

# Here's how to fix Florida's water crisis – and how to pay for it | Opinion

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Florida has a well-documented water crisis.

The aquifer, our primary source of potable water, is being depleted as indicated by reduced water flow in our springs.

And our surface waters are polluted with nutrients which feed frequent harmful algal blooms.

Gov. Ron DeSantis and lawmakers are taking incremental stabs at addressing the problems. But there is still no comprehensive nutrient-reduction plan, accompanied by long-term funding necessary to solve our water crisis.

The price tag to restore Florida's waters has been estimated to cost \$50 billion over 20 years.

According to the Florida Department of Environmental Protection website, the mission of the five water management districts is to:

1. provide adequate water supply for the future;
2. protect water quality;
3. flood protection and floodplain management;
4. protect natural systems.

Considering the condition of Florida's waters, these agencies are failing.

DeSantis must overhaul the governing boards of all of the water management districts. Many vacancies exist and individuals should be named whose expertise is protecting and cleaning the waters of the state – not those with business-related conflicts of interest.

With strong leadership, free from political pressure and a sufficient budget, the water management districts could resolve much of Florida's water crisis.

To protect our water quality, the districts must enforce Basin Management Action Plans for all polluted watersheds in Florida in compliance with federal clean water standards. This would require all landowners in the district – agricultural lands

included – to be responsible for the nutrients that they contribute to Florida’s waters.



Judy Orcutt (Photo: PHOTO PROVIDED)

The combination of nutrients from fertilizers, septic systems, sewage treatment infrastructure and stormwater runoff has created a toxic soup that is destined to ruin Florida’s tourism and retirement-based economy while threatening citizen’s health.

To fund the nutrient-reduction plan, DeSantis should require the water management districts’ governing boards to restore their ad valorem property tax rates to pre-2010 rates. The previous governor’s administration promoted business over the environment and rates were severely cut...

In his guest editorial on Jan. 15, University of Florida Professor Ulanowicz described solutions to address the future potable water shortage. Consumptive Use Permits issued by water management districts must have teeth and carry a realistic fee, including a cap on the metered amount withdrawn by all users.

Even a small water withdrawal fee (\$.05 per 1000 gallons) would produce \$118 million for water improvement projects statewide. The state and its water management districts should not be giving away our water resources and must say “no” to new permits when sufficient water is not available for allocation.

We need regulatory agencies willing to enforce existing laws; we need a legislature that is more interested in protecting human and environmental health than doing the bidding of special interest groups; we need reliable funding from a fee on consumptive use permits along with water management districts that utilize their ad valorem capacity to fund water infrastructure projects; and we need to reverse 10 years of deregulation that has caused great harm to our environment. The future of our water will be determined by whether our needs are met with action, not just campaign promises.

*Judy Orcutt is vice president of the Clean Water Coalition of Indian River County and has served on the Management Board for the Indian River Lagoon National Estuary Program since its formation in 2015.*