

2018 in Review

Looking back on 2018, we've had a year filled with hope, tragedy, and anticipation. The year started off with the office in Tallahassee being blanketed in snow. Of course, it was short lived but it gave us the feeling that miracles can still happen.

For the twenty-eighth year, the Florida Rural Water Association partnered with the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) to present the 2018 Focus on Change Seminar series. Focus on Change has proven to be one of our most popular seminars. This year over 1400 attendees were on hand to learn firsthand from DEP about the new regulations for 2018. I am sure that many of those that attended were glad they were aware of some of the new stipulations that they learned at Focus on Change.

In February The FRWA Board of Directors traveled to Washington DC to attend the National Rural Water Association Rural Water Rally. The Rally provides an opportunity for supporters of our industry to make their case directly to their elected officials. Florida Rural Water scheduled meetings with Representatives, Senators and their staff, so that they can share the Rural Water success story, answer questions and build important relationships.

In May of 2018, Florida Rural Water and Alabama Rural Water hosted another very successful Joint Technical Training Conference in Panama City, Florida. This Conference began years ago with each State Association hosting it every other year in their respective State. This Training Conference is unique because it offers utilities from both Alabama and Florida the opportunity to network and discuss how new and existing regulations affect their respective utilities and how each utility complies with those regulations. With over 500 attendees and a maxed out Exhibit Hall, this year's Conference proved to be one of the most successful events yet. Next year's Conference will be hosted by Alabama on May 28-30, 2019. Make your plans early to reserve your spot.

Spring gave way to summer and FRWA was busy preparing for our thirty-ninth Annual Conference. This year's event was held at the Daytona Beach Hilton. From the time the attendees arrived at registration until the last class was dismissed, the Conference was filled with lots of things to do and a wealth of information to take home. One of our attendees, when asked what he liked about the Conference commented, "The choice of classes, interesting topics, good food, facilities, and location". FRWA strives to present information that is pertinent to what is happening in today's water and wastewater industry and it looks like this year, we fulfilled your expectations. The almost 700 attendees went home with knowledge, memories, and a smile or two. The Exhibit Hall had to be redesigned to fit more than 100 booths. Please plan to attend the next year's Conference when we return to Daytona on August 6-8, 2019 for the fortieth edition of the FRWA Annual Technical and Training Conference.

September came in with a vengeance with Hurricane Florence hitting the Carolina coastline. The problem with Florence was more the record rainfall it produced (35.93 inches in one location) more than its category one hurricane wind status. FRWA responded to North Carolina Rural Water Association's requests for assistance gathering at the FRWA Warehouse in emergency response mode. Generators were loaded onto semi-trailers and headed north within a few hours.

October brought the Panhandle of Florida the strongest storm to strike the United States since 1992 leaving devastation in its wake. Hurricane Michael hit the coast on October 10th. Each time we are hit by a natural disaster, it changes those affected. The Florida Rural Water Association has been changed forever by Hurricane Michael. Staff have witnessed devastation like we have never seen before. Communities gone, businesses in ruin, homes damaged beyond compare, trees lifted out of the ground and toppled like tooth picks. This hurricane presented unique obstacles for FRWA, ranging from communication systems being down to major thoroughfares being blocked. FRWA is still helping the systems in the panhandle as they try to restore their systems to meet the needs of their customers.

2018 offered FRWA many challenges but we persevered. We have provided technical assistance to the small water and wastewater systems of Florida for forty years. In 2019 and we will continue to do so.