

WATER POLICY

Florida Spring Initiative

What is it and how can we talk about it?

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The Florida Spring Initiative (FSI) is a comprehensive and coordinated program of the state of Florida to protect more than 700 freshwater springs in the state. The FSI was established in 2001 by Governor Jeb Bush with the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP). The FSI provides funding for research, monitoring, education, and landowner assistance to improve spring water quality and flow.



Why should springs be protected?

Florida is home to one of the largest concentrations of freshwater springs in the world. Geologists estimate there are more than 900 springs in the state of Florida. Springs have been a focus of human activities since the beginning of human history. In more recent years, Florida springs are attractive with towns, transportation, and tourism developed to ensure access. Many Florida springs provide recreational opportunities for swimmers, boaters, wildlife observers, and cave divers. Overall, springs have provided immeasurable natural, recreational and economic benefits for residents and visitors. The challenge lies in preserving the water quality of Florida's springs while meeting the needs of Florida's residents, visitors and wildlife.

Over \$15 million has been invested in the state of Florida to improve the water quality and flow of the springs. Achievements reported by the FDEP as a result of the FSI include:

- Restoration - Restoration and erosion control are a

"Florida's springs are important to animal and plant life... we are doing our part in supporting these natural treasures."

Rick Scott,
Florida Governor

vital part of the FSI's goal to allow Florida's springs to return to their natural conditions and to help the springs flow without obstructions.

- Protection - Protection of springs has been achieved by waste management of septic tanks to minimize the adverse impacts on the aquifer caused by seepage.
- Education - The FSI also produces educational materials for the public to highlight the importance of Florida's springs and the impact people can have on the health of Florida's liquid bowls of light.
- Preservation - The FSI has been, and continues to be, supportive of land acquisition efforts through the Florida Forever program to have the land in the springshed to be left in its natural state.
- Community involvement - The FSI has engaged the local community to be involved in its protection. The Initiative has established local spring basin workgroups who engage in a vigorous and collaborative process for the preservation of the springs.

For more information about the Florida Spring Initiative, visit:

<http://www.dep.state.fl.us/springs/initiative.htm>

Conversations to have:

Producers and agricultural business owners should be aware of how FSI associated programs may influence their businesses. Information about FSI associated policies and regulations, local water quality standards, limitations on use of water bodies, and standards related to nutrient and waste management should be identified while making decisions associated with business management strategies. Alternative farming practices recommended by research and the government should be taken into consideration to enhance the sustainability of water resources.

The general public needs to understand the importance of the FSI and how the FSI relates and influences their life and health. They should be aware of their use of springs and understand how to minimize adverse impacts on springs caused by their spring-related activities. People who live around the springs should be aware of how community waste is managed and how to minimize waste production. People who are active with their landscapes should be aware of the quantity of chemicals they use for landscaping, as well as the ramifications of chemical run off. The BMPs suggested in the FSI associated programs are approaches that can be applied to properly manage water use, waste, and other possible contaminants and retain or even improve spring water quality. Additionally, FDEP also provides opportunities for public involvement in protecting spring water quality.

Decision makers need to know about local spring water quality standards associated with the FSI in their area and be aware of any changes in spring water quality standards promulgated by the FDEP. Decision makers should understand current regulations related to water contaminant management, what science can tell us about water quality, and be aware of public opinion of water issues which provide a broad snapshot of understanding

on a complex topic. By understanding both regulatory and scientific facts, as well as public opinions, decision makers will be equipped to take educated action on public policy development.

Important Items

Definition of a spring: A spring is a point where groundwater flows out of the ground, and is thus where the aquifer surface meets the surface of the earth. With more than 900 freshwater springs, Florida has one of the largest concentrations of springs on Earth. Most of the springs are located in northern and central Florida.

Importance of springs: Florida has one of the largest concentrations of freshwater springs in the world. Florida springs have provided immeasurable natural, recreational and economic benefits for residents and visitors and also provide habitats to wildlife.

Threats to springs: The health of springs depends largely on the activities in the spring basin and at the spring itself. The people closest to the spring can have the biggest impact on a spring's health. Three major threats to springs are listed by the FDEP: Lawn care, human consumption, and recreational activities.

Sources of pollutants: Pollutants impacting water quality include pathogens, nutrients, sediment, and metals. Currently, the major pollutants found in Florida are nutrients, such as nitrogen and phosphorus, through leaching and runoff.

Best Management Practices: BMPs are the most effective, practical means of preventing or reducing pollution from nonpoint sources.

Water quality monitoring: Since water quality decrease can be influenced by seasonal climate and human activities, water quality should be monitored continuously to ensure water use safety.

For more information visit www.piecenter.com/pep.

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