

## Water Control - Water Management

Although the pressures of rapid growth brought about comprehensive water resource management legislation in the '70s, portions of south Florida had been under some degree of water control for nearly a century. During the late 1800s and the first half of the 1900s private and public projects sought to control the surface waters that could inundate most of the central-southern and lower east coast regions of the peninsula during extremely wet years. There were relatively few well defined streams but a large portion of the area was "wetland." Water control required canals, levees, pump stations, dams, and other structures that involved substantial costs for planning, construction, and operation. It was not until an extensive flood control project was implemented, during the 1950s and '60s, that water in south Florida could be viewed more as a resource than as a recurring threat to agricultural and urban areas.

State law provided for the formation of "drainage districts" (Chapter 298, Florida Statutes, 1913), with taxation and other powers to construct and operate water control systems over specified areas, usually not more than a few thousand acres. Special acts created larger districts, such as the Everglades Drainage District as early as 1907, the Central and Southern Florida Flood Control District in 1949, and the Southwest Florida Water Management District in 1961. The more recently formed districts usually provided water storage and conservation and not just drainage and flood control. Still, the power to regulate private water management and use was limited to controlling the connections of private water systems to district owned facilities.

By the late 1960s considerable experience had been gained in the control of water in small districts and on a regional basis. The intricacies of funding, structural design, and hydraulics could be managed. Where water conveyance and storage facilities were publicly owned and controlled, such as by the districts, some measure of resource management was available. Over a great portion of the state, however, natural streams and lakes constitute the surface water system and owners of lands adjoining these waterways (riparian owners) could drain to or withdraw water from these waterways within the poorly defined constraints of existing water law. All landowners could tap groundwater supplies within these same constraints. Some water quality control was available, but through agencies not dealing with water quantity control.