

SURFICIAL AND INTERMEDIATE AQUIFERS

By Henry G. Healy

INTRODUCTION

Aquifers that comprise the Floridian aquifer are becoming increasingly important as sources of water supply in the State, particularly in those areas where water in the underlying artesian aquifer is highly mineralized or has the potential of becoming so. Florida is a state where most of the water used for drinking in parts of east coastal, southwest coastal, and south Florida are surface and intermediate aquifers. These aquifers supplied 104 Mgal/d of water for public supply and 44 Mgal/d of domestic and municipal water supplies. These correspond to 10 percent of the total public supply and 38 percent of the total rural domestic use in the 12 counties in Florida that have rural domestic use in 12 other counties supplied for rural domestic use in 12 other counties (Healy, 1981).

Surficial and intermediate aquifers are the only source of ground water available for public supply in some areas where artesian aquifers are not present. Florida precludes its use for public supply without special and expensive water treatment. This summary includes only those intermediate and intermediate aquifers that are currently being used to supply more than half of the drinking water for public supply (fig. 1).

TERMINOLOGY

About 12 percent of Florida's total public supply and rural domestic needs are supplied by aquifers other than the Floridian, the Biscayne, and the sand-and-gravel. These "other aquifers" have been loosely identified by informal terminology, which is usually characterized by a name of location. In various parts of the State, these names have been used include shallow, surficial, secondary, water-table, semi-artesian, and intermediate aquifers. In some areas, where several local names apply to essentially the same regional water source, this variability may lead to confusion.

To define or delineate these "other aquifers" for purposes of this discussion, the term "surficial aquifer" shall refer to any other aquifer which is continuous with the land surface, and is a local source of supply for drinking water. The term "intermediate aquifer" shall refer to any aquifer that is below the surficial aquifer and above or within the unit containing the surficial aquifer. According to the U.S. Geological Survey (1977), the mean annual rainfall ranges from about 40 inches in the Keys to about 64 inches in a portion of the northern Florida Panhandle and exceeds 64 inches over most of the State. However, only a fraction of this amount is available for use as ground water. Recharge areas of ground water are seepage from rivers, lakes, irrigated lands, surface and subsurface flow from artesian wells, and subsurface flow from intermediate aquifers. Recharge from rivers and lakes occurs when lakes and streams are at higher elevations than the water table because of topographic control or irregular distribution of rainfall.

Discharge areas are seepage into rivers, lakes, swamps, and salt marshes, evapotranspiration from the soil, and flow from the soil zones, and as subsurface flow and draft from wells. Draft from wells has exceeded recharge, and water levels have declined in many parts of the State, particularly at Stuart in Martin County and near Fort Myers in Lee County. It has caused ground-water levels to decline 15 feet (1932-77) in the intermediate aquifer.

The surficial aquifers range in thickness from less than 1 foot in parts of Broward, Miami-Dade, Monroe, and Palm Beach Counties to more than 400 feet in Broward and St. Lucie Counties. Contour maps of the top of the surficial aquifer are available for all of the State and are compared in Klein (1954, p. 22, 25); Brown and others (1957, p. 71; 1962a, p. 86); Litcher (1960, p. 25); Clark and others (1972, p. 27); and Wolansky (1978, p. 18). Maps of the intermediate aquifer are available in Bishop (1956) and Fritchell (1972) for Duval County and by Wolansky (1978) for Charlotte County. Maps of the base of the surficial aquifer have been published by the U.S. Geological Survey (Bishop, 1956; Miller 1980).

The intermediate aquifers consist mostly of shell beds and lenses of limestone in the Tamiami and Hawthorn Formations which are not in direct hydraulic contact with the underlying Floridian aquifer. They are intermediate aquifers because they contain water under nonartesian or artesian conditions in Charlotte County (Sutcliffe, 1975), Collier County (Klein, 1972), and Lee County (Bishop, 1956), and Lee County (Boggess and others, 1975). Examples of water-bearing deposits in the Hawthorn Formation are the Hawthorn aquifer, water-supply area in Clay County (Clark and others, 1964); Bentely, 1977) and Duval County.

Water-bearing units of the lower part of the Hawthorn Formation and the underlying Tamiami Limestone parts of south Florida are intermediate aquifers. Because potable water is not available from the Hawthorn Formation and from the Tamiami Formation and from the Tampa Limestone, these formations have been considered separately from the Floridian aquifer in this present report for the State of Florida. Examples of reports discussing these units include Lee County (Boggess and Massner, 1975); and Sutcliffe (1975).

Water-supply wells in 24 of 30 sample areas less than 500 micromhos per liter (mg/L) chloride less than 10 mg/L and less than 100 mg/L dissolved solids. References: Brown and others (1952, 1962a, 1964); Healy, 1977.

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The highest concentrations of dissolved solids and chloride are found in those areas where the water-bearing deposits have become contaminated by saltwater intrusion. In some areas, the water is considered to be brackish and within the designation of freshwater, containing less than 10,000 mg/L dissolved solids.

Water in the surficial and intermediate aquifers normally contains low concentrations of dissolved solids. The maximum concentrations of dissolved solids in the intermediate hydrogeologic units are given in table 7, by counties.

Dissolved solid concentrations range from less than 15 mg/L to 100 mg/L in water-supply wells in the Pleistocene deposits in Manatee County (Brown, 1981) to more than 10,000 mg/L in the Hawthorn Formation in Lee County (Land and others, 1973). Chloride concentrations range from near zero in numerous Pleistocene and Holocene lenses to 100 mg/L or more in the Hawthorn Formation.

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