# EASTERN PASCO WELLFIELD FEASIBILITY STUDY FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

## Background

### What is the Eastern Pasco Wellfield project?

Tampa Bay Water is investigating several new water supply options to meet the region's growing demands in the 2033 timeframe. The Eastern Pasco Wellfield Feasibility Study is one of three potential project options being considered as part of the Feasibility Study for New Groundwater Sources. The project involves conducting an aquifer performance test at a Pasco County-owned property (8424 Powerline Rd, Dade City, FL 33523). Tampa Bay Water will install a test well and monitoring wells, then conduct an aquifer performance test. The test will provide important data on water quality, water quantity and data needed to model aquifer responses to pumping. The project team will also dig a core hole which will provide water quality and geologic data down to the Lower Floridan Aquifer. The data collected will determine if a freshwater wellfield in eastern Pasco County is technically, environmentally and financially feasible. The study will also provide data on brackish water quality to determine if a brackish water supply should be further evaluated in the future.

If selected, this proposed project would initially withdraw fresh groundwater and treat it at a new water treatment plant in Pasco County. Fresh groundwater wells will withdraw water from the Upper Floridan Aquifer, approximately 500 feet or more below the surface. If preliminary data indicates brackish water should be further investigated, additional studies may be conducted to evaluate the viability of developing brackish water to meet demands beyond 2033.

### Why are new water supplies being investigated?

The Tampa Bay region will need an additional 25 million gallons per day of drinking water by 2043, with 10-20 million gallons of water per day needed as early as 2033. Pasco County's current water demand from Tampa Bay Water is approximately 38 million gallons per day and it is projected to increase by 5.6 million gallons per day, or nearly 14%, by 2033 and 11 million gallons per day, or 29%, by 2043. As one of the projects being studied, the proposed Eastern Pasco Wellfield project could provide additional supply to Pasco County.

### Are demand projections and supporting data available to the public?

All data is accessible to the public. Tampa Bay Water updates demand projections on an annual basis and most recently provided an update at the February 2025 board meeting. The agenda and agenda item are posted online at tampabaywater.org.

### How much additional water supply will this proposed project yield for Pasco County customers?

The proposed project's initial estimated annual yield is 4 million gallons per day from a fresh groundwater supply. The estimated yield will be refined once the aquifer performance test and modeling are complete.

### What are the potential benefits of the proposed project?

The proposed Eastern Pasco Wellfield project could provide a reliable source of water supply in Pasco County, where regional demands are growing. Groundwater is also the most efficient source to clean because the aquifer performs most of the filtration, so it is less expensive than other water supply sources.

## Why is Tampa Bay Water considering new supply from groundwater sources?

Tampa Bay Water has a 25-year track record of responsible groundwater management and supply. The regional utility has invested more than $2 billion in diverse new water supply sources to create a balanced water supply network in which groundwater plays an important role. Groundwater, if withdrawn in a responsible manner, is an affordable drinking water supply. Tampa Bay Water's board of directors approved the agency's 2023 Long-term Master Water Plan in November 2003. Of the seven projects that were chosen for further study, three are part of the Feasibility Study for New Groundwater Sources, including the Eastern Pasco Wellfield Feasibility Study. During the feasibility studies, Tampa Bay Water will refine potential yields, costs, permitability, treatment requirements and engage the community. Project concepts that are proven to be economically feasible, environmentally sustainable and reliable will be considered individually or as configurations of projects in the water supply selection process.

## Will the proposed project enable growth?

Tampa Bay Water has no authority to control growth. We have an unequivocal obligation to meet the water demands of our customers, including Pasco County. As the region's water needs grow, we respond by either adding news supplies, expanding our delivery network, or both. Growth is controlled by local cities and counties.

## Where will the Eastern Pasco Feasibility Study test and monitor wells be located?

Pasco County Board of County Commissioners has granted Tampa Bay Water a temporary construction easement for the test and monitor wells at **18424 Powerline Rd, Dade City, FL 33523.** The Pasco County Commission approved the easement agreement at its meeting on Jan. 14, 2025.

## What is the size of the Eastern Pasco Wellfield Feasibility Study test site property?

The test site is 20 acres.

## Were other areas of Pasco County considered for the East Pasco Wellfield Feasibility Study? How was the study area selected?

The Feasibility Study site search area was determined based on the portion of the County where new groundwater withdrawals may potentially be available and where drawdown will not impact the Hillsborough River Groundwater Basin. Tampa Bay Water is also exploring new water supply via groundwater withdrawals in the western portion of the County through a feasibility study to increase its Consolidated Water Use Permit.

## What is the cost of the Eastern Pasco Wellfield Feasibility Study? How is it being funded?

The Eastern Pasco Wellfield Feasibility Study is estimated to cost $5 million, being paid through Tampa Bay Water's municipal bonds. The project may be eligible for co-funding from the Southwest Florida Water Management District (the District).

## What is the Eastern Pasco Wellfield Feasibility Study schedule?

Below is the projected timeline for the Eastern Pasco Wellfield Feasibility Study:

- Siting Criteria Public Survey - Third quarter of 2024
- Property Parcel Review/Study – Third quarter of 2024
- Public Information Meeting – Fourth quarter of 2024
- Property Selection Approved – First quarter of 2025

- Coring – Third quarter of 2025
- Test Well Construction – Third/fourth quarter of 2025
- Modeling – Second quarter of 2026
- Feasibility Study Results – First quarter of 2027
- Water Supply Configuration Recommendations to the Tampa Bay Water board of directors - Third quarter of 2027

## Feasibility Study Details

### What does the Eastern Pasco Wellfield Feasibility Study include?

The Feasibility Study will explore a potential new fresh groundwater wellfield in Pasco County. Tampa Bay Water will install a test well and monitor wells and then conduct an aquifer performance test. The test will provide important data on water quality, water quantity and data needed to model aquifer responses to pumping. This information is key to understanding if this project in Pasco County is technically feasible and environmentally sound.

### The Eastern Pasco Wellfield Feasibility Study originally included brackish water test and monitoring wells and aquifer performance tests. Is this still part of the study?

Tampa Bay Water has eliminated the brackish water test and monitoring wells and aquifer performance test from the Eastern Pasco Wellfield Feasibility Study to reduce project costs by nearly $6 million and maintain the project schedule.

### Will Tampa Bay Water still study the effects of brackish water withdrawals in Eastern Pasco County?

Tampa Bay Water will take a more incremental approach to studying brackish water availability in eastern Pasco County. As part of the Eastern Pasco Wellfield Feasibility Study, important brackish water quality and geologic data from depths of approximately 2,000 feet via the core hole installation will still be collected. This data will provide valuable insights as to whether further investment in brackish water studies in the Lower Floridan Aquifer is worthwhile in eastern Pasco County.

### What is brackish water?

Brackish water is water that is saltier than freshwater but less salty than seawater.

### What is an aquifer performance test?

An aquifer performance test is done to evaluate the changes in aquifer water levels and water quality from pumping a well. The well is pumped at a constant rate for a short period of time (for example, 7-14 days). During the test, hydrologic data is collected to observe the aquifer's response. The data is input into a groundwater model which provides information on the potential yield and changes in water levels (drawdown) in the aquifer and at environmental features such as wetlands and lakes. The water pumped during the test is typically discharged into a receiving water body or stormwater system.

### How far will test wells be from residential areas?

The test well, monitor wells, equipment and construction trailer will be located in the interior of the site and buffered from views by maintaining the existing tree line. This will lesson direct impacts, such as noise pollution, to the surrounding residential areas. The north and the west property lines will have a 200-foot buffer and the south property line will have a 130-foot buffer. To the east, the property abuts another Pasco County parcel.

### What impacts will there be on my private well? On my agricultural well?

As part of the Eastern Pasco Wellfield Feasibility Study, test and monitor wells will be installed and an aquifer performance test will be conducted over a period of time. Data from the test will be used in models to predict water level drawdown on a large scale, which will identify whether any nearby domestic or agricultural wells will be impacted. In general, if the proposed project is predicted to impact existing legal users, the project will not be permitted by the Southwest Florida Water Management District.

### Will water quality be tested as part of the Eastern Pasco Feasibility Study?

Yes. The Eastern Pasco Wellfield Feasibility Study includes testing the full suite of water quality parameters including PFAS. Additionally, the project team will research previous land use when establishing water quality sampling parameters.

### Why is the Eastern Pasco Wellfield Feasibility Study considering land in the protected areas? Is this in conflict with the Comprehensive Plan?

There are state conservation lands and easements, as well as Environmental Lands Acquisition and Management Program (ELAMP) parcels in close proximity to the area identified for the Eastern Pasco Wellfield Feasibility Study, however the test well site is not within the protected area. When properly designed with the environment in mind, water supplies can benefit the environment and the public. Wellfields in central and eastern Pasco County can protect important wildlife habitat and maintain protected status as nature preserves and parks. A wellfield can be consistent with County plans, and if this project is recommended for development, Tampa Bay Water will work closely with the County to the benefit of the public and the environment.

### What are the impacts related to the construction of the test well?

Residents can expect to see and hear construction activity on weekdays from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. Crews will first prepare the site by clearing some trees and brush and installing crushed gravel for equipment and materials staging. Contractors will deliver drill rigs and heavy equipment to the site and well installation and coring work is expected to begin in the second quarter of 2025. Work on site is expected to conclude in the second quarter of 2026.

### Will the Eastern Pasco Wellfield Feasibility Study cause sinkholes?

Sinkholes are naturally occurring features throughout much of Florida, including Pasco County. Northeastern Pasco County has fewer incidences of sinkholes than the western part of the county, but sinkholes can still occur. The aquifer performance test is a relatively small quantity of water pumped for a short period of time and is not expected to cause a sinkhole. If the proposed project is selected for development in 2027, Tampa Bay Water will conduct an evaluation and risk assessment based on existing sinkhole records.

### What new infrastructure will be needed for the proposed Eastern Pasco Wellfield project if it is selected for development?

If feasible and selected by Tampa Bay Water's board of directors for development, the proposed Eastern Pasco Wellfield will include a fresh groundwater wellfield, treatment plant and pipelines, a finished water storage tank and a finished water pump station and pipeline to the distribution system.

## Environmental

### If selected, will the proposed project impact the environment?

The purpose of the feasibility study is to identify potential project impacts, including environmental impacts. A project whose feasibility study shows negative environmental impacts would not be recommended to move forward into the water supply selection process. For more than 25 years, Tampa Bay Water has invested in a diversified water supply network that balances the needs of the environment with the needs of the community. Our diversified network of alternative water supplies, including desalinated seawater and river water, has enabled Tampa Bay Water to reduce its reliance on groundwater, which has resulted in rejuvenated environmental health of lakes, wetlands and other surface water bodies across northern Tampa Bay. As we evaluate the potential Eastern Pasco Wellfield and other new water supply sources to meet future needs, we are committed to maintaining the environmental recovery achieved over the past 25 years.

### How could the proposed Eastern Pasco Wellfield impact the Hillsborough River Groundwater Basin?

The project is being proposed in an area of eastern Pasco County that is outside the Hillsborough River Groundwater Basin. Potential impacts to the Hillsborough River Groundwater Basin will be known after the aquifer performance test and modeling conducted during the Feasibility Study. Projects must have zero impact in order for the District to grant the water use permit.

### Are any studies being done on potential impacts to the Withlacoochee River and Silver Lake?

The project's analysis will investigate that there is no drawdown on the Hillsborough River Basin. The District is currently doing a minimum flow study on the Withlacoochee River. When the minimum flow is established, withdrawals can't have a negative impact on that water body's minimum flow. Our project cannot go forward if it would harm either river.

### Could the proposed Eastern Pasco Wellfield project affect the health of Pasco County's lakes and wetlands?

Potential effects to surficial and upper Floridan aquifers will be known after the aquifer performance test that will be conducted during the Feasibility Study. The test will provide data on drawdown and the aquifer's responses to pumping and will be used to model larger withdrawal quantities.

### How does Tampa Bay Water work with the District during the Feasibility Study?

Any time water is withdrawn from the environment (a lake, river, aquifer, etc.), Tampa Bay Water must obtain a water use permit from the District. Their rules can stop a project from moving forward. If a withdrawal doesn't meet their strict criteria, they will not issue a water use permit, and the study/project will not move forward. The District is the regulator who oversees, reviews and evaluates data to determine if a permit should be granted.

### How will water conversation be encouraged over water usage?

Tampa Bay Water works with its member governments on water conservation efforts. Tampa Bay Water Wise is a regional water conservation program that offers rebates to residents, commercial property owners, contractors and builders who take proactive steps to reduce water use and demand on the region's water supply. Tampa Bay Water shares water conservation information, offers grants for community projects that conserve water, funds the Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ Program, encourages the Tampa Bay community to conserve water and more.

## Public Input

### Will the public have input on this project?

In late July/early August 2024, Tampa Bay Water reached out to property owners within the project parameters to inform them on the project, directing them to an online survey to provide input on site selection criteria. On Dec. 4, 2024, Tampa Bay Water hosted a public meeting at St. Leo University to provide an update on the agency's Long-Term Master Water Plan and the Eastern Pasco Wellfield Feasibility Study, as well as the site selection process and the status of the property acquisition. A summary of the Public Meeting can be found at www.TampaBayWater.org/EPW.

Throughout the Feasibility Study, the project team will share information and solicit input on key components of the project. As with all projects, Tampa Bay Water is committed to open, transparent communication with residents.

### Will you hold public meetings in the future?

Yes, the project team will hold public meetings to share information and updates on the Feasibility Study. Residents will be invited to future meetings via direct mail, email and information will be posted on Tampa Bay Water's website and social media channels.

### How can I get more information on the Eastern Pasco Wellfield Feasibility Study?

Information on the Eastern Pasco Wellfield Feasibility Study is available on Tampa Bay Water's website at **TampaBayWater.org/EPW.** If you would like to opt in to receiving notices regarding this project, please email **GroundwaterProjectInfo@gmail.com** or call (813) 550-8326.