

Peace River Cumulative Impact Study & Resource Management Plan

– Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is the Peace River Cumulative Impact Study & Resource Management Plan?

In its 2003 session, the Florida Legislature directed the Department of Environmental Protection, in consultation with the Southwest Florida Water Management District, to study the cumulative impacts of changes in landform and hydrology in the Peace River Basin.

Upon completion of the Study, the Department and District will prepare and adopt a resource management plan for the Peace River Basin to minimize any identified existing and future adverse cumulative impacts to water resources of the basin, including surface waters, groundwaters, wetlands, fisheries, aquatic and estuarine habitats, and water supplies.

2. Why is the Study Important?

The Peace River drainage basin is approximately 2,350 square miles in area. The river flows about 105 miles from the confluence of the Peace Creek Drainage Canal and Saddle Creek in Polk County down through Hardee and DeSoto counties where it is the dominant fresh water system to Charlotte Harbor in Charlotte County. Flows from the Peace River are vital to the estuarine health and overall productivity of Charlotte Harbor.

Land within the basin has been considerably altered from the natural state by phosphate mining, agriculture, and other development. Additionally, considerable amounts of water are withdrawn each day to support these land uses. Ground water has historically provided the majority of this water, but surface water use for public supply is increasing in the southern part of the basin.

A steady, long-term decline in Peace River flows has been observed since the early-1960s. The causes of the decline are complex. Average annual rainfall over the last 30 years is about five inches/year lower than in the previous 30 years. Historic ground-water withdrawals for public supply, agriculture, and mining since the early-1930s have lowered the potentiometric surface of the Floridan aquifer reversing the hydraulic gradient between the river and underlying aquifers. This has caused gravity drainage of the river into sinkholes in the upper part of the basin (above Ft. Meade) during periods of drought.

3. What is being Studied?

The Study will assess the cumulative effects of major land use changes within the Peace River Basin due to urbanization, agriculture, and phosphate mining that have resulted in changes in the hydrology and ecology within the Peace River basin.

The study will evaluate cumulative impacts of these activities prior to state regulation, pursuant to exemption, permit, or reclamation plan on water resources of the basin, including surface waters, groundwaters, wetlands, fisheries, aquatic and estuarine habitats, and water supplies. The study will also evaluate the effectiveness of existing regulatory programs in avoiding, minimizing, mitigating, or compensating for cumulative impacts.

The study is thus focusing on the major stressors to the ecology and hydrology of the basin including climatic changes (rainfall), ground-water withdrawals, and land use changes.

4. Who is conducting the Study?

Through a competitive solicitation process, Post, Buckley, Schuh & Jernigan (PBS&J), was selected to conduct the Study. PBS&J is one the nation's top ranked engineering and environmental companies according to the *Engineering New Record*. PBS&J has also brought in other experts to assist in various elements of the Study.

5. What is the schedule for completion of the Study?

PBS&J is expected to complete the Study on or before August 31, 2006. They will present preliminary results from the Study in a series of public meetings. The following meeting dates and locations are scheduled, and each meeting will start at 6 PM.

May 24, 2006 –Bartow: SWFWMD Bartow Service Office, 170 Century Boulevard, Bartow. At this first meeting, PBS&J will present information on changes and trends in River hydrology, water quality, and fishes.

June 21, 2006 – Arcadia: Turner Center, 2250 NE Roan Street, Arcadia. At this second meeting, PBS&J will be presenting information on land use changes and regulatory history.

July 26, 2006 – Punta Gorda: Punta Gorda Isle Civic Association, 2001 Shreve Street, Punta Gorda. At this third meeting, PBS&J will be presenting information on water budgets and regulatory history.

August 9, 2006 – Wauchula: Hardee County Board Room, 412 West Orange Street, Room 103, Wauchula.

6. What is the Resource Management Plan?

Results and recommendations from the Study will be used by the Department and Water Management District to prepare a resource management plan for the Peace River Basin to minimize any identified existing and future adverse cumulative impacts to water resources of the basin.

The Plan will identify regulatory and nonregulatory actions necessary to minimize existing and future adverse cumulative impacts identified in the study and, where appropriate, also recommend changes to laws needed to improve existing regulatory programs.

The Department and Water Management District will develop the Plan with the assistance of a stakeholder group representing local governments, regional water suppliers, regional planning councils, along with mining, agriculture, development, environmental, and fishing interests within the basin.

7. When will the Plan be completed?

The Plan is scheduled to be submitted to the Governor, the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives no later than January 31, 2007.

8. How can I learn more about the Study and Plan?

Both the Department and Water Management District are maintaining websites where information, meeting dates and locations, status reports, and final reports will be available for review and downloading. CD's and hard copies of this information will also be available upon request.

The District's website is:

<http://www.swfwmd.state.fl.us/waterman/peaceriver/>

The Department's website is:

<http://www.dep.state.fl.us/water/mines/index.htm>