

# SUWANNEE RIVER WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

## MEMORANDUM

TO: Governing Board

FROM: Hugh Thomas, Executive Director

Date: April 14, 2026

RE: **Public Hearing** for Approval of Order Number 26-003, Modified Phase II Water Shortage

### **RECOMMENDATION**

Conduct a public hearing and approve Order Number 26-003, Modified Phase II Water Shortage.

### **BACKGROUND**

The District is observing drier than average conditions for surface conditions, groundwater, and surface water Districtwide. On March 10, 2026, the Board adopted Phase II Water Shortage Order Number 26-002 based on ongoing drought conditions.

District staff have continued monitoring the hydrologic conditions within the District and have determined that additional regulatory measures are warranted as the drought persists. Monitoring indicates that flows throughout the District are all below average (less than the 25<sup>th</sup> 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 10<sup>th</sup> percentile. Districtwide mean Upper Floridan aquifer level remains below the 20<sup>th</sup> 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 (April – June 2026) calls for a 33-40% chance of above normal rainfall. As of March 31, 2026, fourteen District counties had an average rainfall deficit of approximately 20 inches based on records beginning in 1932. As of April 2, 2026, the U. S. Drought Monitor for Florida identifies all District counties within either Extreme Drought (D3) or Exceptional Drought (D4) categories.

Based on the ongoing deficit in rainfall and below average aquifer conditions the District is recommending a progression to a modified Phase II water shortage. The combination of restrictions listed in Chapter 40B-21, Florida Administrative Code, and other appropriate and necessary restrictions are included in the Modified Phase II Water Shortage Order. This will expand and clarify regulatory measures related to landscape irrigation, pond augmentation, establishment of new vegetation, and the use of water to maintain aesthetic standards. 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 have prompted Southwest Florida Water Management District and the St Johns River Water Management District to issue Water Shortage Orders for their Districts.