



## Warm Mineral Springs – Outstanding Florida Spring (OFS) Designation Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) for City Commission

### **1. What is an Outstanding Florida Spring (OFS)?**

Outstanding Florida Springs are designated under the Florida Springs & Aquifer Protection Act (2016) and include 30 major springs considered highly significant to Florida's water resources. OFS designation triggers enhanced oversight, potential Priority Focus Area (PFA) boundaries, and stricter requirements for nutrient management, wastewater, stormwater, and land use.

Warm Mineral Springs (WMS) is not currently eligible under the statutory definition and would require legislative action to be added.

### **2. Can Warm Mineral Springs qualify for OFS designation?**

Not automatically. WMS is a third-magnitude spring, while current law includes first-magnitude and selected second-magnitude springs.

The Legislature may choose to add WMS by name. This requires a sponsoring legislator, regional support, and multi-agency coordination. Prior legislative attempts have been made, but did not advance.

### **3. What benefits would OFS designation provide to the City?**

Potential benefits include:

- Stronger water-quality protections if impairment occurs
- Access to a formal statewide management structure (BMAP)
- Increased visibility and recognition for WMS
- Support for long-term aquifer and nutrient management
- A strengthened position when seeking state and federal grants  
*(Funding is not guaranteed)*

### **4. What are the potential drawbacks of pursuing OFS designation?**

- Significant long-term financial obligations if the spring becomes impaired



- Possible requirements for stormwater, wastewater, or septic upgrades
- Increased administrative workload (monitoring, reporting, coordination)
- Expanded regulatory oversight from FDEP and SWFWMD
- Potential impacts to planned recreation, tourism, or redevelopment at WMS
- Multi-jurisdictional management requirements involving Sarasota County, Charlotte County, Venice, SWFWMD, and others

## **5. Would OFS designation require immediate infrastructure upgrades?**

No. OFS designation alone does not mandate upgrades.

Obligations only occur if the spring is later declared impaired, which triggers a Basin Management Action Plan (BMAP).

## **6. What is a BMAP and what would it require from the City?**

A Basin Management Action Plan (BMAP) is a state-mandated nitrogen/risk reduction program developed when an OFS spring is impaired.

A BMAP typically requires:

- Identification of nutrient sources
- Long-term nitrogen reduction strategies
- Wastewater and stormwater retrofits
- Monitoring wells and water-quality sampling
- Annual reporting to FDEP
- Multi-decade compliance milestones

Similar municipalities report total costs of \$10M–\$40M+ over 20 years depending on infrastructure age and level of required upgrades.

## **7. How could OFS designation affect residents?**

If a future BMAP is triggered:

- Some homes in the PFA may require advanced septic systems (\$12k–\$22k)



- Possible septic-to-sewer conversions (\$5k–\$15k after grants)
- Fertilizer and irrigation restrictions
- Potential utility rate impacts if wastewater upgrades are needed

These requirements only occur if impairment is confirmed and tied to nutrient sources within the PFA.

## **8. Could OFS impact development or redevelopment in Activity Center 7A or near the Springs?**

Yes, depending on PFA boundaries and BMAP requirements.  
Development in these areas could face:

- Enhanced stormwater treatment
- Nutrient load reductions
- Potential restrictions on irrigation and fertilizer
- Additional permitting oversight

OFS alone does not change zoning or development rights, but it increases regulatory control if water-quality impairment occurs.

## **9. Would OFS designation impact recreation or future improvements to Warm Mineral Springs Park?**

Possibly. Some OFS-designated springs in Florida have restrictions on:

- Swimming or diving
- Shoreline activities
- Infrastructure upgrades

Any future impairment or adoption of Minimum Flows & Levels (MFLs) could introduce additional constraints.

## **10. What is a Minimum Flow & Level (MFL), and would OFS require one?**

An MFL defines the minimum water level needed to prevent harm to the spring ecosystem.  
WMS does not currently require an MFL.



However, if the spring experiences reduced flow or impairment, SWFWMD may establish one. MFL adoption could impact:

- Municipal water withdrawals
- Private wells
- Regional pumping strategies

## **11. What regional partners must be involved in an OFS designation or BMAP?**

Because the springshed and PFA would extend beyond city limits, coordination would be required with:

- Sarasota County (upgradient areas)
- Charlotte County (downstream hydrology and utility interactions)
- City of Venice (stormwater basin ties)
- SWFWMD, FDEP, and Department of Health

A regional coalition would be essential for legislative support and BMAP execution.

## **12. Are there alternative protection strategies the City can pursue without OFS?**

Yes. The City can implement:

- Conservation easements (including the current 60-acre easement in progress)
- Local water-quality ordinances
- Post-development nutrient controls
- Stormwater retrofits
- Interagency partnerships with SWFWMD, FDEP, and USGS
- Grant acquisition independent of OFS status

These measures offer targeted protection with significantly lower financial risk.

