

CAN SOLAR FARMS ASSIST WATER RESOURCE MANAGEMENT?

In recent years, solar farms have been developed in the springsheds of several Florida springs, including Fanning Springs and Gemini Springs. Changes in aquifer recharge or nutrient loading from these sites have not been evaluated. However, the conversion of land use from intensive agriculture to solar farm should benefit nutrient impaired springs and those with a need for increased flow. The SJRWMD is exploring potential sites for solar farm leases, one based upon a staff evaluation and two others based upon an inquiry from an external solar developer. To help in the evaluation, the SJRWMD is conducting a GIS exercise to evaluate its lands where leasing a facility might be useful to achieving SJRWMD missions. Evaluation criteria include, wetlands, habitat quality, level of ecological disturbance, proximity to power lines or substations, potential for aquifer recharge, recreation, proximity to springs and public water usage. SJRWMD land management plans generally view leases as a tool to achieve management plan goals. Revenues generated through leases on lands are used for managing and restoring SJRWMD lands.