

April 2009



## just the FACTs

This fact sheet is provided as a reference to encourage a greater understanding of the various issues related to managing water in south Florida.

## Kissimmee Basin Reservations

### Protecting Fish and Wildlife of the Upper Chain of Lakes, and the Kissimmee River and Floodplain

*Kissimmee River Restoration is an ongoing effort to rehabilitate miles of river and floodplain at the headwaters of America's Everglades. Water reservations are part of the \$620 million plan to restore more than 27,000 acres of wetlands and 43 miles of the meandering river in Central Florida.*

*Florida law supports the creation of water reservations to set aside water for the protection of fish and wildlife or public health and safety. In June 2008, the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) Governing Board initiated a rulemaking process to reserve water needed for the environmental protection of the Kissimmee Basin, which includes the Kissimmee River and floodplain and the Upper Chain of Lakes and surrounding tributaries.*

#### Defining water reservations

This is a legal mechanism to set aside water for the protection of fish and wildlife or public health and safety. When a water reservation is in place, volumes and timing of water at specific locations are protected for the natural system ahead of consumptive uses such as new development.

- Reservations for the water bodies are identified using scientifically reviewed data on the link between local hydrology and fish and wildlife.
- Enough water is reserved, or set aside, to ensure a healthy and sustainable native fish and wildlife community during natural cycles of drought, flood and population variation.
- Water that is reserved for the protection of fish and wildlife in the ecosystems will not be allocated for consumptive use.
- Any water above the amount needed to protect fish and wildlife may be considered for allocation.
- Existing legal uses that are not contrary to the public interest may continue.

#### Reservation water bodies proposed

- Reservations within the Kissimmee Basin are proposed for:
  - Lakes Kissimmee, Cypress and Hatchineha
  - Lake Tohopekaliga
  - East Lake Tohopekaliga
  - Lakes Hart and Mary Jane
  - Lakes Myrtle, Joel and Preston
  - Alligator Chain of Lakes
  - Lake Gentry
  - Kissimmee River and floodplain



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### **Reservations benefit the environment**

Long-term success of ecosystem restoration is measured, in part, by the ability of native fish and wildlife to thrive in habitats within the Kissimmee River and floodplain and the Upper Chain of Lakes. These water bodies support habitats where dozens of Florida's native species breed, shelter their young and hunt or forage for food. The Kissimmee Basin supports:

- 52 species of fish, including largemouth bass, black crappie, redear sunfish and bluegill.
- 82 species of wetland-dependent and wading birds. These include the snail kite, wood stork, sandhill crane and whooping crane, birds which are identified as endangered or threatened species.
- 24 species of amphibians and reptiles, including the American alligator and several species of frogs, toads, salamanders and turtles.
- 4 mammals, including the river otter and round-tailed muskrat.
- 16 species of ducks.
- To survive, these populations depend on the year-round availability of water within the Kissimmee Basin.

### **Establishing reservations and gathering public input**

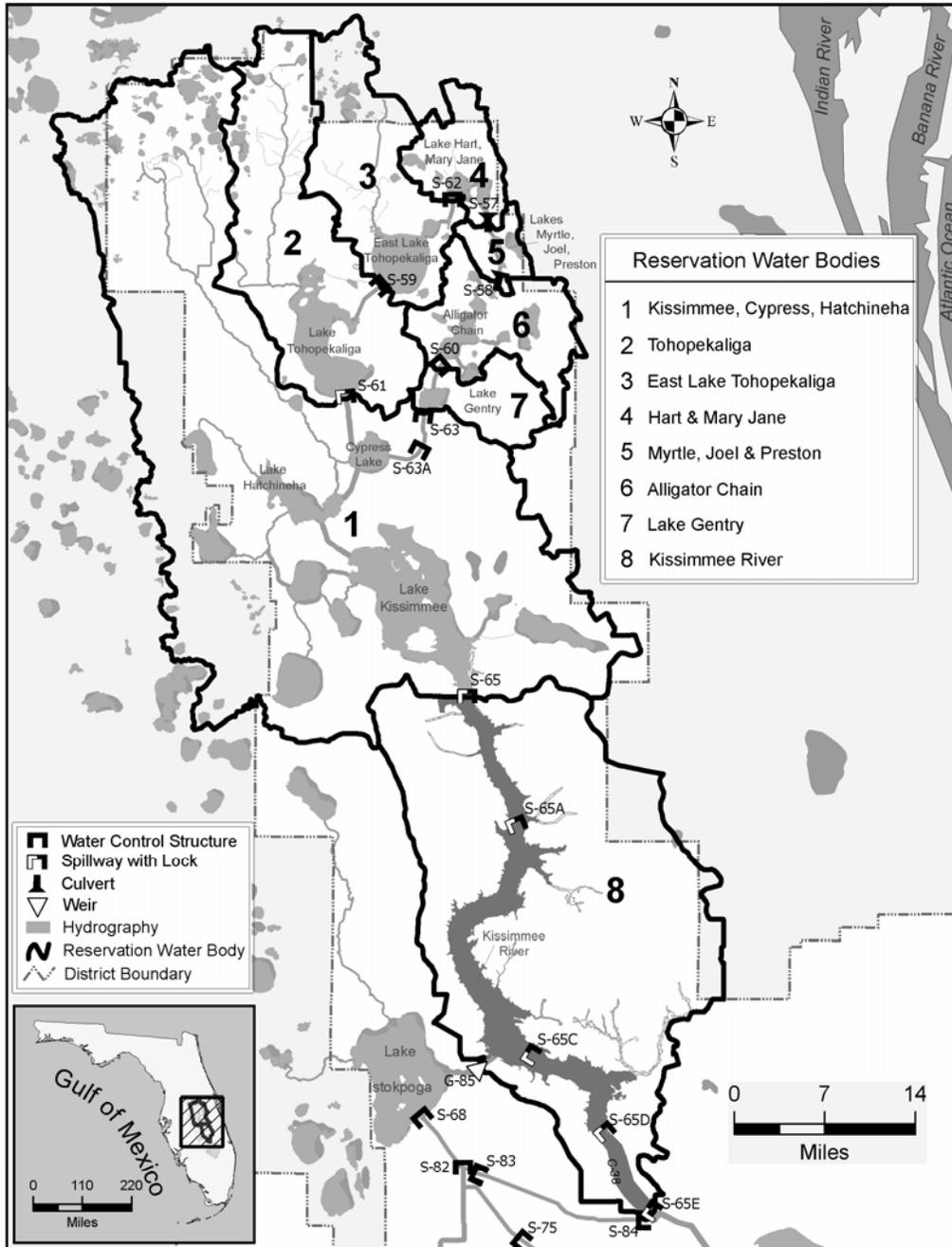
A multi-step process is in place to ensure that the proposed water reservations are thoroughly studied and considered by scientific experts, officials, stakeholders and the public.

- The South Florida Water Management District Governing Board initiated the rulemaking process in June 2008.
- Public workshops to develop draft rule language will continue through May 2009. Workshops will be held:
  - April 16, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., Osceola County Commission Chambers, fourth floor, 1 Courthouse Square, Kissimmee
  - May 5, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., Osceola County Commission Chambers, fourth floor, 1 Courthouse Square, Kissimmee
- A panel of nationally recognized, independent scientific experts began reviewing research supporting the proposed water reservations in March 2009. To read the draft report and participate in the review, go online to: [www.sfwmd.gov/krrreservation](http://www.sfwmd.gov/krrreservation).

### **What's next**

- The scientific peer review panel will issue its final report in April.
- A statement of estimated regulatory costs will be produced.
- Draft rule language will be posted online at [www.sfwmd.gov/krrreservation](http://www.sfwmd.gov/krrreservation) and refined following additional public workshops.
- The South Florida Water Management District Governing Board will authorize publicizing the draft rule language in the *Florida Administrative Weekly* prior to a rule adoption hearing.

Water reservations within the Kissimmee Basin are proposed for these water bodies and the surrounding areas contributing significant flows to the water bodies.



For more information about Kissimmee Basin Reservations, visit the South Florida Water Management District website at: [www.sfwmd.gov/krrreservation](http://www.sfwmd.gov/krrreservation).