

an adequate supply of water to serve the new development. A worst-case scenario could see a building moratorium in a community that doesn't get its act together. "The rubber starts to meet the road this summer," says Carol Ann Wehle, SFWMD's executive director.

Aside from whether the Legislature resists diluting the law, a key issue is how communities will create additional water supply. Additional groundwater pumping in many parts of the state, particularly the south and southwest, isn't an option.

Many communities will be looking at creating alternative water sources — via reuse, desalination, treating brackish water and the like. They also need to make conservation a bigger priority. There's an inherent bias in big organizations like water management districts toward expensive, technology-heavy solutions like desal without comparable investments in conservation, which is cheaper and faster. The state, meanwhile, puts a disproportionate amount of money into creating alternative supply vs. spending on conservation.

Many believe conservation should get more emphasis. At least one group, the Utility Council of the Florida Section of the American Water Works Association, supports making water conservation or demand-side management programs eligible for funding as alternative water supplies. David Moore, executive director of the Southwest Florida Water Management District, a leader in conservation efforts, told attendees at a water conference at the University of Florida in February that he believes "the biggest bite of the water-supply apple in the next 20 years is going to be conservation."

At the conference, Moore refuted the notion, advanced by another water manager, that you can't "count" gallons created via conservation. Moore's district has excellent statistics to that point, and to how effective conservation measures can be. Water use in Pinellas County, for example, fell from 153 gallons a day in 1990 to 89 gallons in 2006, largely the result of education and conservation measures. Meanwhile, as Trend reported last year, as construction of a giant desal plant on Tampa Bay dragged on for years, the regional water utility managed to reduce groundwater pumping in the region from 192 million to 121 million gallons a day in the face of a growing population — without any of the desalinated water that officials once insisted they needed to meet that goal.

The state has plenty of room to conserve. Farms use half the water consumed in Florida; half the farms use inefficient flood irrigation. State-supported investments in micro-irrigation could help reduce ag's consumption. As for overall use, although Florida has reduced its daily per capita usage from 174 gallons a day in 2000 to 157.5 in 2005, that's still higher than the average daily U.S. per capita consumption of about 100 gallons. Europeans use about 53 a day.

As Trend's associate editor, Cynthia Barnett, makes clear in her book, "Mirage," water supply planning needn't be built on the premise that we have to have more and more water to prosper. Overall water use in the United States stopped rising in the 1980s, yet population as well as gross domestic product have grown steadily ever since. Saving a gallon of water is just as effective — and much, much cheaper — than producing a new one. All the numbers show that growth and conservation co-exist just fine.



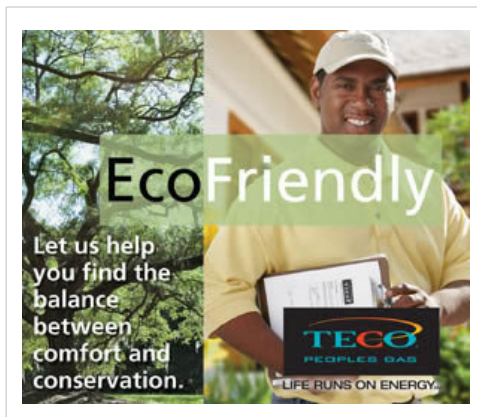
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