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## 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.



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## Kissimmee Basin Water Reservations

*The Kissimmee Basin forms the headwaters of Lake Okeechobee and the Everglades, encompassing more than two dozen lakes in the Kissimmee Chain of Lakes, the Kissimmee River and its floodplain. The basin contains a nationally recognized largemouth bass fishery, nesting colonies of the endangered wood stork and snail kite and one of the largest concentrations of nesting bald eagles in the country. Maintaining the availability of water is a key component of environmental restoration and management affecting the Kissimmee Basin.*

*The South Florida Water Management District is developing a water reservation rule for the Kissimmee Chain of Lakes and the Kissimmee River and floodplain that identifies and reserves from consumptive use water needed for the protection of fish and wildlife in the basin. The rule will support the Kissimmee River Restoration Project, a joint partnership between the District and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to return flow to the meandering river's historic channel. When the restoration project is complete, more than 40 square miles of river-floodplain ecosystem will be restored, including almost 25,000 acres of wetlands and approximately 44 miles of historic river channel.*

### Defining water reservations

- A water reservation 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, quantities and timing of water flows at specific locations are protected for the natural system. The necessary quantities and timing are determined using data which link local hydrology to the needs of fish and wildlife.
- All presently existing legal uses of water are protected so long as the use is not contrary to the public interest. If a project develops water above the amount needed to protect fish and wildlife, the Governing Board may certify the volume available for allocation to consumptive uses.

### 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 the habitats restored. Key facts being considered in the development of the Kissimmee Basin water reservations include:

- The waterbodies of the Kissimmee Chain of Lakes and Kissimmee River and floodplain support breeding, shelter and foraging habitats for 178 species of fish, wetland-dependent wading birds, amphibians, reptiles and mammals that depend on the year-round availability of water for survival. These include:

(more)

- 52 species of fish, including largemouth bass, black crappie, red ear sunfish and bluegill
- 98 species of wetland-dependent and wading birds, including ducks, the Everglades snail kite, wood stork, sandhill crane and whooping crane and birds identified as endangered or threatened
- 24 species of amphibians and reptiles, including the American alligator and several species of frogs, toads, salamanders and turtles
- 4 mammal species, including the river otter and round-tailed muskrat
- Other factors and major issues include:
  - Providing sufficient flows to protect fish and wildlife in the Kissimmee River ecosystem in support of the Kissimmee River Restoration Project.
  - Ensuring adequate future quantities of water are reserved for the protection of fish and wildlife within the Upper Chain of Lakes, Headwater Revitalization Lakes and the Kissimmee River and its floodplain.
  - Protecting threatened and endangered species living in the ecosystem, including the American alligator, Everglades snail kite and wood stork.
  - Excess water above that needed for fish and wildlife may be allocated, when available, for water supply purposes in the central Florida region.

### **Background and conditions**

- The Kissimmee River — a key component of the Kissimmee Basin — once meandered 103 miles through central Florida between Lake Kissimmee and Lake Okeechobee.
- Historically, the river contained diverse fish and wildlife resources and habitats associated with sand bars, vegetation beds and variable flow conditions. The river frequently overflowed its banks and inundated the 1-to 2-mile-wide floodplain for extended periods of time, creating a mosaic of wetland plant communities.
- Changes to the natural flow of water through the basin occurred in the 1960s and 1970s as the result of deepening and straightening the river to reduce flooding. These modifications achieved flood reduction benefits but also harmed the river-floodplain ecosystem.
- Realizing this, the Kissimmee River Restoration Project was authorized by Congress in the 1992 Water Resources Development Act to restore the historical configuration and integrity of the river.
- Three construction phases are now complete, and continuous water flow has been re-established to 24 miles of the meandering river. Seasonal rains and flows now inundate the floodplain in the restored area.
- The entire Kissimmee River Restoration Project is currently projected to be complete by 2019.

### **Reservation waterbodies proposed**

Waterbodies to be protected under the rule include:

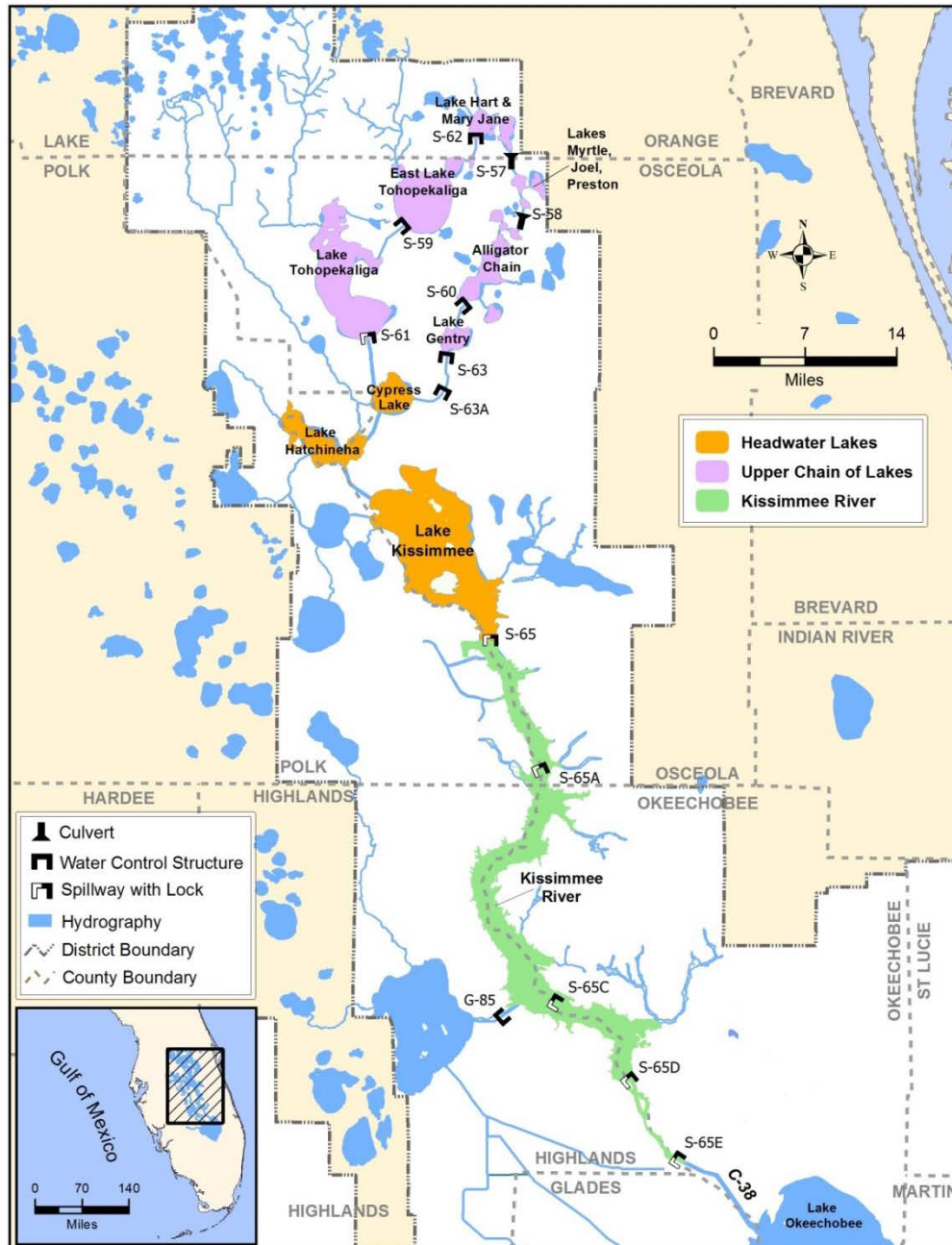
- The Kissimmee Chain of Lakes (Upper Chain of Lakes and Headwaters Revitalization Lakes): Lakes Kissimmee, Cypress, Hatchineha, Tohopekaliga, East Lake Tohopekaliga, Ajay, Hart, Mary Jane, Myrtle, Joel, Preston, Alligator, Brick, Lizzie, Coon, Center, Trout, Gentry and Fell's Cove
- All interconnected lakes
- All interconnected canals that are part of the Central and Southern Florida Project for Flood Control and Other Purposes
- The Kissimmee River and its floodplain

### **Developing the reservation and gathering public input**

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

- Building on initial technical analysis conducted in 2008-2009, the District Governing Board reinitiated water reservation rule development on June 12, 2014.
  - Public workshops occurred on July 30, 2014, and Dec. 12, 2014.
  - The opportunity to provide public comments on the proposed draft rule language and the supporting technical document is open until May 1, 2015.
  - Public input on the Kissimmee Basin water reservations can also be provided during status updates at future Water Resources Advisory Commission and Governing Board meetings and at the monthly Central Florida Water Initiative (CFWI) Steering Committee meetings.

Location and components of the Kissimmee Basin water reservation rule



For more information about this water reservation rule or other previously adopted reservations, please visit [www.sfwmd.gov/reservations](http://www.sfwmd.gov/reservations).