

Charlotte County update for 2/10/16

Charlotte monitoring for mosquitos, Zika virus

By Raymond Sandrock, Charlotte County Administrator

Charlotte County has been actively monitoring reports about the Zika virus in recent days. As of Tuesday, there have been no reported or confirmed cases of the virus here. All 16 confirmed cases in Florida, including two in Lee County, were travel-related, meaning nobody has contracted the virus from a mosquito bite received in the state.

The virus causes flu-like symptoms, such as red eyes, rash, fever, malaise and joint and muscle pain, which can last from seven to 10 days. A large majority of people infected, however, show no symptoms, but can be hosts for the virus.

Charlotte County Mosquito Control has increased surveillance and is developing a program to combat the mosquitos that may carry the Zika virus. Mosquito Control operates both ground and air spraying missions to reduce the number of mosquitos in Charlotte County, is testing hand-held units in some areas and is deploying new monitoring traps that specifically target the type of mosquitos known to carry the virus. Staff is also responding to calls about localized mosquito hatches and standing water, which is a breeding ground for mosquitos.

Residents and visitors should take precautions against mosquito bites throughout the year, especially after periods of rain, which puddles in swales, outdoor containers or even discarded trash. Wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants when you are going to be in an area where mosquitos are likely to be and use insect repellent.

The Florida surgeon general has been providing daily Zika updates, which can be found on the state Department of Health website www.floridahealth.gov.

Federal agenda

Commissioners on Tuesday reviewed the county's federal legislative agenda with our Washington lobbyist Greg Burns of Van Scoyoc Associates. Among the issues we are monitoring are RESTORE Act funding from settlements reached with BP and other companies as a result of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill; potential changes in the National Flood Insurance Program; the prospective expansion of energy exploration in Florida; and the status of the Environmental Protection Agency's new rule expanding its jurisdiction over waterways in Florida and the rest of the country.

We are also keeping tabs on agency appropriations for transportation, economic development, housing and environmental protection. For example, we continue to seek federal assistance for our Charlotte Harbor Water Quality Initiative, which includes the replacement of aging, failing septic systems throughout Mid-County. In addition, we are pursuing grants from the Economic Development Administration to fund improvements in the Parkside, Charlotte Harbor, and Murdock Village community redevelopment areas.

Commissioners also received updates on several tax and bond legislation that may have an impact on our budgets, including capital improvement program financing and tourism development funding.

Florida Huddle

Staff from the Charlotte Harbor Visitor & Convention Bureau participated in the Florida Huddle, the state's foremost travel trade event attended by domestic and international tour operators and journalists interested in doing business in Florida. Produced by VISIT FLORIDA, the show took place in Tampa the last week in January. Staff met with several tour operators and journalists and returned with several leads for potential business for Charlotte County accommodation and attraction businesses. Many journalists from Florida and Canada are interested in learning more about the destination in order to write about the area for their respective publications.

Busy day

January 30 was a busy day in Charlotte County. Hundreds of youngsters and their parents attended the annual Kids Fest at Port Charlotte Beach Park and hundreds more participated in Hands Across the Harbor activities at Bayshore Live Oak Park.

The Kids Fest featured prizes, giveaways and character meet-and-greets, along with presentations from the Historical Center and appearances by personnel and equipment from the Natural Resources Division, Charlotte County Sheriff's Office and Fire/EMS.

At Hands Across the Harbor, runners, walkers and cyclists navigated a variety of courses from Bayshore Live Oak Park over the Gilchrist Bridge to Punta Gorda. The event, celebrating the connections between the Charlotte Harbor and Punta Gorda community redevelopment areas, included a half-marathon, 5K races and fun walks, a longboard race and several cycling courses up to 30 miles. The morning activities wrapped up with an awards ceremony and a pancake breakfast provided by Charlotte County Fire/EMS personnel to raise money for the Muscular Dystrophy Association.

Thanks to all the county department employees and volunteers for their hard work organizing and executing these events, sponsors who supported them and all the participants who came out to enjoy all Charlotte County has to offer.

Ray Sandroock is the Charlotte County administrator. Readers may reach him at raymond.sandroock@charlottecountyfl.gov.