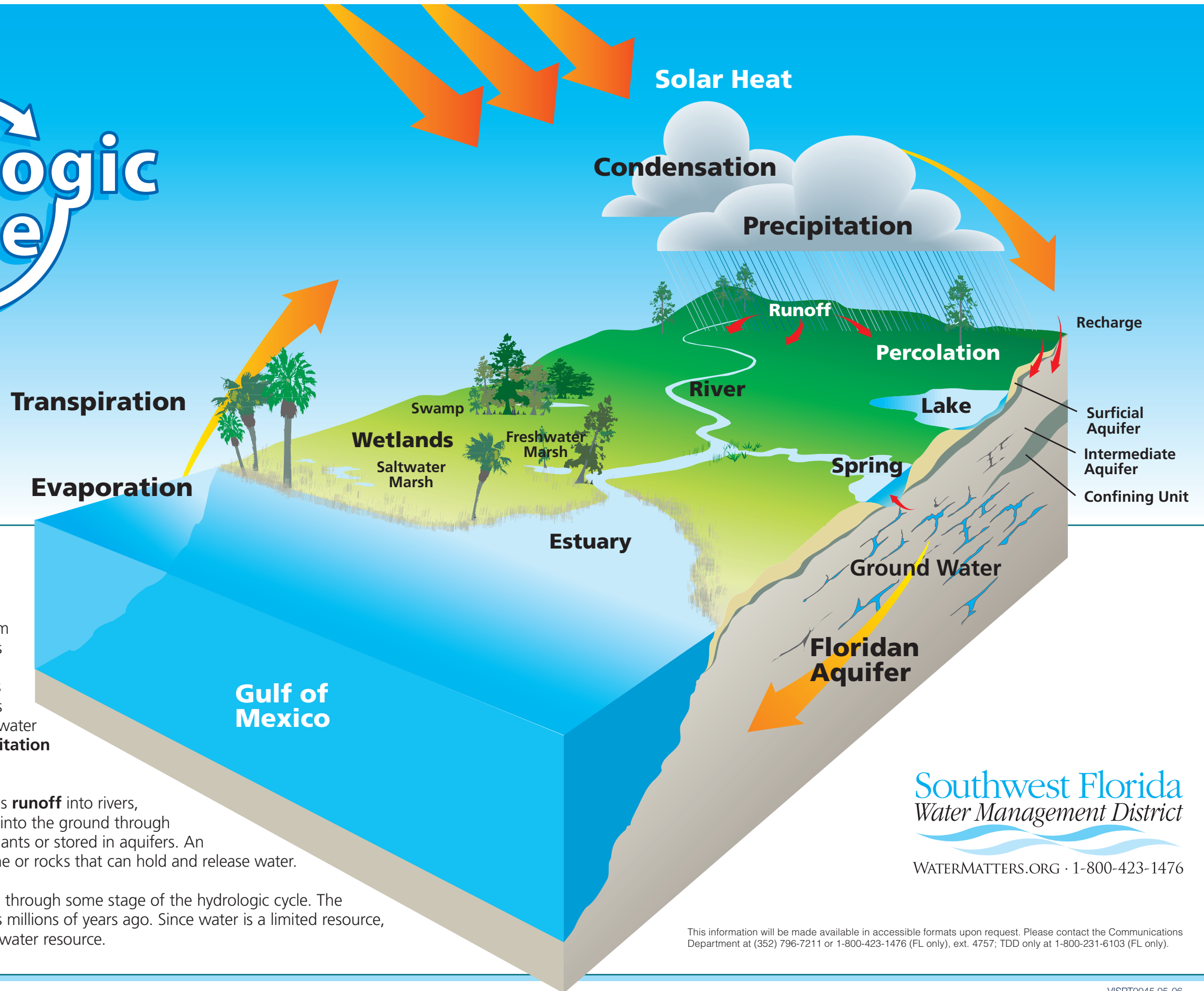


The Hydrologic Cycle



Water moves through our environment in a process known as the **hydrologic cycle**. The cycle begins when the sun's energy warms water bodies on the earth's surface, such as lakes, oceans and rivers. This heat leads to **evaporation**, when water changes from liquid to vapor. The heat of the sun also causes plants to release water vapor in a process called **transpiration**. As vapor rises, the tiny water droplets eventually stick together and form clouds in a process called **condensation**. Clouds then grow heavy with water and must release it back to the earth through **precipitation** such as rain, snow, sleet or hail.

When water falls to earth, some of it lands or flows as **runoff** into rivers, lakes and other water bodies. Some of it is absorbed into the ground through **percolation**. Once in the ground, water is used by plants or stored in aquifers. An **aquifer** is a spongelike underground layer of limestone or rocks that can hold and release water.

Water is recycled over and over again, always passing through some stage of the hydrologic cycle. The amount of water on earth today is the same as it was millions of years ago. Since water is a limited resource, humans must be careful to conserve and protect the water resource.

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This information will be made available in accessible formats upon request. Please contact the Communications Department at (352) 796-7211 or 1-800-423-1476 (FL only), ext. 4757; TDD only at 1-800-231-6103 (FL only).