

Water Conservation Professionals Gather to Share Strategies and Success Stories

More than 80 water conservation professionals from across the Central Florida Water Initiative region and beyond gathered at the UF/IFAS Extension Osceola County office for a productive quarterly meeting. Hosted by Toho Water Authority, representatives from the St. Johns River, South Florida and Southwest Florida water management districts, along with cities, counties, utilities and environmental agencies statewide, exchanged ideas, shared success stories, discussed challenges and explored innovative approaches to water conservation.

Presentations highlighted a variety of programs designed to help residents conserve water. The Alliance for Water Efficiency, an organization that champions water conservation, stewardship and efficiency across North America, provided an overview of its tools, resources and research that help utilities and agencies advance water efficiency programs. Toho Water Authority shared its Splash of Education program, which brings water conservation lessons into local classrooms, along with community outreach initiatives and irrigation evaluations for homeowners' associations.

Attendees also learned about Project WET, a nationally recognized water education program for teachers, for which both the St. Johns and Southwest districts serve as partners. The Southwest District presented results from a pilot project that used solar-powered signs displaying recent rainfall totals in neighborhoods with high water use. The project led to measurable water savings, demonstrating how timely information can influence irrigation decisions. Participants also exchanged conservation success stories, including new digital tools and homeowner outreach programs designed to make water-saving information more accessible.

One of the meeting's highlights was a presentation on a Florida Department of Environmental Protection funded statewide residential irrigation messaging project. The project examines how to more effectively communicate water conservation messages to residents. Researchers shared findings that emphasized the importance of clear irrigation restrictions, simple conservation actions and messaging that reassures residents they can conserve water while maintaining healthy landscapes. The presentation also featured communication strategies, message themes and creative campaign concepts.

The meeting concluded with an update on the ongoing drought, including current messaging strategies and public outreach initiatives related to Florida's ongoing dry conditions.

"These meetings are so important because they give us the opportunity to learn from one another," said Deirdre Irwin, a water conservation coordinator for the St. John's District. "Many of the challenges we face are shared across communities, and these discussions help us identify new ideas and strategies to better serve residents."

For more information about the quarterly water conservation meetings, please contact Deirdre Irwin at dirwin@sjrwmd.com.