

PALM BEACH COUNTY

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

WORKSHOP SUMMARY

Meeting Date:

August 26, 2025

Department:

Water Utilities Department

I. EXECUTIVE BRIEF

Title:

Overview of Septic Systems in Palm Beach County (County)

Summary:

The purpose of this workshop is to provide the Board of County Commissioners (BCC) with a comprehensive update on septic systems across the County. The presentation will provide an overview of the number and distribution of existing onsite sewage treatment and disposal systems (OSTDS) commonly referred to as septic systems within the County and its commissioner districts. A review of how septic systems affect surface water and overall environmental quality, with an emphasis on sensitive areas. An update on ongoing state and federal regulatory requirements and any recent or upcoming changes that may affect septic system management and compliance. A forward-looking discussion on planned approaches for transitioning from septic systems to centralized sewer service. This will include prioritization criteria, potential funding opportunities, and community engagement strategies to ensure successful implementation.

The workshop will provide the BCC with a clear picture of current conditions, regulatory drivers, and the pathway forward for improving water quality and community health through an effective septic to sewer conversion initiative. Countywide (MWJ)

Background and Policy Issues:

Septic systems are underground wastewater treatment structures that treat wastewater from household plumbing. The process typically begins with solids settling within the septic tank and ends with wastewater treatment in the soil by the drainfield. Septic systems are currently used for wastewater disposal by approximately 30% of Florida’s population according to the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP). FDEP estimates there are approximately 2.6 million septic systems in operation in Florida.

Attachments:

1. Presentation

Recommended By:

Department Director

Date

Approved By:

Assistant County Administrator

Date

II. FISCAL IMPACT ANALYSIS

A. Five Year Summary of Fiscal Impact:

Fiscal Years	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029
Capital Expenditures	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>
Operating Costs	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>
External Revenues	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>
Program Income (County)	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>
In-Kind Match County	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>
NET FISCAL IMPACT	0	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>
# ADDITIONAL FTE POSITIONS (Cumulative)	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>

**Budget Account No.:**   **Fund**                      **Dept**                      **Unit**                      **Object**

Is this item Included in Current Budget?                      Yes \_\_\_\_\_      No \_\_\_\_\_

Is this item using Federal Funds?                      Yes \_\_\_\_\_      No \_\_\_\_\_

Is this item using State Funds?                      Yes \_\_\_\_\_      No \_\_\_\_\_

B. Recommended Sources of Funds/Summary of Fiscal Impact:

C. Department Fiscal Review: \_\_\_\_\_

III. REVIEW COMMENTS

A. OFMB Fiscal and/or Contract Development and Control Comments:

\_\_\_\_\_                      OFMB                      \_\_\_\_\_                      Contract Development and Control

B. Legal Sufficiency:

\_\_\_\_\_                      Assistant County Attorney

C. Other Department Review:

\_\_\_\_\_                      Department Director

This summary is not to be used as a basis for payment.



# ***Septic Systems in Palm Beach County Current Inventory, Key Challenges and Strategy for Conversion***

*Aug 26, 2025*





# Award-Winning Utility

## 55 Awards in 5 years

local, state, national and International

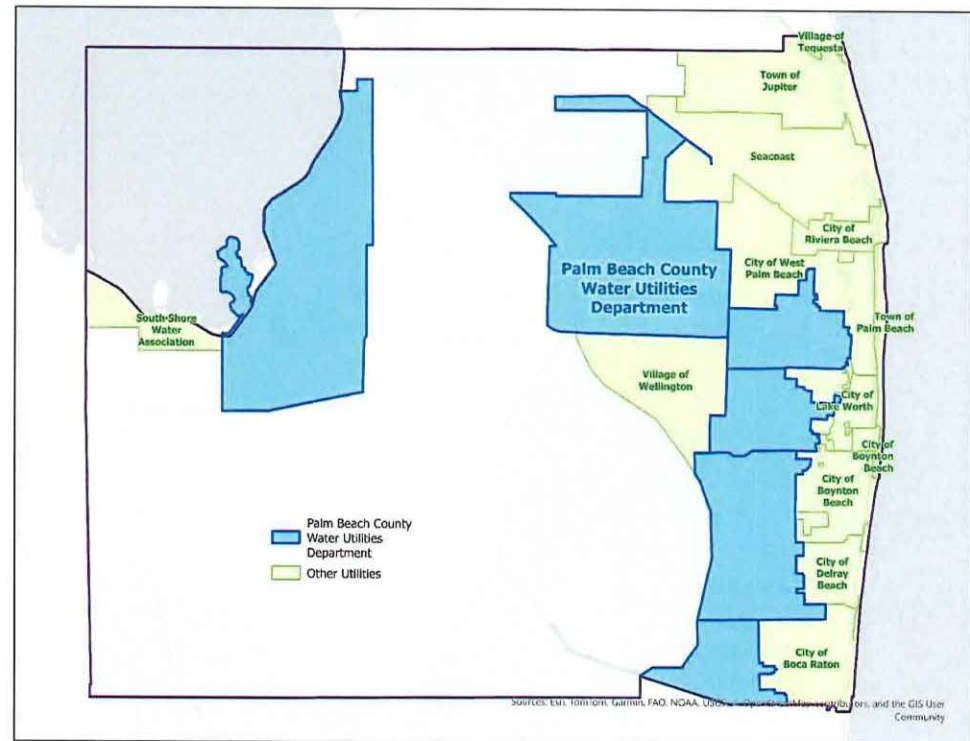
- Water quality with zero violations
- Residential customers' cost is about 25% below state average\*
- Enterprise fund
- AAA bond rating from Moody's, S & P & Fitch

\*Source: Florida Water and Wastewater Rate Survey, RAFTELIS



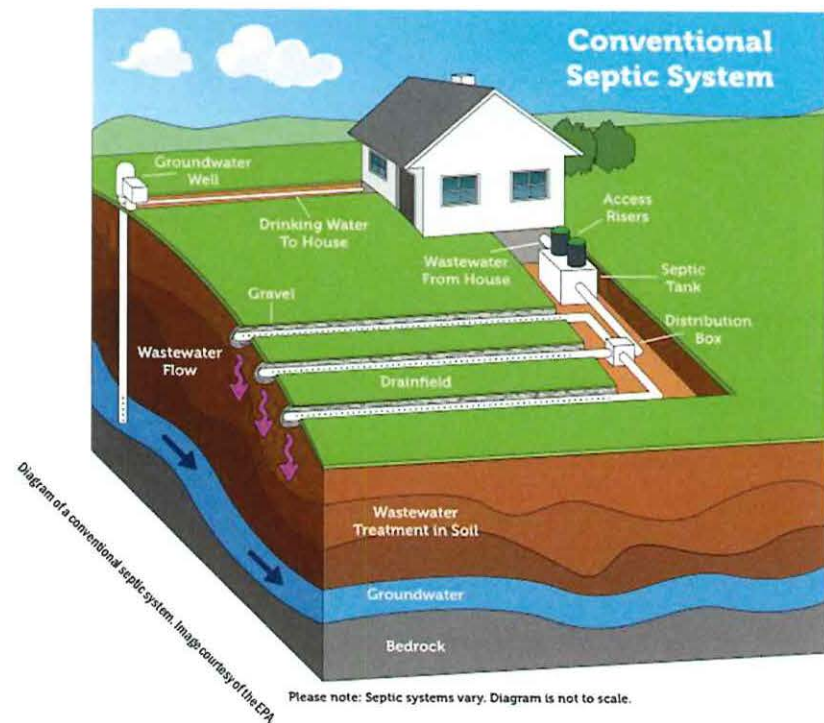
# PBCWUD Service Area

- PBCWUD is the **3rd largest** full-service utility in Florida
- Serves **635,000+** residents across 1,300 square miles of Palm Beach County
- Employs **630+** employees



# South Florida Utility Challenges

- Population Growth • Low Quality Alternative
- Competing Demands Water Source (Floridan
- Periodic Droughts Aquifer)
- Saltwater Intrusion • Harmful Chemicals (e.g. PFAS)
- Sea Level Rise • Septic Systems





# Onsite Sewage Treatment and Disposal Systems (Septic Systems) Inventory

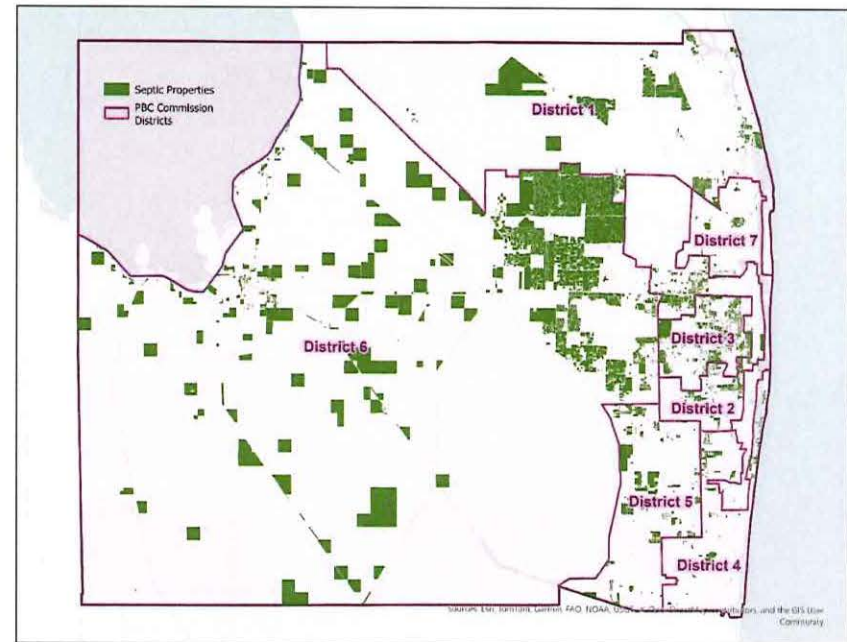
Florida: 2.6M (approximately 30% of State)

Palm Beach County: 56K

PBCWUD: 33K (approximately 12% of service area)

Data from Florida Department of Environmental Protection

of June 2025, **246K** dwelling units are connected to WUD's sewer system



# All Septic Systems Are not the Same

- Maintenance
- Density
- Location, is the property located within a designated BMAP area?
- Property size, is the property larger than 1 acre?
- Proximity to waterbodies
- Proximity to central sewer system

## Septic System Use by Property Value (PBCWUD Service Area)

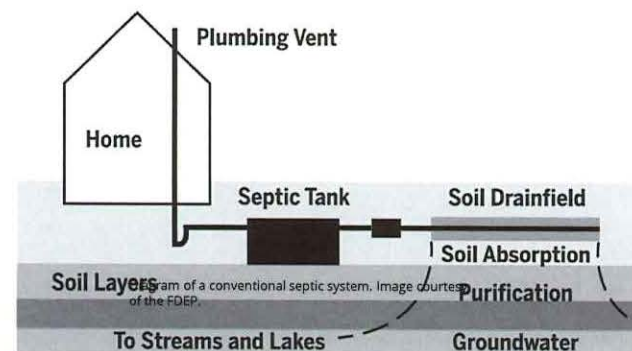
>\$400K	20%
\$200K-\$400K	41%
<\$200K	39%



## How a Septic System Works

**A septic system uses natural processes to treat and dispose of sewage.**

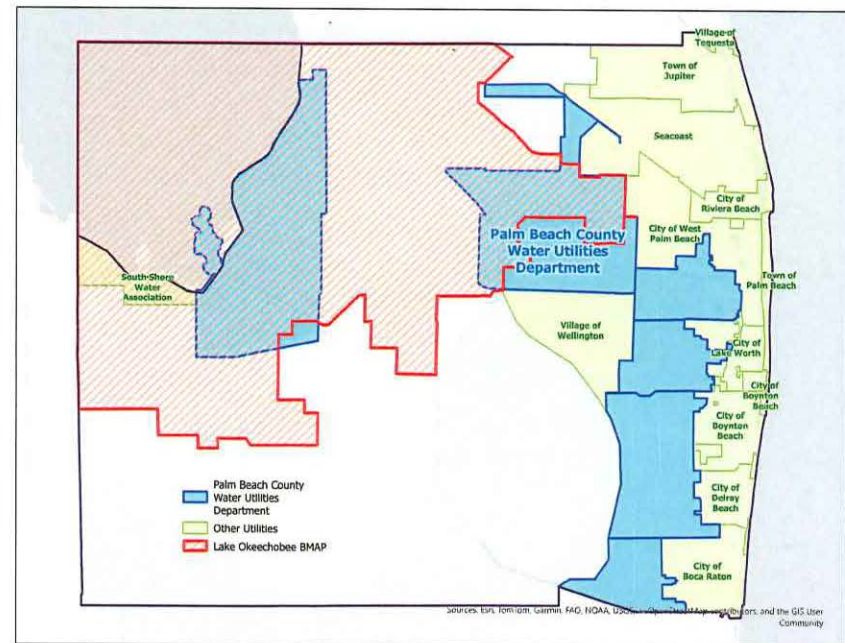
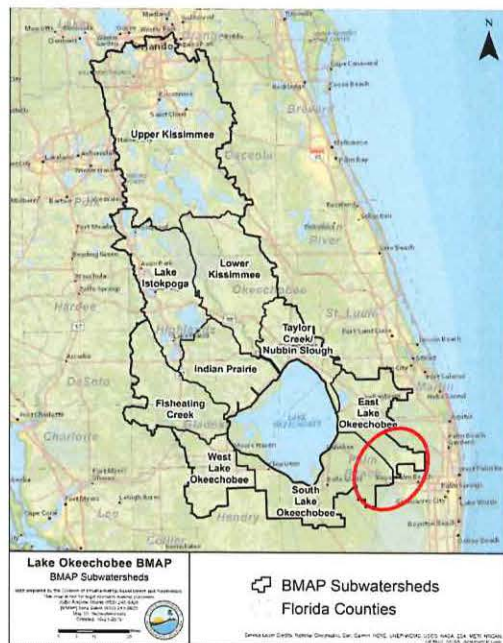
Most systems have a septic tank and drainfield. This is called a conventional system. The diagram below shows the parts of a conventional septic system.





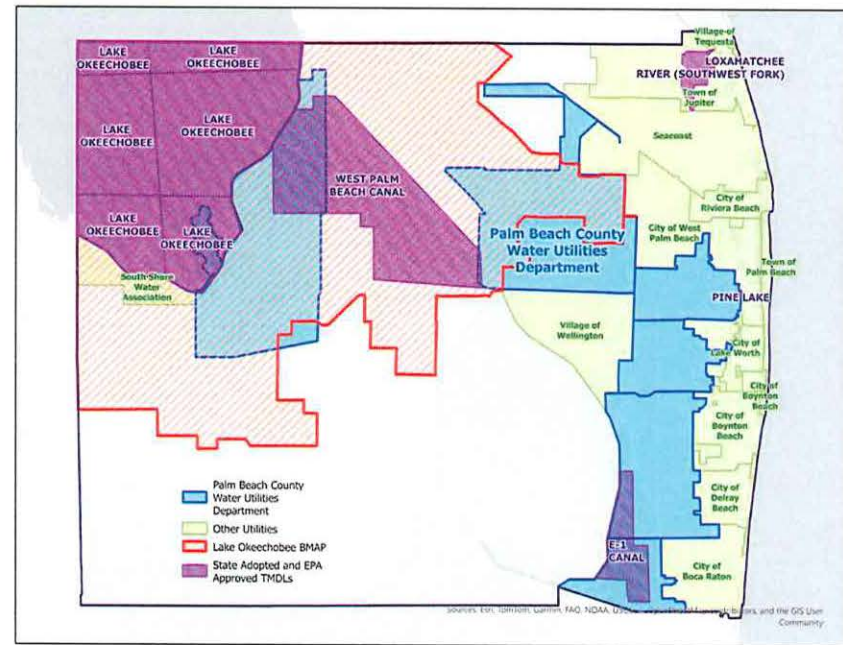
# Lake Okeechobee Basin Management Action Plan (BMAP)

A basin management action plan, or BMAP, is a comprehensive set of watershed-specific strategies to reduce or eliminate pollutant loadings and restore particular waterbodies to health.



## Other Basins with Adopted Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL)

TMDL is a scientific determination of the maximum amount of a given pollutant that a water body can absorb and still meet the water quality standards that protect human health and aquatic life. Waterbodies that do not meet water quality standards are identified as "impaired" for the pollutants of concern - nutrients, bacteria, dissolved oxygen, mercury (fish tissue), etc. - and TMDLs must be developed, adopted and implemented for these pollutants to reduce pollutants and clean up the waterbody.





# Onsite Sewage Treatment and Disposal Systems (Septic Systems) Inventory

District	Septic Systems in PBC	Septic Systems in WUD Service Area Only	Inside BMAP WUD Service Area Only	Properties Larger than 1 Acre Inside BMAP WUD Service Area Only
1	6,431	303	300	200
2	9,525	4,200	0	
3	13,765	7,655	0	
4	2,231	378	0	
5	2,304	2,283	0	
6	20,412	17,747	12,454	11,589
7	1,278	428	0	
<b>Total</b>	55,946	32,994	12,754	11,789



# Regulatory Review

## **6A.C. 62-6, Administrative Rule**

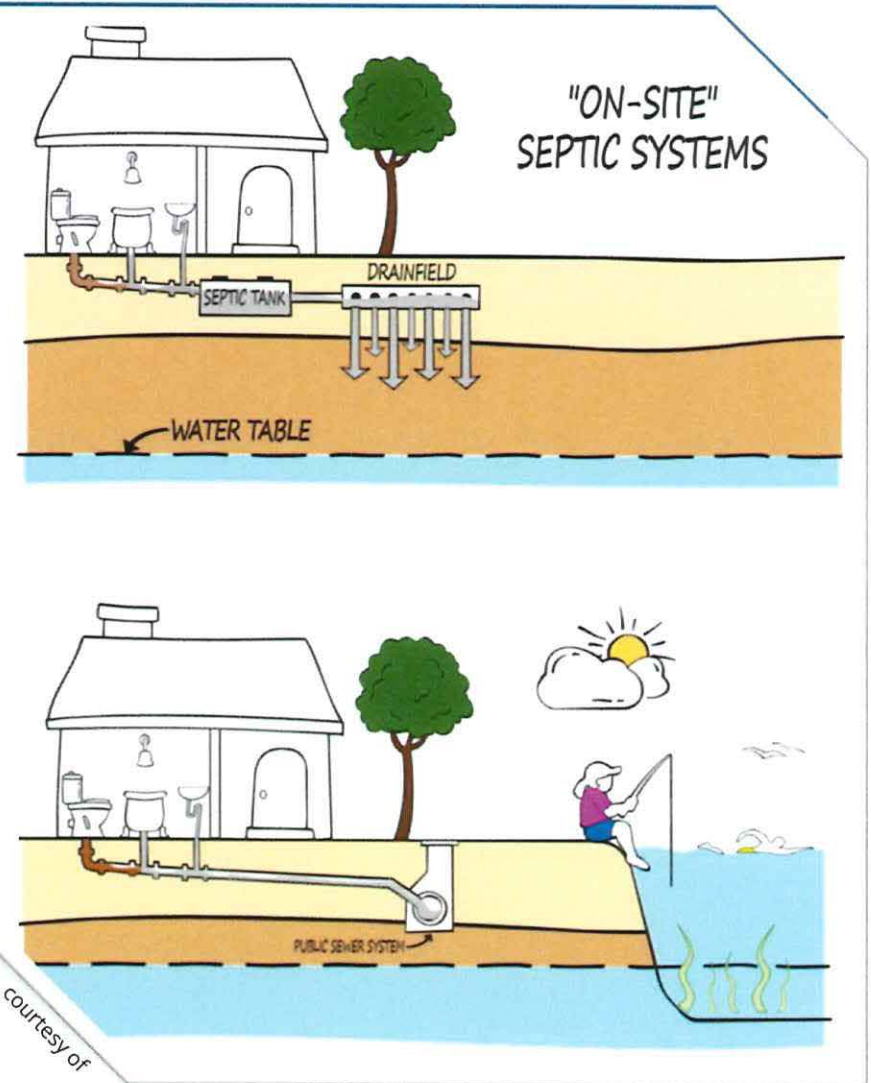
Established by Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP), regulating permitting requirements, construction, and design standards of septic systems. FDEP is the designated authority for septic systems, but until January 2027 Florida Department of Health (FDOH) is in charge of ONSITE SEWAGE PROGRAMS in Palm Beach County

## **House Bill 1379 (2023) Requirements:**

- Requires Septic to Sewer Conversion for lots 1 acre and below in vulnerable areas (BMAP Areas) where sewer connection is available
- Requires Installation of Nitrogen Reducing OSTDS (septic) system (ENR-OSTDS) for all new septic systems and septic replacements in BMAP areas where sewer connection is not feasible
- Local government must consider the feasibility of providing sanitary sewer services for any existing development of more than 50 residential lots, whether built or unbuilt, with more<sup>10</sup>

# Conversion Strategies

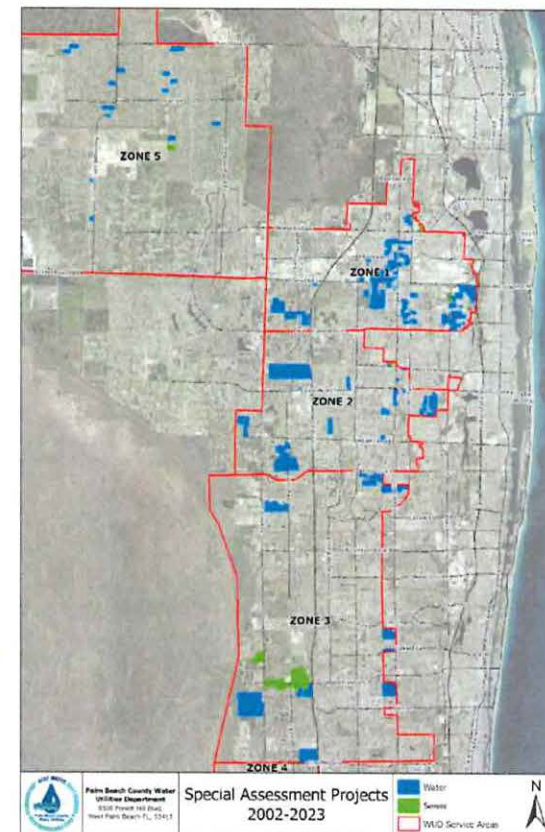
- PBCWUD Assessment Program
- State and Federal Grants
- Other County Initiatives



# Conversion Strategies-Assessment Program

- All in one
- Initiated by the Community
- County provides:  
Planning, Project  
Management, Design,  
Construction, and Finance  
(5.5% interest rate)
- Project cost is paid back to  
the County in a 20 year  
period

Total projects completed  
under the program ~ 80  
(78 water and 2 sewer)  
Water/Sewer Connections –  
4,218 (4,193 water and 25  
sewer)





# Conversion Strategies-Grants \$2,021,400

- **Grant 1:** NonPoint Source Grant 319H Federal; **\$449,700**
- **Grant 2:** Water Quality Improvement; **\$263,300**
- **Grant 3:** State Appropriation- Central Palm Beach County Infrastructure Improvements **\$1,000,000**
- **Grant 4:** NonPoint Source Grant 319H Federal **\$308,400.00** .(Status – Application Submitted on 3/31/2025, Awaiting Response)

Conversion of 15 septic systems to a centralized wastewater collection system owned and maintained by PBCWUD. The project is located in District 6, approximately 1000 feet from Lake Okeechobee.



Project includes the installation of 19 sanitary sewer services. It also includes replacement of 22,000 LF of aged, undersized, and undesirable pipe material potable water main, water services, and improvement of the fire protection within the Golfview Heights residential area, a subdivision within the Westgate/Belvedere Homes Community Redevelopment Agency (CCRT area) located in District 2.<sup>13</sup>

# Conversion Strategies-ARPA Funds \$10,500,000

The County owns 110 parks and facilities, and once the ongoing septic-to-sewer project is complete, we will have reduced the number of County parks on septic to just two—marking a significant step toward modernizing our facilities and protecting our environment. The project is managed by WUD.

- Okeeheelee Park
- Lake Ida Park
- Caloosa Park
- Gulfstream Park
- John Prince Park
- Duncan Padgett Park
- Triangle Park



Caloosa Park



Gulfstream Park



Lake Ida Park



# Moving Forward

In addition to State required feasibility study, a data driven ranking of septic systems based on factors such as location within BMAP or TMDL areas, availability of existing infrastructure, property size and other relevant criteria is in progress and will be completed by 2026 and presented to the Board accordingly

The department will continue collaborating with private property owners, local municipalities and State and federal agencies to identify grant funding opportunities and implement projects

We will work with communities requiring septic-to-sewer conversion to explain the WUD Assessment Program, guide them through the process, and provide the support needed for successful project implementation



# New Hires

Work Location: Green Cay 2/RECAP

Starting Date: Nov 2026



Allison "Allie" Gator



Edgar Egret



Oliver "Ollie" Owl

An architectural rendering of a modern building with a curved, white roof and a large, white, cylindrical column. The building has a green-tinted upper section and a glass entrance. A large palm tree stands to the left, and several people are walking on the sidewalk in front of the building. The sky is blue with some clouds.

# THANK YOU

*RECAP coming late 2026!*