

Administrator's Update for 8/5/15
RESTORE Act MYIP available for public comment
By Ray Sandrock, County Administrator

The Charlotte County RESTORE (Resources and Ecosystems Sustainability, Tourist Opportunities, and Revived Economies) Act Multiyear Implementation Plan (MYIP) identifies the proposed plan for spending the initial \$726,453 in Direct Component funds under the RESTORE Act. Projects funded through the RESTORE Act must fit into eligible categories that are identified in the legislation. The Charlotte County RESTORE Act Advisory Board recommended four projects for funding under the initial Direct Component funding allocation to Charlotte County.

The Harbor Walk project, located in the Charlotte Harbor Community Redevelopment Agency area, will create a boardwalk, fishing pier, and boat taxi launch. This project is seen as the economic cornerstone for future commerce and economic development. During the 1970's, as growth prospered in other areas of Charlotte County, consumer interest strayed from this historic commercial business district and properties were simply abandoned and depreciated due to the lack of owner interest and investment. Phase I of the Harbor Walk is already under construction. RESTORE funds will be used toward the cost of constructing a transportation corridor linking both sides of U.S. 41 for pedestrians and cyclists. This project is eligible for RESTORE funding under the category of "infrastructure projects benefiting the economy or ecological resources including port infrastructure".

The Fisheries Monitoring Project objective is to better understand the status of fish communities in tidal tributaries of Charlotte Harbor and to assess the impacts of the habitat restoration work. RESTORE funds will be used towards the cost of monitoring, sampling, data analysis, and similar costs. The Fisheries Monitoring Project meets the eligibility criteria by implementing a priority action identified in the Charlotte Harbor National Estuary Program Comprehensive Conservation Management Plan Up-Date 2013, defined as a "federally approved marine, coastal, or comprehensive conservation management plan, including fisheries monitoring" under the RESTORE Act.

The Restoring Bay Scallops project is designed around the best available science for restoring the bay scallop population to Charlotte Harbor and falls under the RESTORE Act category of "restoration and protection of natural resources, ecosystems, fisheries, marine and wildlife habitats, beaches, and coastal wetlands of the Gulf Coast Region." Bay scallops were once abundant in Southwest Florida waters and supported a mainly commercial fishery. By the mid-1960's, however, the bay scallop populations in southwest Florida had collapsed. Scientists are not sure what caused the disappearance but degraded water quality, overharvesting, and loss of seagrass habitat are suspected. The first big rebound in bay scallop populations in Pine Island Sound occurred in 2005, two years after a restoration project took place in the same location. The success of this restoration has led scientists and citizens to hope one day bay scallops may return to sustainable levels in Charlotte Harbor. Funds will be used for controlled releases of bay scallop larvae and juveniles.

The Restoring Impaired Waters of Charlotte Harbor project is a large, multi-phased wastewater expansion project to reduce potential sources of pollutants entering the impaired waters of Charlotte Harbor. This project implements strategies under the Charlotte Harbor National Estuary Program Comprehensive Conservation Management Plan Update 2013 through reducing the dependence on septic systems. RESTORE Act funding will be utilized for failing or aged septic systems and falls under category of "federally approved marine, coastal, or comprehensive conservation management plan, including fisheries monitoring."

Public comment period ends Aug. 22

The MYIP is currently available for review and public comment online - visit www.CharlotteCountyFL.gov and click "RESTORE Act MYIP" in the Hot Topics list. Paper copies are available by calling 941.764.4996. Comments should be submitted to Mindy.Collier@CharlotteCountyFL.gov by Aug. 22, 2015.