



Floridian city reclaims stormwater for household irrigation

Rather than build more retention ponds along a stretch of Floridian highway, the city of Altamonte Springs has instead expanded its existing reclaimed water system to direct stormwater runoff for household irrigation.



Frank Martz, city manager, Altamonte Springs (end right), at the opening of the A-FIRST project in November 2015

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Prior to the launch of the Altamonte Springs-Florida Department of Transport Integrated Reuse and Stormwater Treatment (A-FIRST), stormwater would run off the Interstate-4 highway into drainage ponds along the side of the road. Over time some pollutants in the water would seep into the groundwater. The stormwater is now captured, treated and redirected into the city's reclaimed water system to be used for irrigation.

When there is extra stormwater, the city, at no extra cost, pumps the excess to the neighbouring city of Apopka which is experiencing its own water shortages.

"In addition to providing an alternative water supply, A-FIRST makes a substantial impact on reducing nutrient pollution in the Little Wekiva River system," Frank Martz, City Manager, Altamonte Springs, told *The Source*.

The project, at a cost of US\$13 million, is being almost entirely funded by the State of Florida through savings from not having to build retention ponds. It is expected to reclaim 6 million cubic metres a year.

"The partnership aspect of the A-FIRST project was one of the most crucial aspects," said Martz. "All of the partners were made aware of the multiple benefits the project could bring; from alternatives to groundwater withdrawal in the Central Florida region to the cost savings that were possible."

Martz admits that a city would first need in place a reclaimed water system, something which his own city built 33 years ago—Project APRICOT—and was one of the first of its kind in the southeast of the US.

"In the first discussions about the project there were of course doubts and hurdles," added Martz. "The city just kept plugging away at each point as it arose and just like *The little engine that could*, made A-FIRST a model to follow."