Background

The east-central Florida area has been identified as a priority water resource caution area by the St. Johns River Water Management District, meaning that all future water supply needs may not be able to be met from current and anticipated sources without causing unacceptable impacts to water resources and related natural systems. The east-central Florida area consists of Brevard, Orange, Volusia, and Seminole counties and portions of Lake, Marion, Polk, Sumter, Osceola and Flagler counties.

The Floridan aquifer provides almost all of the region's existing public water supply and a large part of the agricultural water supply. This source will likely not be able to meet all future needs without unacceptable impacts to wetlands, lake levels, spring flows and groundwater quality. Unacceptable impacts will not be allowed to occur. To support projected economic growth and increased water demands, alternative water supply source options and management techniques must be developed. Because impacts of water withdrawals from the Floridan aquifer extend beyond political boundaries, cooperation and coordination among local governments and water supply utilities are vital to a successful water supply planning process.

Initiative Goal

The focus during Phase I, from May through October, 2002, has been on convening a dialogue process among elected and appointed officials and other stakeholders to clarify key water supply issues, provide some information and education needed on the issues and identify promising consensus subregional and regional strategies to address these priority issues. Those participating in the dialogue process reviewed, ranked, revised and agreed on the following overall goal and goals for each phase of this process:
The overall goal of the initiative is to develop an “East-Central Florida Water Agenda” that seeks to over time:

- Ensure that new, sustainable water supplies are developed in ways that maximize the benefits and minimize harm to natural resources in the region;
- Preserve the economic vitality of the region;
- Draw linkages, as appropriate, to land use plans; and
- Identify cooperative, affordable and equitable solutions that minimize costs and avoid competition for remaining inexpensive water resources.

The initiative will proceed in 2 phases. Phase I of the initiative will proceed through October 2002, and focus on a dialogue process to clarify key water supply issues, provide information and education needed on the issues and identify promising subregional and regional strategies to address them. It will also identify next steps needed to continue the dialogue during Phase II to develop more specific objectives and actions. A draft report will be prepared by the Florida Conflict Resolution Consortium Facilitation Team setting out the results of the Phase I dialogue in the form of a report and a proposed East-Central Florida Water Agenda. Phase II will proceed beyond October 2002, if there is interest among key stakeholders in the region. It will seek to build upon the results of Phase I to help decision-makers in the region continue the dialogue and jointly develop action plan(s) for the East-Central Florida Water Agenda. The action plan(s) would include identification of agreed-upon water supply strategies and clarification of roles and responsibilities for their implementation. The action plan(s) could be multi-year efforts, with some form of annual review and reporting of activities. These action plans should be suitable for inclusion in the appropriate water management district regional water supply plan.

**Initiative Process**

Orange County Chairman Richard T. Crotty hosted two meetings in January and February, 2002 for elected officials and other stakeholders to discuss the water supply situation in east-central Florida. (See the website at http://consensus.fsu.edu for summaries of these summits.) At those sessions, several water supply presentations were provided as background information and other regional water supply experiences were discussed. Local government representatives participated in a panel discussion, and participants identified advantages and disadvantages regarding addressing water supply issues regionally or by local governments trying to overcome the challenges on their own. The attendees supported the idea of local governments working together to plan to meet future water supply needs.

To assist in fostering and facilitating discussion among the local governments and other stakeholders, the St. Johns River Water Management District, the South Florida Water Management District and the Southwest Florida Water Management District retained the Florida Conflict Resolution Consortium, a legislatively created statewide neutral resource, to design and facilitate the dialogue process. The Conflict
Resolution Consortium has overseen the process of developing objectives and strategies to address the future water supply needs of the east-central Florida region.

From March-May 2002, the Consortium conducted an assessment involving individual and group interviews with elected officials and other stakeholders. The purpose of the assessment was to clarify the scope and the specific issues the initiative will seek to address and to determine how best to facilitate dialogue and decision-making throughout the region. The results of the assessment interviews and meetings suggested nearly unanimous agreement that future additional groundwater withdrawals are and will continue to be limited, based on environmental constraints. There was also a willingness to look at solutions to long-term water supply needs from a "regional" perspective. Partners and projects identified usually related to reuse projects, not alternative water supplies, and identified partners were those from adjacent municipalities, not adjacent counties.

Based on the assessment, the Consortium team proposed a series of three rounds of subregional workshops covering the following five sub-areas within the 10-county region:

- **Subregional Area # 1** East Orange area: Brevard County and portions of Osceola and Orange counties
- **Subregional Area # 2** West Orange area: Osceola and Polk counties and portions of Orange and Lake counties
- **Subregional Area # 3** North Orange/Seminole area: Portions of Orange and Seminole counties
- **Subregional Area # 4** North/East area: Volusia and Flagler counties and portions of Seminole and Brevard counties
- **Subregional Area # 5** Western area: Sumter and Marion counties and portions of Lake County

These facilitated workshops were designed to provide an opportunity to inform the water supply debate and offer a forum for elected and appointed officials and stakeholders to discuss various water supply issues and their impacts as well as identify strategies among different subregional jurisdictions and areawide.

Each of the three workshops was preceded by a mailing to over 800 elected and appointed officials and water supply stakeholders in the region whose future groundwater withdrawals have the potential to impact one another and who also have the potential to partner on possible solutions. These mailings included executive summaries and draft recommendations. The project also has a website where these
summaries and other information were placed for ease of access to the public. (See our website at [http://consensus.fsu.edu/ECWS/index.html](http://consensus.fsu.edu/ECWS/index.html).)

A draft Phase I report with recommendations on use of reclaimed water, enhanced recharge, water conservation, creating new water supply, linking land and water and intergovernmental coordination is now available for review and comment ([http://consensus.fsu.edu/ECWS/index.html](http://consensus.fsu.edu/ECWS/index.html)) and will be presented at the October 17 region-wide forum in Orlando. This report serves as the initial product of a total of fifty interviews with key elected officials and stakeholders, two plenary sessions and 15 facilitated workshops conducted in three rounds in May, July, and August 2000, which were convened and facilitated by the Florida Conflict Resolution Consortium and sponsored by the St. Johns River Water Management District, the South Florida Water Management District and the Southwest Florida Water Management District. The purpose of the series of subregional workshops has been to begin the dialogue among elected and appointed officials and other stakeholders on identifying the priority water supply issues as well as testing the acceptability of promising water supply strategies that might be jointly developed at the subregional and regional levels in east-central Florida.

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