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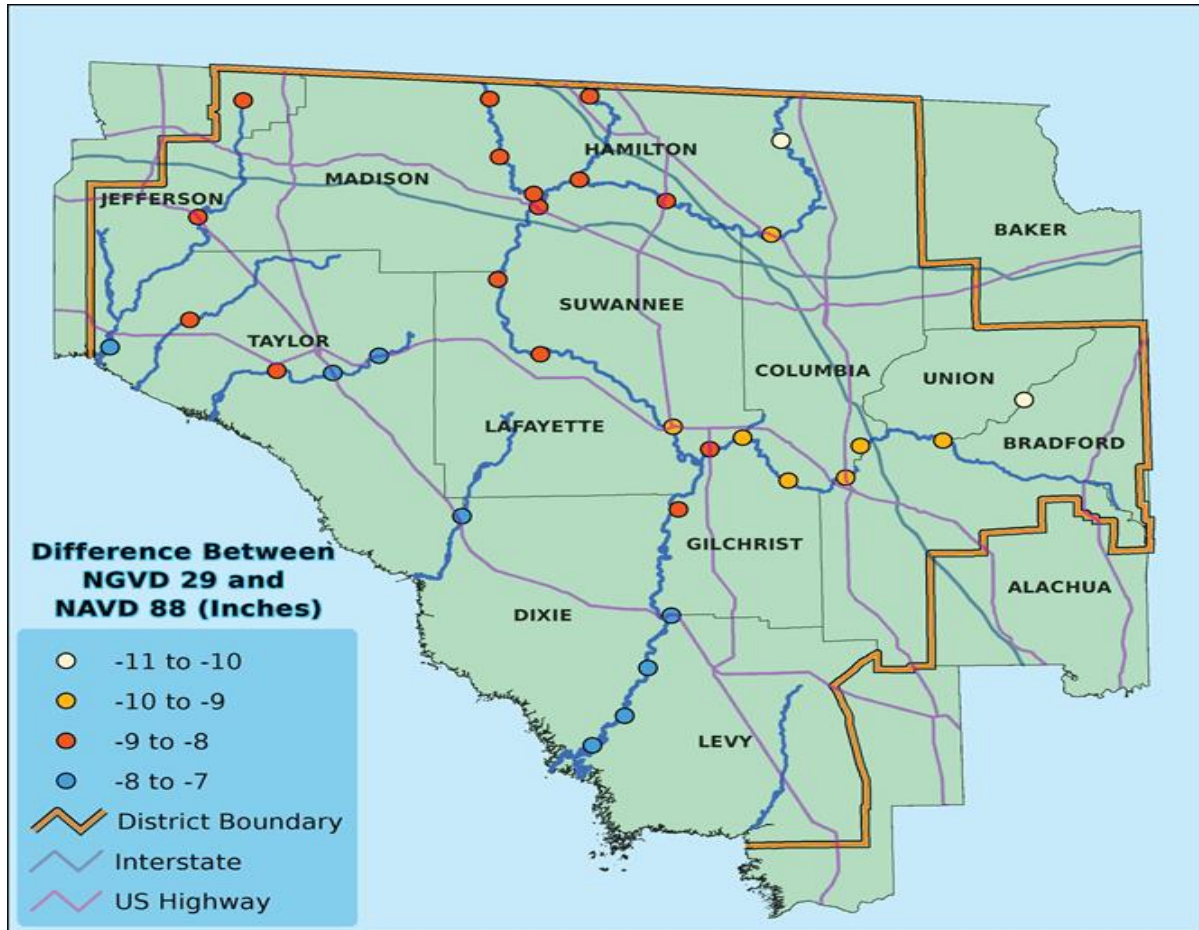
Suwannee River Water Management District

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Improving the accuracy of the river level measurements



Map of river gages in the District showing the estimated difference between the newer more accurate NAVD88 datum elevations and the older NGVD29 elevations. The minus sign ("-") indicates that the NAVD88 elevations are lower than the previously used NGVD29 elevations.

LIVE OAK, FL September 23, 2016 — Flooding along rivers and their tributaries is a recurring challenge. Providing the most accurate river level information is essential for forecasting and flood preparation. Beginning in August 2016, water levels for many surface water bodies will be measured with improved accuracy at river gages in the Suwannee River Water Management District (District) by using what is known as the North American Vertical Datum of 1988 (NAVD88). By November 2016, the District along with the Florida Division of Emergency

Management (FDEM), the National Weather Service (NWS), and the United States Geological Survey (USGS) will all use the NAVD88 datum for reporting river level measurements.

A vertical datum is a common base point that provides a way to compare elevations at different locations. The vertical datum does not affect the actual height of the river. Using NAVD88 only affects the value used to represent the river level.

Every day, the District and the USGS collect water level measurements of the District's major rivers and streams. These data are used by the National Weather Service to create flood forecasts. Previously, the National Geodetic Vertical Datum of 1929 (NGVD29) was used to establish river levels at these gages. However, advancements in technology allowed the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's National Geodetic Survey to develop the more accurate NAVD88 datum.

NAVD88 elevations range from about 7 to 11 inches lower than NGVD29 elevations, depending on the location within the District (Figure 1). For example, using NAVD88 at the Branford gage in the Suwannee River results in a reduction of about $\frac{3}{4}$ of foot. Thus, when the NGVD29 river level at this gage is at 24.81 feet, the truer NAVD88 river level value is 24.06 feet. **There is no change in the actual river level, only the value used to represent the level is different.**

The new vertical datum will affect river level values on the Alapaha, Aucilla, Econfinia, Fenholloway, Ichetucknee, New, Santa Fe, Steinhatchee, Suwannee, Withlacoochee, Waccasassa, and Wacissa Rivers and a few lakes. Most other lakes and groundwater levels will still be measured and reported using NGVD29 until further notice.

This project is a cooperative effort with the NWS, USGS, Florida Division of Emergency Management and the District. More information about vertical datums may be obtained from the National Geodetic Survey at <http://www.ngs.noaa.gov/datums/vertical/#>, or on the District's website at <http://www.mysuwanneeriver.com/VerticalDatum> or by calling the District offices at 386-362-1001 and asking to speak with Tom Mirti, Director of Water Resources.

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