

**INDIAN RIVER COUNTY, FLORIDA
INTER - OFFICE MEMORANDUM**

TO: Jason E. Brown
County Administrator

THROUGH: Phil Matson, AICP
Community Development Director

FROM: Andrew Sobczak
Chief, Environmental Planning

DATE: July 20, 2020

RE: Approval of Cost-Share Agreement Renewal with the St. Johns River Water Management District for Repair/Plugging of Abandoned Artesian Wells

It is requested that the Board of County Commissioners formally consider the following information at the Board's regular meeting of August 18, 2020.

DESCRIPTION AND CONDITIONS

From 1990 through 2009, Indian River County participated in a cost-share program with the St. Johns River Water Management District (SJRWMD) to plug abandoned artesian wells countywide, including wells on private property (subject to authorization from the private landowner). As a result of the program, an estimated 395 wells were plugged or repaired in Indian River County, saving millions of gallons per day of groundwater. The program was discontinued from fiscal years 2009/10 through 2014/15, however, due to a lack of funding as a result of the economic downturn at that time. In June 2015, the Board approved an agreement with SJRWMD that reactivated the program, at the previous funding level of (up to) \$20,000 per agency per year. Since reactivation of the program in 2015, twenty-seven flow wells have been plugged.

The 2017 agreement is now up for renewal. As such, the proposed three-year cost-share agreement renewal with the SJRWMD for controlling/plugging abandoned artesian wells is being provided for the Board's approval consideration.

ANALYSIS

The proposed contract agreement extends the well-plugging cost-share agreement for three fiscal years, until September 30, 2023, with each agency (the County and SJRWMD) allocating \$20,000 toward the program each year contingent upon annual budget allocations.

Similar to past agreements, the agreement outlines responsibilities of the County and the District. The list of responsibilities reflects the process that evolved during the years that the cost-share program was in effect. The agreement identifies environmental planning chief Andrew Sobczak as the County's project manager, responsible for coordinating the County's participation in the program.

Public Benefits

Abandoned flow-wells result in the unnecessary consumption of groundwater. Moreover, artesian flow wells tend to have high chloride levels. The high chloride levels, in turn, lower water quality in the surficial aquifer, which is the principal water source for private potable wells. Renewal of the attached agreement will continue an important and successful water quality and water supply protection program. In addition, the agreement renewal will fulfill *Comprehensive Plan Natural Groundwater Aquifer Recharge Policy 3.5*, which calls for renewal of the program contingent on funding availability.

Eligible wells

County Code Section 931.09 requires developers to plug abandoned artesian flow wells on development project properties in conjunction with county site plan and subdivision approval. Flow wells on such properties are not eligible for funding under the County/SJRWMD cost-share program. Rather, the cost-share program targets other wells (not on development project sites) to provide public funding for landowners that may need financial assistance to carry out a proper well abandonment, which can cost hundreds or thousands of dollars, depending on the characteristics of the particular well.

FUNDING

For FY 2020/21, funding for the well-plugging program has been allocated in Planning/Code Enforcement Budget Account # 00420724-033190, under “Professional Services.” Continuation of that annual budget allocation will fund the program in future years, contingent on funding availability. Section 4 of the proposed agreement (“Funding Contingency”) specifies that the District and the County intend to fulfill their 3 year obligations but that funding each year is subject to budgetary approval of the parties.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Board of County Commissioners approve the proposed countywide abandoned flow well plugging cost-share agreement renewal with the SJRWMD, and authorize the Board Chairman to execute the agreement.

ATTACHMENT

1. County grant information form.
2. Proposed cost-share agreement.