

BEFORE THE GOVERNING BOARD OF THE
NORTHWEST FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

Order No.: 25D-001

IN THE MATTER OF:

Approval of the 2024
Region II Regional Water
Supply Plan

**FINAL ORDER APPROVING THE
2024 REGIONAL WATER SUPPLY PLAN FOR REGION II**

The Governing Board of the Northwest Florida Water Management District (District), after considering recommendations of District staff and being fully apprised of the matter, issues this Final Order pursuant to sections 373.036, 373.083, and 373.709, Florida Statutes (F.S.), based on the following Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law.

FINDINGS OF FACT

1. Region II is one of seven water supply planning regions in the Northwest Florida Water Management District. Region II covers approximately 3,495 square miles and encompasses the entirety of Okaloosa, Santa Rosa, and Walton counties.
2. The traditional water supply source in Region II is groundwater. Primary resources are the Upper Floridan aquifer over most of the region, and the sand-and-gravel aquifer in central and northern portions of Santa Rosa County. In coastal portions of Region II, where population and development have been concentrated and continue growing, withdrawals from the Floridan aquifer resulted in water resource issues and concerns, including a drawdown in Floridan aquifer levels, water quality impacts, an ongoing risk of saltwater intrusion, and uncertainty regarding movement of the saltwater interface.

3. Remedial measures in coastal portions of Region II began in the 1980s with the Declaration of a Water Resource Caution Area, associated regulatory criteria, and water resource management planning.
4. The District's first Water Supply Assessment (WSA) in 1998 determined the need for a Region II Regional Water Supply Plan (RWSP). The District's Governing Board approved the first Region II RWSP in 2000 and, following subsequent WSAs in 2003, 2008, and 2018 approved RWSP updates in 2006, 2012, and 2019.
5. A major initiative during the 2000-2010 decade was the development of inland regional wellfields which now provide water supply for coastal communities and reduce reliance on coastal withdrawals in all three counties of Region II.
6. In former decades, the Floridan aquifer potentiometric surface lost as much as 185 feet of head pressure along the coast. In 2000, it was still 135 feet below sea level. Aquifer levels have since markedly improved; however, a significant cone of depression remains centered on the Okaloosa County coastal communities of Fort Walton Beach and Mary Esther. Potentiometric surface drawdown extends north to the Yellow River in Santa Rosa County, to areas north of Niceville and Valparaiso in Okaloosa County, and east of Destin into Walton County. Also, growth in and near the cities of Milton and Crestview and withdrawals northeast of Freeport have drawn down the potentiometric surface in those areas.
7. The 2023 WSA evaluated Region II water resources and related natural systems with 2020 base year water use estimates and future demand projections to the year 2045. The 2023 WSA determined that existing sources of water were not adequate and recommended continued implementation of the Region II RWSP.

8. With completion of the 2023 WSA, in December 2023 the Governing Board approved the staff recommendation to continue regional water supply planning for Region II. The purpose of this effort is to update the Region II RWSP to meet the water supply needs of all existing and future reasonable-beneficial uses and to sustain water resources and related natural systems requirements of Chapter 373, F.S., through the planning horizon to 2045.
9. Development of the 2024 Region II RWSP occurred in an open process actively seeking input from the public; local planning officials; water, wastewater, and reuse utilities; the Florida Department of Environmental Protection; the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services; and other affected and interested parties.
10. An informational public meeting on the 2024 Region II RWSP was held on February 7, 2024, to discuss the technical data and modeling tools used to support the plan. Thereafter, the RWSP planning team conducted outreach to public supply utilities and other self-suppliers to develop a list of water supply development project options. The RWSP report includes these water supply development project options, water resource development projects, and a list of potential funding opportunities. On October 10, 2024, an informational item providing an update on the RWSP status was presented at the District Governing Board Meeting.
11. Two public workshops were held in Fort Walton Beach on December 3, 2024, to provide additional opportunities for participants to ask questions and provide comments and recommendations. The draft RWSP was posted on the District website on December 5, 2024, and a public comment period remained open through December 27, 2024.
12. Region II water resource development projects include minimum flows and minimum water levels (MFL) technical assessments; groundwater evaluations; hydrologic data collection and monitoring; coordination and technical support for reuse, water conservation, managed aquifer

recharge and aquifer storage and recovery (ASR) projects; and water use data, analyses, resource planning, and assessments. Water supply development project options include surface water development, reuse of reclaimed water, water conservation, and storage capacity and distribution system improvements.

13. The 2024 Region II RWSP is not a self-executing document. Implementation of the plan will occur through future Governing Board actions, including contracts, research, budgetary appropriations, cost-sharing arrangements, permitting, local agreements, intergovernmental coordination, and planning efforts. When such final decisions are made, affected persons will be offered appropriate public input opportunities and rights.
14. The 2024 Region II RWSP, Program Development Series 24-02, is attached to this Order as Exhibit A.
15. The 2024 Region II RWSP may be updated as appropriate in light of new technical information and analysis. Such updates may be due to the findings of MFL technical assessments and any required recovery or prevention strategies, or future water supply assessments, and are required to occur at no longer than five-year intervals.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

16. The governing boards of water management districts are authorized to undertake regional water supply planning under section 373.709, F.S. This includes the updating of existing plans, such as the Region II RWSP.
17. Section 373.709, F.S., establishes a framework for RWSP scope, analysis, implementation, and process. Each RWSP must be based on at least a 20-year planning period. Governing boards shall reevaluate the determination of the need for regional water supply planning at least once every 5 years.

18. The Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) requires water management districts to include intermediate water use projections for every five-year interval. See Rule 62-40.531(1)(a), F.A.C. Water use estimates and projections shall be provided in each RWSP for six use classes. See Rule 62-40.531(1)(b), F.A.C.
19. Water resource development projects and water supply development project options must be included in RWSPs. See Section 373.709(2), F.S.
20. The Governing Board concludes that the Region II RWSP 2024 Update meets the requirements of Section 373.709, F.S., and Rule 62-40.531, F.A.C.
21. Section 373.709(5), F.S., establishes the opportunity for administrative review of District approval of an RWSP. This provision states:

Governing board approval of a regional water supply plan shall not be subject to the rulemaking requirements of Chapter 120. However, any portion of an approved regional water supply plan which affects the substantial interests of a party shall be subject to s. 120.569.
22. Section 120.569, F.S., details the legal provisions that apply in all proceedings in which the substantial interests of a party are determined by an agency. The Notice of Rights describes the potential remedies which may exist and is attached hereto as Exhibit B.
23. The Notice of Rights shall not cover actions taken by the Governing Board in the future to implement the 2024 Region II RWSP. When implementing action is taken, the Governing Board shall offer an appropriate point of entry for such implementing action, but not the RWSP itself, to substantially affected parties.
24. The 2024 Region II RWSP may be updated or amended as new technical information and analysis becomes available. Such updates shall occur in accordance with section 373.709, F.S., at intervals no longer than five years from the date of entry of this Order.

25. The Governing Board authorizes staff to make minor changes to the 2024 Region II RWSP in response to stakeholder comments submitted to staff, or scrivener edits, that do not alter the substance of the 2024 Region II RWSP.

ORDER

Based upon the foregoing Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law, it is hereby

ORDERED:

26. The Region II RWSP 2024 Update is hereby approved in accordance with section 373.709, F.S.

27. District staff are authorized to make minor changes to the 2024 Region II RWSP that do not alter the substance of the 2024 Region II RWSP in response to stakeholder comments submitted to staff. Such changes must occur no later than 21 days after the January 9, 2025, Governing Board meeting.

28. District staff are instructed to distribute notice of this Order by certified mail, regular mail, and/or electronic mail to persons who have participated in the plan development process and those entities identified as appropriate for implementing water supply development projects. Notice shall also be published in the Florida Administrative Register.

DONE AND SO ORDERED in Havana, Florida on this 9th day of January, 2025.

NORTHWEST FLORIDA WATER
MANAGEMENT DISTRICT
By its Governing Board



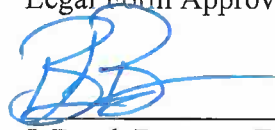
George Roberts
Chair

Attest:



Nick Patronis
Secretary
January 9, 2025

Legal Form Approved:



J. Breck Brannen, Esq.

Filed on this date, pursuant to Section 120.52, F.S., with the designated District agency clerk,
receipt of which is hereby acknowledged.



Clerk

01/14/2025

Date