

The Suwannee River Watershed

The Suwannee Watershed or Basin is made up of all the creeks, streams, rivers and springs that feed the Suwannee River. The Suwannee Basin extends from South Central Georgia to the Gulf of Mexico in Northwest Central Florida and drains 9,950 square miles. The Suwannee River begins in the Okefenokee Swamp and meanders 265 miles south to the town of Suwannee on the Gulf of Mexico with 206 miles of the Suwannee River in Florida. 57% of the Suwannee River Basin is located in the State of Georgia. The Suwannee averages about four miles per hour as it descends from an elevation of about 120 feet above sea level at the Okefenokee to the Gulf.

The Suwannee River has numerous tributaries. The main contributors are the Okefenokee Swamp, the Little River, the Alapaha River, the Withlacoochee River, the Santa Fe River and over one hundred springs.

Above White Springs most of the river flow is from surface drainage of wetlands and local surficial aquifers. Surficial aquifers are local watershed fed by rainfall. Below White Springs the average annual river flow increases from 1,820 cubic feet per second to 6,880 cubic feet per second at Branford. In the section from White springs to Branford, the flow increase is due to inflow from the Alapaha, Withlacoochee Rivers and several springs. Finally in the Lower Suwannee, the flow is 10,400 cubic feet per second at Wilcox. From Branford to Wilcox, the increased flow comes from the Santa Fe River, which is mostly spring-fed, and from dozens of springs along the Suwannee River.

Unlike rivers in more populated areas of Florida, mile after mile of shoreline on the Suwannee and its tributaries is owned by State and Federal Agencies and kept in its natural, pristine condition. This not only keeps floodways clean of obstructions, but also keeps people from developing areas that are certain to flood.



Figure 2-1. Suwannee River Basin in Florida and Georgia. Basins shown are USGS hydrologic units (Kerner et al., 1997).

The Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and the Suwannee River Water Management District (SRWMD) govern water use and wastewater discharge in the Florida portion of the Suwannee River Basin. The Water Management picture in Georgia is more complex. Large water use permits are issued by the Georgia Environmental Protection Department (GEPD), but groundwater, surface waters and coastal areas are all addressed separately. The Georgia Water Council is working on a statewide water plan.

The Florida portion of the basin is in parts of the following Florida counties: Madison, Hamilton, Suwannee, Columbia, Bradford, Union, Clay, Alachua, Lafayette, Dixie, Gilchrist and Levy.

figure from SRWMD Lower Suwannee Minimum Flows and Levels Draft (2005)

http://mysuwanneeriver.com/resources/suwannee+basin+fl_ga+map.pdf

For more information

EPA Suwannee Watershed

<http://www.epa.gov/owow/showcase/suwanneeriver/location.html>