

STORIES OF THE FLORIDAN AQUIFER: FRAMING OF WATER ISSUES IN REGIONAL NEWSPAPERS

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When water is scarce, how should it be allocated? What is responsible water use and what is inappropriate? Which users are virtuous and which are villainous? There are no easy answers to these questions, but we are told that there are. We may, for example, be told and quickly accept that “corporations don’t care about the wise use of natural resources and can never be trusted,” or that “farmers are models of stewardship, always making the most of natural resources in order to feed humanity,” or exactly the opposite. Regardless of the narrative, the message is typically simple and absolute. Such simplicity is appealing. We like the ease of categorizing things as right and wrong, and so we listen to and tell ourselves stories that remove complexity and provide easy answers. But what are the implications of these stories on our water futures?

Through an examination of articles from six regional newspapers, we will examine how water stories are told in northern Florida and southern Georgia, a region that depends on the Floridan Aquifer – a resource of threatened water quality and quantity – to support population growth, agriculture, tourism, and industry. We will look at the frames used by journalists and their sources to describe the regional water situation, considering how the stories impart value judgements including suggestions of whose outcomes matter, which risks are worth taking, and who is playing by the written and unwritten rules of society. Finally, we will consider what the simplification of water stories means for water sustainability.

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