

In December, the West Villages Improvement District (WVID) Board of Supervisors voted 3-1 to authorize a modification to the existing Water Use Permit, issued by the Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD) to redistribute irrigation quality water resources associated with Gran Paradiso to the remaining lands throughout the District. The decision to authorize the requested modification came after careful consideration and was made with the best interests of the landowners and residents of the entire district in mind.

As the local government responsible for irrigation quality water throughout the District, the WVID has prepared this FAQ to better inform and educate residents about the changes to the Water Use Permit.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is a Water Use Permit?

In 2018, the Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD) awarded a joint Water Use Permit to the WVID and The Ranch Land Operations, an affiliate of the master developer. The Water Use Permit, which allows the permittees to conjunctively use surface water, reclaimed water and groundwater for landscape/recreation irrigation, was issued for 50 years, and covers all lands within the district, except for IslandWalk, which was separately permitted. WVID's inclusion on the Water Use Permit requires the consent and cooperation of The Ranch Land Operations and Thomas Ranch Intangibles (Ranch Entities).

This permit determines how much groundwater is available to help meet the irrigation quality water demands for the entire lands within WVID. Permitted quantities are based on the number of irrigable acres within a specific boundary, as well as other factors such as the type of property, irrigation or soil.

Wellen Park's annual average daily water allocation is approximately 2.4 million gallons per day. In a peak month, the allocations shift to approximately 6.7 million gallons per day. If the WVID uses more water than is allowed, the District risks losing its Water Use Permit. If this were to occur, WVID would not be able to meet irrigation quality water demands.

Why was the Water Use Permit modification approved?

On Dec. 3, the District received a letter from the Ranch Entities demanding the District approve the permit modifications. The demand followed approximately two years of litigation surrounding irrigation quality water involving the District and the Gran Paradiso Property Owners Association (GPPOA).

The Ranch Entities asserted that the WVID has not maintained compliance with various terms of the Water Use Permit, including Gran Paradiso's repeated and consistent exceedance of its irrigation allocations, and is in breach of a 2018 Water Supply Agreement between WVID and the Ranch Entities. This occurrence jeopardizes WVID's ability to remain on the Water Use Permit and its ability to provide irrigation quality water to its customers.

Recognizing the importance of the Water Use Permit to the overall system, the Board of Supervisors acted within the best interest of the landowners and residents of the entire district.

How does this impact Gran Paradiso residents?

Once the permit modification is approved, the Gran Paradiso POA will need to seek alternative water irrigation sources for its community. The modification will not affect the District's ability to maintain district property within Gran Paradiso.

Does this impact the ongoing irrigation litigation with the GPPOA?

Since the irrigation litigation was initiated in December 2022 the GPPOA has consistently argued that the existing irrigation quality water supply agreements between WVID and the GPPOA should be voided and of no further force and effect. If the court were to agree with GPPOA, this would result in WVID ceasing to provide irrigation quality water service to the residents in Gran Paradiso. As a result, the permit modification also works to achieve the objective of the GPPOA in the irrigation litigation.

How does this impact other WVID communities?

The modification will have no impact on, and was necessary to ensure the continued access and availability of irrigation quality water to, other communities and properties throughout the District. SWFWMD will adjust irrigation quality water allocations to appropriately reallocate irrigation quality water to ensure communities and properties throughout the District continue to have access to irrigation quality water.

Additionally, the Ranch Entities agreed to cover all costs associated with the Water Use Permit modifications, as well as any changes or improvements to the irrigation system necessary as a result of the Water Use Permit modification.

When does the change go into effect?

The Ranch Entities submitted the application for permit modification to the SWFWMD on Dec. 13, 2024. The District believes that the permit modification may be effective as early as late February 2025.

Additional steps, such as engineering work and infrastructure modifications, may be necessary to remove the wells located within Gran Paradiso from the system.

How is the District addressing other concerns raised by the master developer?

WVID recognizes the importance of permit compliance and is committed to taking the steps necessary to remedy the concerns raised by the Ranch Entities.

The District will continue to work with communities that exceed their irrigation quality water allocations, as well as those that have not submitted conservation plans, to ensure compliance with the Water Use Permit.

Why is water conservation important?

Water conservation is a key element of the Water Use Permit. In accordance with that element, WWID is required to implement SWFWMD-approved water conservation plans. This plan requires the District to supply irrigation quality water quantities to its customers based on the SWFWMD's AGMOD model and ensure compliance with permitted quantities. It also calls on customers, such as homeowners associations, to create and implement their own water conservation plans which the District oversees.