

What is the purpose of this project?

The Tampa Bay region continues to grow, and as it grows, so does the need for additional drinking water. The South Hillsborough Wellfield could supply an additional 6-12 million gallons per day of high-quality drinking water to meet the growing water needs of southern Hillsborough County while providing a net benefit to the aquifer.

What studies have been conducted to date?

Tampa Bay Water conducted thorough feasibility studies on the project in 2021 and confirmed the findings of those studies with an aquifer performance test in 2023. The studies show that the project is feasible, environmentally safe and affordable. The aquifer in this area is very productive, and the water is of high quality.

How many well sites will there be?

Tampa Bay Water is planning for eight production wells that could supply a total of 6-12 million gallons per day.

Where will the wells be located? How were the well sites chosen?

The proposed wellfield will be in the Balm area of Hillsborough County. Tampa Bay Water worked with Hillsborough County Water Resources Department to co-locate three withdrawal wells, connecting pipelines and treatment facilities on Water Resources property at the intersection of Balm and Balm Riverview roads. Tampa Bay Water is also working on a land exchange with Hillsborough County's Environmental Lands Acquisition and Protection Program (ELAPP) to locate four wells on the Stacy R. White Nature Preserve. Tampa Bay Water will also convert its existing test well to a production well.

What will the well houses look like?

The well head, electronics and pumping equipment will be contained in small, garage-style buildings, typically built of split-face concrete block. These well houses are inconspicuous and blend in with surrounding facilities.

How deep will the wells be?

The wells will be around 950 feet deep to maximize well productivity and avoid impacts to the local environment.

How much water have you acquired from purchased permits?

Tampa Bay Water has recently acquired five water use permits on five parcels owned by Land Reserve and Farmland Reserve in southern Hillsborough County. The capacity that can be retired from those permits and transferred to the South Hillsborough Wellfield is estimated to be 3.9 to 5.9 million gallons per day; the final capacity will be determined with the Southwest Florida Water Management District. For these permits, 10 percent of the groundwater impacts from the donor permits goes back to the environment as part of the transfer.

How much additional water are you seeking?

Tampa Bay Water is seeking an additional 6 million gallons of water per day, beyond the permits it has acquired, based on an aquifer performance test and groundwater modeling conducted in 2021 and 2023. Tampa Bay Water is working to purchase groundwater credits from Hillsborough County via its South Hillsborough Aquifer Recharge Project (SHARP) to support this additional withdrawal. The final withdrawal quantity will be determined by the Southwest Florida Water Management District during the permitting process.

How is it possible to develop a new wellfield in the Southern Water Use Caution Area?

Southern Hillsborough County is within a designated Water Use Caution Area established by the Southwest Florida Water Management District (District). To address both growing water needs in this area and saltwater intrusion into the aquifer along the coastline, the District has adopted a “net benefit” framework. In this area, any new withdrawal from the aquifer must be offset by retiring another source and result in an additional positive effect within the same aquifer.

Hillsborough County’s SHARP involves pumping reclaimed water into a salty, deep, coastal zone of the aquifer. This coastal recharge prevents saltwater intrusion and increases aquifer levels several miles inland from the recharge well location. This increase in groundwater levels enables freshwater withdrawals further inland to supply the area’s growing drinking water needs.

Does this project propose using reclaimed water for drinking water?

No. This project would withdraw fresh groundwater approximately 5 miles inland from the coastal SHARP wells.

Will this wellfield take water from local farmers or private wells?

No. Groundwater modeling results showed that water withdrawals from the proposed wellfield should pose no problems for existing permitted residential or agricultural wells in the area. Modeling results using aquifer performance test data show a maximum 3-foot drawdown from pumping in the Upper Floridan Aquifer in the center of the proposed wellfield and the drawdown quickly decreases away from the center of the wellfield. Water levels in the Balm area normally fluctuate between 15-20 feet during the year. Given the minimal anticipated water level changes, Tampa Bay Water expects that groundwater can be withdrawn from the area safely without harming existing legal users. However, if the wellfield is developed, Tampa Bay Water would investigate any well complaints and mitigate any water level impacts that are caused by the South Hillsborough Wellfield.

Will the South Hillsborough Wellfield project cause sinkholes?

Sinkholes are naturally occurring features throughout much of Florida, including Hillsborough County. Southern Hillsborough County is less prone to sinkholes due to the geology of the area, but they can still occur. If this project is selected for development, Tampa Bay Water will conduct an evaluation and risk assessment based on existing sinkhole records.

Will this project impact flows in the Alafia River?

No. The Alafia River is not close to the proposed withdrawal wells. Additionally, the Alafia River is not connected to the Floridan Aquifer in the Riverview area and pumping from the proposed wellfield would have no effect on river flow.

Will this project impact nearby springs?

No. There is a 250-foot confining layer separating the shallow aquifer from the deep aquifer, so withdrawals from the deep aquifer will not affect surface features like springs, lakes, rivers or wetlands. Additionally, the Southwest Florida Water Management District will not permit a proposed project that has a negative impact on these features.

Will this project induce movement of contaminants in the aquifer?

The Southwest Florida Water Management District will not issue a water use permit if a project causes pollution or causes known pollution to migrate. There are no known contamination sites that would affect this project. Tampa Bay Water reviewed water quality monitoring data from the Southeast County Landfill. That data showed no exceedances of water quality parameters, which means water quality in the Upper Floridan Aquifer is not impacted by the landfill; the landfill liner and 250-foot confining layer are protecting the aquifer. Additionally, water quality samples taken during the aquifer performance test shows groundwater in this area is of high quality.

When will construction begin? And when will it produce water?

Tampa Bay Water's board of directors approved moving forward with the South Hillsborough Wellfield at the Oct. 20, 2025, board meeting. Construction could begin as early as 2028, and the facility could begin supplying water to the region as early as 2030.