

Item 10.d.
News Articles

Lawmakers Look at 5-Year Plan for Land, Water Money

By: Jim Turner News Service of Florida | Posted: December 30, 2014 3:55 AM



Florida lawmakers might lay out future water and land preservation efforts in a 5-year plan updated annually, similar to how transportation projects are prioritized.

The proposal will go before lawmakers during committee weeks leading up to the 2015 legislative session, which starts in March.

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Since voters approved the "Florida Water and Land Legacy" constitutional amendment in November, lawmakers have heard from a growing number of interests about how the money -- by some estimates \$10 billion over 20 years -- should be carved up.

Senate President Andy Gardiner, R-Orlando, told reporters this month he supports creating a 5-year plan for the long-term water and land conservation projects.

"It allows local communities to plan," he said. "It gives you some flexibility that if there is some land that needs to be acquired, you could do it in a partnership. Because



Andy Gardiner

everybody knows what that 5-year plan is."

House Speaker Steve Crisafulli, a Merritt Island Republican who has joined Gardiner in saying that water conservation and protection will be a priority during the next two legislative sessions, was more ambivalent when asked about a 5-year plan.

"The idea of a multiyear financial plan, similar to the Department of Transportation's 5-year work program, is something that we have spoken of for some time now and is not a new concept," Crisafulli said last week. "I believe it is an approach that we will vet through the committee process as we approach the upcoming session."

The voter-approved constitutional amendment requires 33 percent of the revenue from a tax on real-estate transactions to go to land and water projects for the next two decades.

Supporters of the amendment say it will generate about \$10 billion over 20 years, while the state appears to project higher numbers. A state analysis estimates the total would be \$648 million during the fiscal year starting in July 2015 and eventually would grow to \$1.268 billion by the 20th year.



Steve Crisafulli

Since the amendment was approved, concerns have been expressed about issues such as how lawmakers will define land-preservation or water-conservation projects, how the state will determine which of its "impaired" water bodies is most critical and how to approach the reduction of stormwater runoff and agriculture fertilizer use.

Eric Draper, state director of Audubon Florida, backed the idea of a 5-year plan.



Eric Draper

"Instead of everybody in Florida hiring a lobbyist in Tallahassee and competing for money from the Legislature, you have a list of criteria and on an annual basis fund the most important things," Draper said.

The concept of the constitutional amendment was spawned as funding diminished for the Florida Forever program.

Florida Forever, which uses bonds backed with revenue from the documentary-stamp real-estate taxes, authorizes lawmakers to spend up to \$300 million a year for preservation. But as the economy went sour during the recent recession, so too did funding for Florida Forever.

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Conservation amendment up to lawmakers now; environmentalists worried

Posted: 12:00 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 7, 2014

By John Kennedy - Palm Beach Post Capital Bureau

TALLAHASSEE —

Environmentalists are wary of early reaction by legislative leaders to the water and land conservation amendment, overwhelmingly approved by Florida voters last month including 85 percent of those in Palm Beach County.

The measure would set aside one-third of the state's existing real estate transaction tax, raising millions of dollars for such conservation programs as Everglades restoration, Florida Forever land purchases and freshwater springs protection.

But lawmakers also seem to be eyeing to make a broader menu of projects eligible for the amendment's more than \$600 million in first-year cash.

House Speaker Steve Crisafulli, R-Merritt Island, said city water and sewer projects – basic repair, maintenance and expansion work that lawmakers spent \$88.5 million on this year – could be among those aided by the Water and Land Legacy campaign dollars.

"It fits into the purview of the intent of the amendment, it certainly does," Crisafulli said.

Although environmentalists and their attorneys drafted the ballot measure, Crisafulli pointed out, "Now it's up to us to interpret the intent."

That reality worries some in Florida's conservation community.

"I didn't see any mention of paying for leaky pipes in the amendment," said Eric Draper, executive director of Audubon of Florida.

Amendment 1 grew out of widespread frustration among environmentalists over the steady shrinking of green program funding, including the erosion through budget cuts of Florida Forever, intended to shield critical land from development.

The last couple years also have been marked by environmental catastrophes.

The Indian River Lagoon on the state's Atlantic shore and Caloosahatchee River on the Gulf side have been badly fouled by freshwater runoff from Lake Okeechobee, carrying pollutants from neighborhoods, farms and cities.

Last year, a record number of manatees died in Florida, largely attributed to toxic water. Dolphin deaths also spiked.

At the same time, freshwater springs, concentrated mostly in Central and North Florida, have proved particularly vulnerable to pollutants.

Such landmark sites as Silver Springs, Wakulla Springs and Fanning Springs are choked by nutrients and algae.

Gov. Rick Scott gets some credit from environmentalists for pouring more than \$880 million into advancing long-stalled work on Everglades restoration.

But Scott proved much less popular with voters than Amendment 1, winning re-election narrowly on the same ballot in which 75 percent of state voters endorsed the Water and Land Legacy measure.

Palm Beach County's 85 percent support was the highest among Florida's 67 counties.

"I do not take it lightly that 75 percent of voters supported Amendment 1," said Sen. Charlie Dean, R-Inverness, named last week as chairman of the Senate Environmental and Preservation Committee.

While the 20-year program created by the amendment is expected to account for more than \$600 million in the 2015-16 budget, it is expected to rise to \$1.3 billion in its last year, 2034, and could raise some \$19 billion overall, state analysts say.

Dean said his committee will work before next spring's legislative session on how to guide future spending.

"Now we have to move on to 'What is going to be our policy with the amendment,'" Dean said. "The policy will dictate how we make our allocations."

Senate President Andy Gardiner, R-Orlando, when sworn-in last month, singled out Amendment 1 as a fresh challenge facing lawmakers. He warned it would affect transportation, affordable housing and economic development programs, which also rely on real estate taxes.

"In this new reality, as we work to apply this new portion of our constitution and faithfully implement the will of the voters, there is going to be some pain," Gardiner said. "There is no question implementing this amendment will be a challenge."

Scott hints that he's on board with the goals of Amendment 1.

The governor alienated many green voters his first term by slashing \$700 million from water management districts and eliminating the agency that oversaw the state's growth management laws.

While Scott's Democratic opponent, Charlie Crist, endorsed Amendment 1, the governor said only that he would leave it up to voters.

Still, within days of his election, Scott pledged that in his second term, "We're going to invest in the environment."

During the campaign, Scott promised an additional \$1 billion in spending on water protection, conservation efforts and tougher penalties on polluters. Amendment 1 money will likely help the governor toward that goal.

Groups that led Florida's Water and Land Legacy campaign also are looking to work with lawmakers on the policy that will shape the type of programs eligible for money under the amendment.

"We're trying to extend an olive branch to the Legislature in terms of implementing Amendment 1," said Will Abberger, who managed the ballot campaign. "But we have some clear ideas about where the money should go."

Land preservation, wetlands clean-up and such big-ticket initiatives as springs protection and Everglades work are where most environmentalists want to see the amendment cash dedicated.

David Guest, managing attorney for Earthjustice's Florida office, acknowledged that when lawmakers start distributing dollars, "We have a fear."

"Environmental 'improvement' doesn't mean setting aside property for hunting preserves or just giving dairy farmers more money to catch cow poop," Guest said. "There is a risk of that with the Legislature."

Amendment 1's passage opens floodgate of questions on water

BY JAMES L. ROSICA

Tribune/Scripps Capital Bureau

Published: November 30, 2014 | Updated: November 30, 2014 at 11:08 AM

TALLAHASSEE — State lawmakers and other elected officials are calling water policy a priority for next year, but where they'll go with it remains up in the air.

One reason is the big unknown: how a constitutional amendment voters just passed that mandates spending for land and water conservation will work.

Beyond this, any attempt at a comprehensive policy will have to address myriad concerns and some powerful interests, including pollution from cities' stormwater runoff and farmers' fertilizer.

What's more, the discussion will come against a backdrop that might seem counterintuitive to champions of water conservation: New data from the U.S. Geological Survey suggests the country's water use overall is tapering off, with numbers at their lowest levels in 40 years.

Florida still managed to use 6.2 billion gallons of fresh water from underground and surface sources such as aquifers and rivers, according to the data. That was in 2010, the most recent year for which the information is available.

The biggest commercial users, at least in Southwest Florida, are still agricultural concerns, which means newly re-elected Agriculture Commissioner Adam Putnam will have a major role in any water policy discussion. Agribusinesses accounted for more than 60 percent of underground water use in 2013, records show.

Another wild card will be who gets appointed to serve as head of the state's Department of Environmental Protection. Gov. Rick Scott on Wednesday announced Secretary Herschel Vinyard's retirement; a successor has not been named. During his four-year tenure, Vinyard has been well regarded by business concerns, less so by environmental groups.

These groups have their eye squarely on the biggest water users in any discussion of water policy.

David Guest, Florida managing attorney for Earthjustice, a nonprofit environmental law firm, recalls one "massive" cattle operation that several years ago requested a permit to draw up to 14 million gallons of water a day.

"That's enough for a small town," Guest said. "It gives you a sense of scale for these agricultural withdrawals."

The dizzying array of problems and stakeholders may be why leaders haven't had an appetite before to tackle the issue substantively.

“A clean abundant water source for the future is important,” said Steve Crisafulli, R-Merritt Island, a seventh-generation member of a Florida citrus-growing family who was sworn in this month as speaker of the Florida House. “We need to focus on that.”

Crisafulli spoke with reporters after organizational ceremonies in Tallahassee for the upcoming legislative session.

“There’s no question,” he said, “that water is my No. 1 issue, because of my personal history and understanding of it.”

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Driving the discussion will be Amendment 1, which now requires money to be earmarked for protecting the environment.

It needed a minimum of 60 percent to pass on Nov. 4, but the amendment received a resounding mandate — more than 4.2 million “yes” votes, or nearly 75 percent.

That was more votes than any cause or candidate in Florida got this year.

The measure requires the state to set aside 33 percent of the money it raises through a real estate documentary stamp tax to protect Florida’s environmentally sensitive areas for the next 20 years.

Until the Legislature, charged with writing a state budget every year, figures out the details of the funding mechanism and what projects get paid for first, lawmakers and others aren’t talking in detail about water policy.

Legislators begin meeting in committees after the new year, with the 60-day legislative session scheduled to begin March 3.

Critics of the amendment complained that being forced to appropriate the money would limit lawmakers’ ability to fund other needs, since “doc stamp” money provides billions toward the overall state budget as part of its general revenue fund.

Proponents have estimated the new constitutional provision will generate almost \$1 billion for protection and conservation efforts.

Senate President Andy Gardiner, R-Orlando, mentioned “water and natural resources policy” in his speech after being formally elected to leadership. He also couched it in terms of implementing Amendment 1.

“The challenge with Amendment 1 is not spending more money on the environment,” he said. It’s “the impact Amendment 1 will have on other areas also funded by doc stamp revenue, specifically transportation, affordable housing and economic development.”

"In this new reality, ... there is going to be some pain," he said.

In an interview with reporters afterward, Gardiner clarified that he wants "open dialogue, public hearings on what exactly Amendment 1 will mean."

"That 33 percent is coming from somewhere. And we want people to understand that," he said. "Everybody is going to come in with a water policy. Our job is to go through them and make sure we do what's right for the people of Florida."

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With South Florida's Everglades, the Treasure Coast's Indian River Lagoon estuary, and 900 springs concentrated from Tampa north, water pollution in particular has been a problem for years.

The state Department of Environmental Protection has designated hundreds of water bodies as "impaired," meaning they don't meet pollutant limits.

Florida's booming population also is requiring more water to be drawn from the Floridan Aquifer, causing sinkholes and saltwater intrusion into the vast freshwater chamber.

This year, environmental groups held 16 rallies across the state, including one in Tampa, to pressure state lawmakers into cleaning up Florida's degraded waterways.

Guest, the attorney for Earthjustice, notes the water degradation caused by algae blooms across the state.

Fertilizer and animal manure from farms and ranches run into waterways, where they act as food for algae, culminating in the slimy, smelly blooms.

In 2013, federal and state environmental authorities brokered a deal on rules to reduce water pollution in Florida, though Guest and other environmentalists slammed the compromise as too lenient.

Guest also lamented the practice of holding cattle waste in "manure lagoons," where the dirty water can leach into groundwater and rivers.

Florida used to spend \$300 million a year of doc stamp money on conservation under Preservation 2000, a 10-year program launched by then-Gov. Bob Martinez, of Tampa, in 1990, and through Florida Forever, an act signed in 1999 by former Gov. Jeb Bush — both Republicans.

But during the tight years of the 2006-09 recession, budget writers diverted that money to other needy programs. What was left of it, anyway. By 2008-09, total doc stamp revenue

sank from \$4 billion a year to \$1 billion, where it stayed for three years because of the pop of the housing bubble.

Putnam, who also comes from a family-run citrus growing business, already has filed his budget request for next year, highlighting “the need for funding to support water restoration and conservation projects,” according to a written announcement. Putnam’s office, however, has not released a detailed water policy proposal.

“We must work to restore the health and conserve our supply of water,— and we must do so with a policy and budget that is flexible, comprehensive and long-term,” Putnam said.

Under his tenure, he added, “more than 10 million acres of agricultural lands in Florida have already adopted water-saving techniques and new technologies to protect and conserve Florida’s water supply,” saving 1 billion gallons of water last year.

And Gov. Scott touted a \$1 billion environmental plan for Florida during his re-election campaign in August. That was a few months after he OK’d \$30 million for springs restoration.

At the same time, he told reporters, “I understand the one side of committing dollars to this, and I understand the other side, but I want to make sure we have money for schools, for poverty programs, for health care and all those things.”

jrosica@tampatrib.com

(850) 765-0807

Twitter: @jlrosicaTBO

- Forwarded message -----

From: Diane Salz <salz.govconsultant@gmail.com>

Date: Mon, Nov 24, 2014 at 8:52 AM

Subject: Legislators will Decide Amendment 1's Impact

To: Diane Salz <disalz@yahoo.com>

Legislators Will Decide Amendment 1's Impact

By MARY ELLEN KLAS

TAMPA BAY TIMES

Published: Sunday, November 23, 2014 at 10:18 p.m.

Last Modified: Sunday, November 23, 2014 at 10:18 p.m.

TALLAHASSEE | Florida environmentalists say they were forced to go to voters to get permanent funding for land and water protection because legislators neglected the need for too many years. But now, even though Amendment 1 passed with 75 percent of the vote, the Legislature will get the last word.

House and Senate Republican leaders are preparing legislation to rewrite many of the state's existing environmental laws to respond to the amendment, which requires the Legislature and governor to set aside one-third of all taxes collected from the documentary tax on real estate transactions. Lawmakers warn that painful tradeoffs lie ahead.

How legislators make those tradeoffs will determine whether the implementation of Amendment 1 is a cordial affair — in which proponents and lawmakers agree to compromise — or the debate becomes a test of wills and, potentially, lawsuits.

"In this new reality, as we work to apply this new portion of our Constitution and faithfully implement the will of the voters, there is going to be some pain," said Senate President Andy Gardiner in a speech to the Senate last week during the swearing-in ceremony for members.

Gardiner conceded that the proposal to generate between \$10 billion to \$20 billion for environmental causes over the next 20 years could "make a significant impact on the future of water and natural resources," but emphasized that "implementing this amendment will be a challenge."

Amendment 1 is expected to raise between \$300 million and \$500 million a year for projects intended to preserve environmentally sensitive land and protect and improve water quality. At its core, the amendment weakens the Legislature's most coveted power —

the power of the purse — by taking away legislators' control of a small piece of the state's \$75 billion budget.

As a result, Gardiner's message was directed at both environmental advocates, who drafted the amendment, and fellow lawmakers, whose power has been clipped by the proposal.

"We already spend hundreds of millions of dollars of doc stamp revenue and other state revenues on many initiatives that benefit Florida's environment and natural resources," Gardiner said in his speech. "The challenge facing this Senate is the impact Amendment 1 will have on transportation, affordable housing, and economic development, and other priorities which also receive doc stamp funding."

Environmental groups don't see these tradeoffs as an either/or. They argue that legislators should use the doc stamp revenues to restore full funding to environmental programs that are already in law, instead of drafting new legislation.

"All the programs are already in place," said Will Abberger, director of the Florida Water and Land Legacy, which put the amendment on the ballot. "They just need to be funded."

The groups also think that as the economy recovers and real estate transactions increase, revenues from doc stamp taxes will be enough to also expand housing and transportation programs.

The ballot initiative came about after Gov. Rick Scott and the Legislature repeatedly cut programs that protect the state's vulnerable springs and watersheds.

Legislature's new leaders size up challenges

By Lloyd Dunkelberger , Herald-Tribune / Tuesday, November 18, 2014
TALLAHASSEE

A Republican-dominated Legislature on Tuesday elected new leaders to confront a series of challenges, including a new constitutional amendment requiring lawmakers to spend more on environmental programs.

The Senate unanimously tapped Andy Gardiner, a 45-year-old Orlando health care executive, as Senate president. In that capacity, he will lead the 40-member chamber through the 2015 and 2016 sessions.

The House unanimously backed Steve Crisafulli, a 43-year-old real estate broker and agribusinessman from Merritt Island, as House speaker.

Crisafulli will lead a chamber that has a "super majority" of 81 Republican members and 39 Democrats. Gardiner will have a 26-14 GOP majority in the Senate.

Lawmakers will face a host of issues over the next two years. They will try to match up a new state budget with some of Gov. Rick Scott's campaign promises, including a pledge to increase per-student funding to record levels and cut some \$1 billion in new taxes over the next two years.

The new Legislature will also continue the debate over the expansion of Medicaid — although such action's prospects remain dim in the GOP-dominated chambers. And lawmakers may be forced to confront the issue of gambling as an agreement with the Seminole Tribe expires next year.

In remarks to the organizational session, Gardiner cautioned that despite continued improvement in the state's economy and a revival of revenue growth, money will be tight in the next state budget because of prior commitments to issues like teacher raises and tax cuts.

He also said the Legislature would have to implement Amendment 1, which was passed with nearly 75 percent of the vote and will require lawmakers to use a third of the tax on real estate transactions to pay for environmental programs.

He said it could impact programs such as transportation, affordable housing and economic development, which also rely on funding from the real estate tax.

"In this new reality, as we work to apply this new portion of our constitution and faithfully implement the will of the voters, there is going to be some pain," Gardiner said. "There is no question implementing this amendment will be a challenge."

Gardiner later said the Senate would hold hearings on the amendment beginning early next year to hear testimony on how it could affect state spending.

“That 33 percent is coming from somewhere,” Gardiner said. “And we want people to understand that. We’re not here to advocate one thing or the other. We just want everybody to see ‘Here is the potential impact.’ ”

Sen. Nancy Detert, R-Venice, said she is concerned that the amendment could limit funding for projects like Loveland Village, a housing facility for which she won funding; it is designed to allow developmentally disabled adults to remain independent when they outlive their parents.

Detert said the new amendment could hamper efforts to build similar projects across the state.

“That should be a model,” Detert said. “But if we have to buy environmentally sensitive land, that’s a problem.”

House Democratic leader Mark Pafford of West Palm Beach said how the Legislature balances those programs while implementing the new amendment will be “a litmus test” for lawmakers over the next few sessions.

Pafford said lawmakers should be able to meet housing and environmental needs.

“You don’t want anything to be supplanted,” Pafford said. “I think that’s a big issue. Where they can find those dollars, I don’t know. But hopefully with an improving economy it won’t be such a burden this time.”

Amendment 1 and environmental spending will also be linked to a priority for the new House speaker: a major water initiative.

“We must work together to protect our natural resources and plan for Florida’s water needs,” he told House members after his speakership election.

Crisafulli has not advanced any details of the House water proposal, saying it will be developed as lawmakers head into the 60-day session that begins in March. He said it would be a combination of policy and funding and would represent “a long-term commitment” for the state.

“Not just for the next two years but certainly for the future,” he said.

In his remarks, Crisafulli, a seventh-generation Floridian, said “there is a legitimate role for the government to play in our lives.”

“But, make no mistake — that role must be limited,” Crisafulli added. “It must balance people’s rights with personal responsibility. It must ensure the public’s safety. It must

<http://politics.heraldtribune.com/2014/11/18/legislatures-new-leaders-size-challenges/>

protect private property rights and allow for the flow of goods and services. And, the government must be fair.”

That limited-government philosophy is likely to impact the continued debate over the expansion of Medicaid in Florida — which has been rejected by lawmakers over the last two years.

Crisafulli said it remains an option, but “we in the Republican caucus still stand firm where we did last year and the year before.”

Gardiner said expansion remains doubtful without the federal government giving Florida more flexibility on how it handles an expansion. “It’s either all or nothing. I think that’s been one of the biggest problems,” he said.

With the new leadership, lawmakers predicted a continuation of the relative harmony that has existed between the House and Senate in the last two years.

Crisafulli said he and Gardiner would develop a joint agenda for the 2015 and 2016 sessions, much as former President Don Gaetz, R-Niceville, and House Speaker Will Weatherford, R-Wesley Chapel, had over the last two years.

Subject:

Amendment 1: Palm Beach Post Editorial

From:

Diane Salz <salz.govconsultant@gmail.com> (Add as Preferred Sender)

Date: Sat, Nov 22, 2014 5:42 pm

To: Richard Owen <richardowen@wrwsa.org>

Cc: Nancy Smith <nsmith@wrwsa.org>

Editorial: Protect voter intent for use of Amendment 1 funds

Posted: 12:00 a.m. Saturday, Nov. 22, 2014

Florida voters made history Nov. 4 when an overwhelming 75 percent approved the water and land conservation ballot initiative — the most support ever for a conservation-related constitutional amendment. The next step: Spend the money it raises as voters intended — to protect Florida's beaches, lands, rivers, lakes, springs and coastal waters for future generations.

Amendment 1, which takes effect in July, also is the largest state conservation money measure in U.S. history. It is expected to raise \$640 million in the first year from documentary stamp taxes on real estate sales. Over the next 20 years, it could raise as much as \$18 billion.

Record numbers of Floridians voted for it — including 84 percent in Palm Beach County, nearly 80 percent in Martin and 81 percent in St. Lucie.

Those high numbers should protect it from budgetary tricks in the Florida Legislature, at least for the first year.

"It tells legislators," Audubon of Florida's Eric Draper said, "that voters knew what they were doing." Indeed, more than 400 conservation organizations worked to educate voters on the amendment, said Will Abberger, vice president of the Conservation Campaign and director of The Trust for Public Lands conservation finance service.

State lawmakers decide where the money will go, and Abberger said the amendment is written to be self-implementing. The state already has the mechanisms for selecting projects in place.

For example, when the Florida Forever land-buying program was up and running, the Legislature gave it \$300 million as a block grant. Legislators also allocated money for Everglades restoration, land management, protecting North Florida's springs and other projects.

The programs remain in place, but have had no money for years. Now they will.

And therein lies the problem. Legislators — even county and municipal officials — should resist the temptation to create a new bureaucracy to distribute the money or tamper with what has worked well.

The amendment allows spending to buy and improve land, on conservation easements that save land from development, on beaches, shores, working farms and ranches, on outdoor recreation areas, and to improve public access to recreational lands. Money can be used to buy land in the Everglades Agricultural Area, offering hope to slow Lake Okeechobee discharges to the east and west coast estuaries.

A few are talking about ways to spend the money that voters wouldn't find acceptable. The money should not be spent on wastewater treatment, stormwater treatment projects or developing water supply for new developments.

"Any one of those things," Abberger said, "by itself could take all the money." Wastewater treatment historically has been financed by charging rate-payers, spreading it out over the whole community. All of the rumored suggestions are outside the boundaries and purpose of the amendment.

"They're not what voters want," Abberger said.

The Gainesville Sun

Bruce Ritchie: The real year of water in Florida

Published: Friday, November 21, 2014 at 6:01 a.m.

Last Modified: Wednesday, November 19, 2014 at 11:32 p.m.

OK, 2015 actually could be the "year of water" in the Florida Legislature.

Certain Capitol pundits earlier this year predicted that water would be a top issue during the 2014 session. But they were wrong because there wasn't support in both chambers for dealing with the issue.

The Senate passed a springs bill that would have provided limited funding for projects to reduce groundwater pollution. But House leaders always had expressed reluctance because the Senate bill was still evolving and they instead wanted a broader approach to water.

The difference in 2015, according to House and Senate leaders, is that voter approval of Amendment 1 will drive a focus on water issues. Approved by 75 percent of voters, Amendment 1 is expected to provide more than \$10 billion over the next 20 years for land and water conservation.

House Speaker Steve Crisafulli said soon after taking the gavel during Tuesday's organizational session that water will be a policy and funding priority as the Legislature implements Amendment 1.

"A clean, abundant water source for the future is important and we need to focus on that," he said.

New Senate President Andy Gardiner told reporters that Amendment 1 is going to drive a lot of the debate about water legislation.

During the organizational session, Gardiner told senators that the challenge of Amendment 1 is not spending more on the environment. Instead, he said, the challenge is spending less on transportation, affordable housing and economic development because tax revenues are being diverted.

"There is going to be some pain — there is no doubt about that," Gardiner said. "There is no question implementing this amendment will be a challenge."

He told reporters that Gov. Rick Scott and Agriculture Commissioner Adam Putnam also will be a part of the dialogue about water legislation.

"Everybody is going to come in with a water policy," he said. "Our job as the Legislature is

to kind of go through them and make sure we do what is right."

But it's still not at all clear what are the water problems that will be discussed or how the Legislature can address them.

I've been covering springs issues for more than 20 years and I know there are a variety of threats to springs — pollution and over-pumping, for example — and they vary with each spring. I don't expect the Legislature to throw out water quality standards that the state, with support from industries and water utilities, adopted through an agreement with the federal government in 2013.

Sen. Alan Hays, R-Umatilla, said the Legislature will need to identify and prioritize issues that it faces with water quantity and quality for surface water bodies, such as lakes and rivers, as well as aquifers that feed springs.

"If we can stop the point source of contamination, then we're going to be able to let the bodies heal themselves," Hays said. "There's no point in us pouring millions or hundreds of millions of dollars into cleaning up large water bodies when we're continuing to contaminate them."

But he also said he doesn't see a need for new regulations to deal with those issues.

Rep. Mark Pafford, D-West Palm Beach and House Democratic leader, said he hopes there aren't any policy differences with Republicans on water issues. But he added that he doesn't know because those issues haven't been discussed.

With 75 percent voter support, Amendment 1 is "a good litmus test perhaps for everything we're moving forward doing in the next two years," he said.

Bruce Ritchie is a Tallahassee journalist and editor of Floridaenvironments.com. Column courtesy of Context Florida.

Posted: 6:17 p.m. Wednesday, Nov. 19, 2014

http://www.wftv.com/news/news/local/9-investigates-math-mistake-could-mean-central-fla/njBWz/#_federated=1

9 Investigates: Math mistake could mean central Fla. running out of water faster than expected

ORANGE COUNTY, Fla. — Florida may be running out of fresh water faster than previously thought.

9 Investigates has been reviewing depositions of senior staff members with the St. Johns River Water Management District as a result of a hearing before Judge E. Gary Early with the Florida Division of Administrative Hearings. According to statements made by staff members, the water models used by staff at the St. Johns district may have had a fundamental flaw that caused the water management district to miscalculate how fast water is coming out of the Floridan Aquifer versus how fast the aquifer is recharging.

According to the deposition of Assistant Division Director for the Division of Regulatory, Engineering and Environmental Services Thomas Bartol, the water management district failed to account for what are known as sinks and drains. Sinks and drains are essentially lakes and other bodies of water where groundwater flows in and out of the aquifer. In the deposition, Bartol told attorneys, "So when we went back, we discovered this error. We kept those features in the model and just focused on the withdrawal, and that 29 CFS (cubic feet per second) jumped to somewhere between 45 to 50."

In the same deposition, Bartol is asked to elaborate on groundwater, with attorneys asking, "Currently, the district recognizes that there has been a regional decline in groundwater levels, correct?" Bartol answers, "Yes."

"We've taken more than our fair share, let's just say that," said Dr. Bob Knight of the Howard T. Odum Florida Springs Institute. "The environment is getting the short end right now."

Knight says using the model with the error, St. Johns issued what are known as "consumptive use permits" based on the presumption that water was flowing back into the aquifer faster than it was. The largest drain on Florida's groundwater is agriculture and residential, use; however, Knight says even the permit for Niagara Bottling in Lake County was approved by St. Johns using the model with the error.

"There are a lot of good people and good staff at St. Johns that should have known that these problems were already too large," said Knight. "The modeling approach has been a problem for a very long time."

"If there were errors made, absolutely there is a concern, but at this point in time I don't know if that is definitely the answer," said St. Johns River Water Management District Chairman John Miklos.

Water management district officials say they are still reviewing their models and calculating flows at places like Silver Springs and Wekiva Springs.

"Staff has been briefing me on this and we're taking a closer look at it," said Miklos.

Permits already issued by St. Johns, including the ones for Niagara Bottling, may not be able to be amended until they come up for renewal.

The state has five water management districts; each district has an unpaid governing board that is appointed by the governor of Florida. According to the state, the districts are charged with maintaining "programs to manage the consumptive use of water, aquifer recharge, well construction and surface water management." It is unknown if the other four water management districts have found similar errors in the models used for calculations.