



Enhancing Conservation Education in Polk County

Conservation is a key strategy to help reduce water demands in central Florida. To enhance conservation outreach, several utilities in Polk County have taken part in the Southwest Florida Water Management District's (SWFWMD) Conservation Education Program (CEP).

The CEP is a SWFWMD-funded initiative that aims to partner with local utilities to develop and implement educational projects that help increase residents' knowledge and behaviors leading to water conservation. Utilities in Polk County have participated in the CEP over the past two years and are slated to implement additional projects in 2023. Past utility participants in the county have included the cities of Haines City, Auburndale and Dundee.

Though CEP projects are tailored to meet the needs of each utility and can include many different aspects, one project component implemented by all three utilities in Polk County was the Home Water Use Report mailout. This mailout was sent to high water users and was individually tailored to show each household's water use information, compared to that of a "water smart" household meeting a target water use of 9,120 gallons per month or less. The mailout also included actionable information on ways to reduce water use and was sent every 2-3 months during the project period.

"The CEP provides a great opportunity for the District to support utilities in the shared goal of enhancing water conservation," said Katherine Munson, SWFWMD CEP project manager. Munson elaborated on CEP successes like the Home Water Use Report mailout, stating, "Past water use analysis and self-reported survey results have shown that the distribution of the mailout to high water users reduces water use and reinforces self-reported behavior changes that lead to water conservation. It is also a very cost-effective project."

Additional project components that may be supported by the CEP include, but are not limited to:

- Direct mailouts
- Billboards
- News media or radio advertisements
- Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ demonstration sites
- Educational signs or displays
- Educational videos
- Fliers or pamphlets
- Supplemental low-cost conservation giveaway items

Polk County is the fifth largest county in Florida and lies wholly within the Central Florida Water Initiative (CFWI) planning region. Participation in programs like the CEP is one of many actions taken by utilities in the county to ensure current and future water needs are met.