

WATER RESOURCE MANAGEMENT IN FLORIDA

by

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Introduction

The population of Florida grew from 3 to 10 million people from the early '50s to 1980 (Fernald). During the same period, Florida agriculture expanded and intensified. Irrigated acreage increased about 450 percent to over 2 million acres (U.S. Bureau of the Census). Much of this development as well as earlier growth took place in areas subject to flooding in their natural state, requiring investments in drainage and in water control for flood protection. Some communities outgrew the local water supplies and arranged to satisfy growing water demands by tapping water resources of slower growing regions. It became apparent during the 1960s that the facilities, management philosophy, and legal structure of the early to mid-1900s were inadequate for effective water resource management in a rapidly growing economy. In response, the Florida legislature passed a comprehensive, statewide Water Resources Act in 1972 (codified as Chapter 373, Florida Statutes), declaring all waters of the state subject to regulation and establishing an administrative structure to carry out the regulation.

Although it has been amended several times, the Water Resources Act has not changed substantially since 1972. Population growth and economic development in the state has continued; policies have been promulgated; regulatory programs have been developed; several regional droughts and one severe, nearly statewide drought have been experienced; and several interagency relationships have evolved. The extent of water resource regulation varies over the state, as do public experiences and attitudes toward regulation of water use.

The purpose of this publication is to provide an overview of the Florida experience with administrative water law. It briefly describes Florida's water resources, examines the

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