

Water quality a priority for Charlotte County

By Hector Flores

With the recent announcement of the winners of the 2022 One Charlotte, One Water calendar contest, it's a good time to discuss the county's commitment to water quality. Congratulations first to the contest winners and thanks to all who entered their photos of our wonderful waterways. Calendars are available at facilities around the county while supplies last. Visit www.CharlotteCountyFL.gov for locations.

One Charlotte, One Water is the concept we adopted from the U.S. Water Alliance's One Water campaign. The alliance's website states it succinctly: "The One Water approach views all water — drinking water, wastewater, stormwater, grey water and more — as resources that must be managed holistically and sustainably.

In its strategic plan, the County Commission states, "water resources are one of the most important assets the county has and protection of those assets, in all forms, is a top priority for the board." To that end, the board last year approved hiring its first water quality manager, whose job is to coordinate all water-related activities in the county, develop local, regional, state and national partnerships to identify water quality issues and marshal resources to address them.

Among projects now underway is a water quality dashboard that gathers all information about testing, monitoring, restoration initiatives and reclamation projects in one online database to improve public awareness of both impaired waters and efforts to improve water quality. That project is part of an overall water quality monitoring plan being developed.

The county commitment to water quality is not new. Many readers are aware of the septic-to-program currently underway. In 2013, the commission adopted a resolution creating the East and West Spring Lake septic-to-sewer conversion program that has converted more than 2,300 homes and vacant lots to central sewer service.

The board later commissioned a report identifying high-priority areas for future conversations based on criteria including proximity to waterways, population density and septic system ages. Since adopting that report's findings, the board has approved conversion projects in the El Jobean and Ackerman/Countryman neighborhoods that will switch about 1,600 properties to sewer. For information about utility projects, visit www.CharlotteCountyFL.gov/departments/utilities/projects.

County staff are planning a water quality summit for March 7, 2022 at the Charlotte Harbor Event and Conference Center to highlight these and other efforts and share tips on doing your part to preserve and protect our waterways. I'll have more information and details in this column in the coming weeks.

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