



Serving Alachua  
Bradford • Columbia  
Dixie • Gilchrist • Hamilton  
Lafayette • Levy • Madison  
Suwannee • Taylor • Union Counties

---

2009 NW 67th Place, Gainesville, FL 32653-1603 • 352.955.2200

## MEETING NOTICE

# MIDDLE AND LOWER SUWANNEE RIVER AND WITHLACOOCHEE RIVER TASK FORCE

There will be a meeting of the Middle and Lower Suwannee River and Withlacoochee River Task Force on **March 18, 2026**. The meeting will be held virtually via communications media technology at **10:00 a.m.**

**DIAL IN NUMBER: Toll Free 1.888.585.9008**

**CONFERENCE CODE: 568 124 316**





Serving Alachua  
Bradford • Columbia  
Dixie • Gilchrist • Hamilton  
Lafayette • Levy • Madison  
Suwannee • Taylor • Union Counties

---

2009 NW 67th Place, Gainesville, FL 32653-1603 • 352.955.2200

## AGENDA

### MIDDLE AND LOWER SUWANNEE RIVER AND WITHLACOOCHEE RIVER TASK FORCE

Virtual Public Meeting  
Via Communications Media Technology  
Gainesville, FL

March 18, 2026  
10:00 a.m.

Page

- I. INVOCATION
- II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE
- III. WELCOME
- IV. INTRODUCTIONS
- \* V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES - May 20, 2020 5
- VI. REPORT ON ACTIVITIES
  - A. City of Valdosta Mayor and Staff Appointments - April 21, 2025 and December 9, 2025
  - B. Joint Task Force and City of Valdosta City Council Workshop - August 14, 2025
  - C. City of Valdosta Presentation at North Central Florida Regional Planning Council Meeting - June 29, 2026
- VII. NEXT STEPS
  - \* A. Water First North Florida Aquifer Recharge Project Resolution No. 2026-01 9
  - \* B. Water First North Florida Aquifer Recharge Project Community Meeting - March 19, 2026 13
- VIII. CITIZEN COMMENTS

This agenda item provides an opportunity for citizens to address the Task Force on any matter not included on the agenda. The comment period is limited to three minutes for each individual.

\* See Attachment

o:\council.mtg\suw - with rivers\agendas\agenda 3-18-26.docx

Dedicated to improving the quality of life of the Region's citizens,  
by enhancing public safety, protecting regional resources,  
promoting economic development and providing technical services to local governments.



MIDDLE AND LOWER SUWANNEE RIVER AND WITHLACOOCHEE RIVER TASK FORCE  
MINUTES

Virtual Meeting  
Via Communications Media Technology

May 20, 2020  
4:00 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Ken Cornell, Alachua County  
Rick Davis, Madison County. Chair  
Thomas Demps, Taylor County  
Don Hale, Suwannee County  
John Meeks, Levy County  
Daniel Riddick, Bradford County  
Ronald Williams, Columbia County

MEMBERS ABSENT

Anthony Adams, Lafayette County  
William Martin, Gilchrist County  
Beth Burnam, Hamilton County, Vice-Chair  
Gene Higginbotham, Dixie County  
James Tallman, Union County

OTHERS PRESENT

Duane Cannon, Assistant County Manager  
Dixie County  
Joshua Gabel, Regional Director  
U.S. Senator Marco Rubio  
Ben Glass, Legislative and Community Affairs Chief  
Suwannee River Water Management District  
Thomas Mirti, Deputy Executive Director  
Suwannee River Water Management District  
Daniel Penninman  
Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission  
Paula Vann, Executive Director  
Columbia County Tourist Development Council

STAFF PRESENT

Scott Koons

I. INVOCATION

Chair Rick Davis called the meeting to order at 4:05 p.m. and gave an invocation.

II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Task Force members and guests pledged allegiance to the flag of the United States of America.

III. WELCOME

Chair Davis welcomed the Task Force members and others in attendance to the meeting.

IV. INTRODUCTIONS

Chair Davis stated there was a quorum of the Task Force. The Task Force members and others in attendance introduced themselves.

V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES - January 23, 2020

Chair Davis requested approval of the January 23, 2020 minutes.

**ACTION: Commissioner Williams made the motion, with a second by Commissioner Demps, to approve the minutes of the January 23, 2020 meeting. The motion carried unanimously.**

VI. REPORT ON ACTIVITIES

A. Suwannee River Water Management District

The Task Force received a report from Tom Mirti, Deputy Executive Director, Suwannee River Water Management District, concerning the condition of the Suwannee River and Withlacoochee River following the most recent raw sewage spill by the City of Valdosta.

B. Georgia Environmental Protection Division Proposed Consent Order

The Task Force reviewed proposed Consent Order EPD-WP-8904 by the Georgia Environmental Protection Division with the City of Valdosta. The Task Force requested that the Division remove the one-year limit in proposed Consent Order No. EPD-WP 8904 on water quality testing to the state line and require the City to perform continuous testing with no specified termination date.

The Task Force also requested that the Division include a requirement in proposed Consent Order EPD-WP-8904 that the City implement a plan to budget and expend the necessary funds to reimburse those citizens impacted downstream for expenses they incur for water testing, water well treatment and installation of water treatment systems. In addition, the Task Force requested that City should also be required to reimburse counties and municipalities for expenses related to well testing to determine water quality and continuous water quality testing of the Withlacoochee River and the Suwannee River.

**ACTION: Commissioner Meeks made the motion, with a second by Commissioner Demps, to authorize staff to draft a letter to be reviewed and signed by the Task Force Chair to be sent to the Georgia Environmental Protection Division requesting that the Division remove the one-year limit in proposed Consent Order No. EPD-WP 8904 on water quality testing to the state line and require the City to perform continuous testing with no specified termination date; and requesting that the Division include a requirement in proposed Consent Order EPD-WP-8904 that the City implement a plan to budget and expend the necessary funds to reimburse those citizens impacted downstream for expenses they incur for water testing, water well treatment and installation of water treatment systems, and that City should also be required to reimburse counties and municipalities for expenses related to well testing to determine water quality and continuous water quality testing of the Withlacoochee River and the Suwannee River. The motion carried unanimously.**

C. Joint Task Force and City of Valdosta City Council Workshop - July 8, 2020

Chair Davis stated the Middle and Lower Suwannee River and Withlacoochee River Task Force and the City of Valdosta City Council are scheduled to meet in joint workshop session on July 8, 2020 in Valdosta.

**ACTION: Commissioner Cornell made the motion, with a second by Commissioner Williams, that due to social distancing and mass gathering limitation requirements of the COVID-19 pandemic, to authorize the Task Force Chair and Task Force Vice-Chair to represent the Task Force at the July 8, 2020 joint workshop in Valdosta.**

VII. NEXT STEPS – None

VIII. CITIZENS COMMENTS - None

The meeting was adjourned at 4:47 p.m.

---

Rick Davis, Chair

3/18/26  
Date





Serving Alachua  
Bradford • Columbia  
Dixie • Gilchrist • Hamilton  
Lafayette • Levy • Madison  
Suwannee • Taylor • Union Counties

2009 NW 67th Place, Gainesville, FL 32653-1603 • 352.955.2200

March 11, 2026

TO: Middle and Lower Suwannee River and Withlacoochee River  
Task Force Members

FROM: Scott R. Koons, AICP, Executive Director 

SUBJECT: Water First North Florida Aquifer Recharge Project Resolution No. 2026-01

**RECOMMENDATION**

**Adopt Resolution No. 2026-01 opposing the Water First North Florida Aquifer Recharge Project and recommend the implementation of the alternative water desalinization project, and send a copy of the adopted resolution to the Governor, the President of the Florida Senate, the Speaker of the Florida House of Representatives, the north central Florida Legislative Delegation, the Suwannee River Water Management District, the St. Johns River Water Management District and the Jacksonville Electric Authority.**

**BACKGROUND**

The Suwannee River Water Management District and St. Johns River Water Management District have announced a regional initiative, the Water First North Florida Aquifer Recharge Project, designed to return more than 40 million gallons of water per day to the Floridan Aquifer system to maintain minimum flows and levels in the Lower Santa Fe River Basin and the Ichetucknee River Basin.

The Water First North Florida partnership proposes to take reclaimed wastewater and further purify it through a natural wetland filtration system to recharge into the aquifer. The proposed wetland filtration system would be located in Duval County. The filtrated wastewater would be transmitted via a pipeline to a recharge site located in either Baker County, Bradford County, Columbia County, Hamilton County or Union County in the north central Florida region.

Both Districts jointly approved the project after determining it was the most cost-effective and environmentally beneficial solution to meet area water needs. Staffs evaluated more than 100 potential projects.

The estimated cost of the project is \$1.0 billion. The Jacksonville Electric Authority has pledged \$400 million and the St. Johns River Water Management District has pledged \$150 million for the project. An alternative desalinization project is estimated to cost between \$2.0 billion and \$3.0 billion.

According to the Districts, the initiative will deliver multiple long-term water benefits to the region.

- Restoring flows and protecting the health of rivers and springs;
- Recharging the aquifer to ensure a sustainable water supply for residents and visitors;
- Supporting agriculture, small businesses, tourism and future growth;
- Restoring wetlands that support wildlife habitat and enhance recreation; and
- Providing the greatest environmental return at the lowest cost compared with other alternatives.

If you have any questions concerning this matter, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Attachment

o:\council.mtg\suw - with rivers\mtgmemos\2026\water first north florida aquifer recharge project resolution no. 2026.01.03.18.26.docx



RESOLUTION NO. 2026-01

A RESOLUTION OF THE MIDDLE AND LOWER SUWANNEE RIVER AND WITHLACOOCHEE RIVER TASK FORCE OPPOSING THE WATER FIRST NORTH FLORIDA AQUIFER RECHARGE PROJECT AND RECOMMENDING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ALTERNATIVE WATER DESALINIZATION PROJECT

WHEREAS, the North Central Florida Regional Planning Council has appointed the Middle and Lower Suwannee River and Withlacoochee River Task Force, hereinafter referred to as the Task Force, whose membership is comprised of a county commissioner from each of the 12 counties within the north central Florida region; and

WHEREAS, the water quality of the freshwater springs, rivers and the Floridan Aquifer is critical to the economic vitality of eco-tourism, agriculture and recreation in the north central Florida region; and

WHEREAS, the lowering of the potentiometric surface of the Floridan Aquifer by water users located outside of the north central Florida region has contributed to lower flows and levels in the Lower Santa Fe River Basin and Ichetucknee River Basin; and

WHEREAS, the Task Force recognizes the importance of achieving minimum flows and levels in the Lower Santa Fe River Basin and Ichetucknee River Basin as necessary to protect north central Florida region natural resources and the Task Force's interest in maintaining a high quality of life for its citizens and enjoyment of the area for residents and visitors; and

WHEREAS, the State of Florida local water sources first policy suggests that water users located outside of the north central Florida region should develop alternative water supplies, such as desalination; and

WHEREAS, the Water First North Florida Aquifer Recharge Project would discharge 40 million gallons per day of treated wastewater from outside the north central Florida region into the Floridan Aquifer in either Baker County, Bradford County, Columbia County, Hamilton County or Union County in the north central Florida region.

NOW, THEREFORE, in consideration of the foregoing, BE IT RESOLVED by the Middle and Lower Suwannee River and Withlacoochee River Task Force that:

1. The Task Force opposes the Water First North Florida Aquifer Recharge Project.
2. The Task Force recommends the Florida Legislature, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, the Suwannee River Water Management District and the St. Johns River Water Management District re-evaluate the alternative local water sources first desalination project for water users located outside of the north central Florida region as a means to contribute towards achieving minimum flows and levels in the Lower Santa Fe River Basin and Ichetucknee River Basin.

RESOLVED this 18th day of March 2026, by the Middle and Lower Suwannee River and Withlacoochee River Task Force in special session.

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS  
MADISON COUNTY, FLORIDA

\_\_\_\_\_  
Rick Davis, Chair

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS  
ALACHUA COUNTY, FLORIDA

\_\_\_\_\_  
Mary C. Alford

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS  
COLUMBIA COUNTY, FLORIDA

\_\_\_\_\_  
Rocky Ford

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS  
GILCHRIST COUNTY, FLORIDA

\_\_\_\_\_  
William Martin

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS  
LAFAYETTE COUNTY, FLORIDA

\_\_\_\_\_  
Anthony Adams

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS  
TAYLOR COUNTY, FLORIDA

\_\_\_\_\_  
Thomas Demps

Attest:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Scott R. Koons, Executive Director

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS  
SUWANNEE COUNTY, FLORIDA

\_\_\_\_\_  
Don Hale, Vice-Chair

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS  
BRADFORD COUNTY, FLORIDA

\_\_\_\_\_  
Daniel Riddick

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS  
DIXIE COUNTY, FLORIDA

\_\_\_\_\_  
Jody Stephenson

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS  
HAMILTON COUNTY, FLORIDA

\_\_\_\_\_  
James Murphy

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS  
LEVY COUNTY, FLORIDA

\_\_\_\_\_  
Desiree Mills

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS  
UNION COUNTY, FLORIDA

\_\_\_\_\_  
Melissa McNeal



Serving Alachua  
Bradford • Columbia  
Dixie • Gilchrist • Hamilton  
Lafayette • Levy • Madison  
Suwannee • Taylor • Union Counties

---

2009 NW 67th Place, Gainesville, FL 32653-1603 • 352.955.2200

March 11, 2026

TO: Middle and Lower Suwannee River and Withlacoochee River  
Task Force Members

FROM: Scott R. Koons, AICP, Executive Director

SUBJECT: Water First North Florida Aquifer Recharge Project - Community Meeting

The Suwannee River Water Management District and St. Johns River Water Management District announced a new regional initiative, the Water First North Florida Aquifer Recharge Project, designed to return more than 40 million gallons of water per day to the Floridan aquifer system to maintain minimum flows and levels in the Lower Santa Fe River Basin and the Ichetucknee River Basin.

The Suwannee River Water Management District will be hosting a community meeting concerning the Water First North Florida Project on March 19, 2026 from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. at the University of Florida, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, North Florida Research and Education Center located at 8202 County Road 417, Live Oak, Florida 32060.

If you have any questions concerning this matter, please do not hesitate to contact me.

