquifer level remains around the 20th percentile.

To date, the 2026 rainfall amount for the District has been well below average and the rainfall prediction from the National Weather Service's Climate Prediction Center for the next three-months (March – May 2026) calls for equal chances of above, near, or below normal rainfall. As of February 22, 2026, fourteen District counties had an average rainfall deficit of approximately 16.1 inches based on records beginning in 1932. As of February 19, 2026, the U. S. Drought Monitor for Florida identifies all District counties within the Extreme Drought (D3) category.

Based on the ongoing deficit in rainfall and below average aquifer conditions the District is recommending a progression to a Phase II water shortage. The combination of restrictions listed in 40B-21 and other appropriate and necessary restrictions are appended to the order in the Phase II Water Shortage Restrictions March 2026 attachment. This will expand recommended voluntary measures and implement regulatory measures focused on limiting the frequency of landscape irrigation and discretionary aesthetic uses. Regulatory measures include authorization of the Executive Director to initiate enforcement and administrative penalties as outlined in the order and delegates to the Executive Director authority modify or rescind the order until the next regularly scheduled Governing Board meeting.

The District is encouraging all users to plan proactively for the possibility of an extended drought with the potential for additional regulatory measures, especially focused on reducing water use from less efficient systems and processes. Drought conditions in neighboring water management districts are equally intense and have prompted Southwest Water Management District and the St Johns River Water Management District to issue Water Shortage Orders for their District.

The issuance of a Phase II water shortage order would apply to all counties within the District and unincorporated portions of Alachua and Levy counties, consistent with existing memoranda of understanding with neighboring Districts.

Because of the aforementioned factors, staff recommends that the Governing Board approve Order Number 26-002, Phase II Water Shortage.

RLM/ak
Attachment