

## **Improving water quality is a critical task**

By Ray Sandrock, Charlotte County administrator

As I mentioned in an earlier column, we created a water quality task force to enable us to address the County Commission's strategic focus areas. The task force includes staff from multiple departments and divisions and one early job is to identify what we are already doing.

The scope of the undertaking is highlighted by breaking down all the categories of water, including surface, ground, well, storm, potable, waste and reclaimed. The relative quality of each type is determined by their designated uses and state or federal findings of impairment.

In an organization as large as county government, not everyone can be fully aware of all the work done by everyone else. This is why improving "line of sight" is so important. While not everyone will know exactly what their colleagues are doing, connecting their own work with strategic goals gives them an understanding of how their job contributes to the overall success of the county and the community.

That said, identifying all of the projects underway is necessary to give county administration and the board a broad awareness of our efforts, progress and potential future initiatives. Probably the most high-profile work underway is the sewer master plan, which kicked off with the East and West Spring Lake septic-to-sewer project. Design work is already being done on the next phase of the plan in El Jobean and the next area after that will be in the Ackerman-Countryman area of Port Charlotte, south of Edgewater Drive. The Utilities Department has also undertaken a wastewater line repair and replacement program to address the many older pipes installed by General Development Utilities several decades ago.

Other projects include testing water quality and monitoring and restoring water-filtering clam and oyster populations in Charlotte Harbor. We performed sediment removal from stormwater canals to improve their functionality and installed a floating treatment system in Sunshine Lake to prevent future algae buildup. Our fertilizer ordinance aims to reduce nutrient loads from residences and businesses. We'll soon be restocking the snook fishery to help it recover from last year's red tide outbreak. That's not all, but you get the sense of how much is going on.

The task force also is reviewing what other communities have done when faced with water quality challenges. One finding is that the economic impact of allowing water quality to degrade is a key driver behind convincing community leaders to act.

The County Commission is committed to restoring and protecting our water. Staff is actively working on many projects to meet the board's goals. The task force will bring additional information and proposals to the board in the coming weeks and months. We pledge to be diligent stewards of the natural bounty our county enjoys. I'll share more progress reports in future columns to let you know what we're doing and how it is working.

### **Stewardship award**

Ralph Mitchell, Charlotte County's University of Florida-Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences extension agent, wrote to me about a distinguished honor received by one of our master gardener volunteers:

“I had the opportunity to attend a ceremony today where one of our master gardener volunteers, Becky Copenhaver, was awarded the Environmental Stewardship Award from the Florida Department Environmental Protection for [an] article she wrote about mangroves. DEP South District Office Director Jon Iglehart came up to present it. Mr. Iglehart said that their staff references the article when talking with new residents, snowbirds, or general customers as it is a perfect resource to talk about mangroves.”

Congratulations to Becky on her recognition. We're fortunate to have so many people donate their time and expertise to help make Charlotte County a better place. Whether it's at the Extension Service, our libraries, Keep Charlotte Beautiful, the Community Emergency Response Team, advisory committees and more, volunteers are deeply appreciated by me and my colleagues.

To learn more about volunteering, visit [CharlotteCountyFL.gov](http://CharlotteCountyFL.gov) and click Volunteer on the bottom left side of the page.

### **Softball tourney**

Last month, the Punta Gorda/Englewood Beach Visitor & Convention Bureau partnered with Florida Half Century Softball to host one of their spring tournaments at Carmalita Field in Punta Gorda. The tournament, which Charlotte County has hosted the past several years, attracted 25 teams (23 of which came from outside Charlotte County). These teams generated approximately \$116,000 in estimated direct expenditures, which translates into over \$185,000 in total economic impact. In addition, more than 180 hotel room nights were tracked for the two-day event.

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