

**WITHLACOOCHEE REGIONAL WATER SUPPLY AUTHORITY
LOCAL GOVERNMENT WATER SUPPLY AND CONSERVATION FUNDING ASSISTANCE
PROGRAM**

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED PROJECT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2024

**HERNANDO COUNTY UTILITIES DEPARTMENT
WATER CONSERVATION AND WATER RESOURCE PROTECTION PROGRAM**

Overview

The Hernando County Utilities Department (HCUD) is one of the first local governments in the Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD) to establish an inverted or conservation water rate structure. Hernando County continues to endorse Ordinance 2010-15 which is a one day per week watering schedule. Average water use in the residential sector (single-family homes) ranges between 8000-10,000 gallons a month. Hernando County Utilities Department supplies safe potable water and wastewater services to over 80% of Hernando County. HCUD's customer accounts include residential, commercial, and industrial and total over 67,000 accounts and growing. Hernando County was also one of the first local governments to implement a rain sensor rebate program for customers. We have continued these incentive-based water conservation programs including, low flow toilets, rain sensor rebates, HE washing machine rebates, irrigation evaluation and audit programs, Florida Friendly certified landscapes, participation in Florida Friendly Landscaping programs and participate regionally in an irrigation evaluation and audit program with WRWSA member government partners. These programs, along with many others, show the deep commitment this utility has to the protection and conservation of Hernando County's water supply. Facebook Live and Zoom educational presentations. These are shown on the Hernando County Government's YouTube at: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCvW76oulWUK2sZpCFk5BB3A>

Information is collected from Hernando County residents and other water conservation program participants on types of programs that they believe are the most vital and important. We use this information to produce materials, presentations, workshops, and seminars. Much of our educational programming to virtual platforms. Our plan is to bring in-person educational presentations and workshops back to the public arena in 2024. We have monthly rain barrel workshops in person and virtual. And our Florida Friendly Landscaping program has weekly virtual presentations on a variety of important topics.

Through the WRWSA Local Government Water Supply and Conservation Funding Assistance Program we support these educational efforts.

The assistance of the WRWSA Local Government Water Supply and Conservation Funding Assistance Program, all residents of Hernando County may benefit by the water conservation and water resources protection programs.

PURPOSE & PROPOSED INITIATIVES

Major elements of the program consist of:

- In-school education program (Springs Coast Environmental Education Center, Gulf Coast Academy of Science and Technology)

- Conservation Messaging Campaign
- Customer and Residents Incentive Programs
- Community educational presentations, workshops, and events.

In order to serve all of the citizens of Hernando County, those served by the county's utility system as well as those who use private wells or customers of the City of Brooksville, the county is applying to the WRWSA for funding assistance in the continued development and expansion of its water conservation and quality protection program.

Springs Coast Environmental Education Center (SCEEC)

The SWFWMD purchased Weeki Wachee Springs and the attraction property to be part of the Weeki Wachee Preserve. SWFWMD committed approximately \$750,000 to construct an environmental education center on the property, under the condition that the Hernando County School District supply teachers, curriculum, and equipment. The Hernando County Water and Sewer District (HCW&SD) Board and the Hernando County Board of County Commissioners have pledged to support this endeavor and have authorized a contribution to the Education Center. The doors of the unique learning center opened in April 2005. Initially it served only fourth grade students of Hernando County. SCEEC has expanded its reach to nearly all grade levels and regularly hosts thousands of Hernando County students. As with other Hernando County Schools, The Hernando County Utilities Department has specifically provided support for the development of a water resource/quality protection and water conservation module of the curriculum. By providing support to the center, the Utilities Department is allocating its resources to those skilled in working with students - teachers. In addition, creation of the curriculum module ensures that a consistent and continuing message will be embedded in the educational process. In FY 2008 we added the Gulf Coast Academy of Science and Technology to our student educational efforts. GCA is committed to providing an exceptional education through weekly field experiences integrated with a hands-on advanced middle school curriculum. (Budget item: Springs Coast Environmental Education Center, Gulf Coast Academy)

Water Conservation media messaging campaign:

This campaign includes radio and streamed television advertising. We provide all educational presentations to Hernando County's YouTube channel. This online presence has been very popular. Additionally, we provided water conservation messages other social media such as Facebook. The innovative and instructional media messages broaden public awareness and heightened the acceptance of water conservation was a way of life. Both the Hernando County Utilities Department and Withlacoochee Regional Water Supply Authority are listed in the media spots. (Budget items: commercial airtime, radio, and print media)

Water Conservation and Resource Protection Promotion and Workshops

This quote, "It is because of people that groundwater must be protected, but it is only through the efforts of people that it can be accomplished" describes the importance of bringing education to the public. This is accomplished through promotions, events such a rain barrels workshops, information stations and direct conservation/groundwater protection communication through customer bills. Both the Spring Workshop and the Florida Friendly Workshop are highlights of the effort to bring water conservation and water resource

protection education to the public. (Budget Item: Rain barrels, informational guides, workshops, signs)

Water Conservation (HCUD customers only) Incentive Programs:

Hernando County Utilities Department encourages our customers to conserve our valuable water supply through water bill rebates (and other incentives). Incentive programs: HE Washing Machine Rebate (\$100), Rain Sensor Rebate Program (\$75.00), Low-Flow Toilet Replacement Program (\$125.00) and promotion of Florida Friendly Landscaping workshop, where customer attendees receive a “tuition” reimbursement on their water bill. Incentives also help further the promotion of Hernando County’s Florida Friendly Landscaping (FFL) program. Customer rebates include a \$30 rebate for participating in the FFL rain barrel workshops and another \$25 rebate is available for certifying their landscape as a Florida Friendly Landscape. Outdoor water conservation projects/programs/incentives may include professional leak detection project, sprinkler checkup program, high efficiency irrigation nozzles, water sense timer replacements and/or potential pilot project for sustainability through inclusion of soil amendments incentive.

CONCLUSION

The above elements of the Hernando County Utilities Department’s Water Conservation/Water Resource Program are diverse and purposefully set up that way. An effective water conservation program for a public supply utility must reach all its customers and must strive to change behavior and attitudes towards conservation and protection of water resources in order to affect reliable, long-term results. This must be accomplished through a multi-functional approach including education, outreach, and financial incentives.

IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULE

All the above projects and initiatives will be ongoing throughout Fiscal Year 2024. Funds from the current (FY2023) WRWSA assistance program will be encumbered by September 30, 2023. This meets the requirement to submit funding request for 2024 fiscal year. The water conservation initiatives for FY 2024 will begin October 1, 2023, and conclude with all grant assistance funds being encumbered by September 30, 2024.