

SOURCE STUDY NEEDED FIRST

Several environmental groups want a study conducted to determine the source of nutrient pollution coming into the Picayune Strand State Forest before the next phase of the Picayune Strand Restoration Project begins. At an October 28th Big Cypress Basin Board meeting, the next phase of the project was announced, which focuses on identifying potential parcels of land where new water treatment facilities can be built.

As such, environmental and engineering reviews will be conducted to determine what design is needed to reduce phosphorus and nitrogen levels. But, during the public comment portion of the meeting, representatives from the Florida Wildlife Federation, Audubon of the Western Everglades, Audubon Florida, the Conservancy of SW Florida, and Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation voiced concern that the land acquisition step may be premature. At a minimum, they would like to see a parallel study done to identify the source of pollutants as this data would help the board better understand the costs and scope of the land acquisition project.

While land availability will help the Basin board determine what solutions and thresholds can be achieved, board member Nanette Rivera noted that there still needs to be a plan to reduce pollutants in water coming from three pinch points at the top of the Forest.

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Water Quality Advisory



As the voice of REALTORS® in the Naples area, NABOR® has and will always advocate for action to reduce or eliminate any man-made or environmental threats to home ownership, property values and the living standards in Florida.

DOCUMENTARY DETAILS FUTURE OF WATER CRISIS

In an effort to shed light on the real and potential risks of waterborne contamination – including harmful algal blooms – Calusa Waterkeeper produced and recently hosted a virtual viewing of its documentary “[Waterborne](#)” in early November.

The documentary also shed light on a lack of transparency and communication to the public from government agencies about the seriousness of waterborne pathogen levels in over one million square miles of tributaries that currently have high-levels of impairment in Southwest Florida, according to Jim Watkins, board president of the non-profit organization that aims to educate, promote and protect local waters.

“There’s been little notice or warning signs posted so the public doesn’t really know the full risks and likely negative future health impacts of being in or near many of our popular water recreation areas,” said Watkins, who added that “certain areas of the Imperial and Estero Rivers have pollutant levels that can cause illness.”

“Air quality monitoring canisters placed around Southwest Florida by FGCU recorded the presence of airborne toxins in polluted waters as far as 10 miles away from their origin,” noted Watkins, “but you’re not seeing any added attention or action responding to this data from health departments.”

As part of its advocacy efforts, Calusa Waterkeeper is throwing its support behind [The Safe Waterways Act](#) (SB 604 / HB 393), which would require county health departments to post public notices whenever elevated bacteria levels impair a swimming area in its jurisdiction, not just at beaches.

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REALTORS® that are concerned about the area's water quality and want to provide real-life solutions to homeowners who are seeking ways to reduce their impact and sources of pollution, can download a helpful flyer on [Clean Water Tips](#) in the Resources section below.

A second viewing of "Waterborne" will take place on January 12, 2022, at Collaboratory in downtown Fort Myers. After the documentary, there will be several open discussion groups to engage the community and inspire more support and action. Secure tickets to the showing at www.calusawaterkeeper.org/events.

New LOSOM: Corps Plan for Future Lake Discharges

In the three months since it released eight versions of the proposed [Lake Okeechobee System Operating Manual \(LOSOM\)](#), the Army Corps of Engineers has worked to find one suitable version that outlines a schedule for lake releases over the next eight years. On October 26th, the Corps submitted its final proposal, which will increase lake discharges each year flowing into St. Lucie estuary via the Port Mayaca Lock & Dam. The new manual also outlines a plan to reduce high flow events before or after a tropical storm or hurricane, to the west through the Caloosahatchee River.

Many projects to direct and help the flow of water into the Everglades are complete, and a reservoir south of the lake where more water can be contained, cleaned, and released into the Everglades, is underway.

But not all parties are happy with the new LOSOM. Environmental groups in north Florida are frustrated because they were counting on a plan that stopped all discharges to the estuary. Without infrastructure like more storage capacity south of the lake, these groups are concerned the St. Lucie estuaries will be irreversibly damaged by the new LOSOM discharge schedule in the next five to ten years. But the new manual actually reduces discharges to the east compared to the 2008 manual, and could include no discharge activity east of the lake when it is lower than 16 feet.

In response to the release of the proposed manual, Chauncey Goss, chairman of the South Florida Water Management District governing board said, "The Corps provided a draft framework that clearly takes into consideration the recommendations the governor made, and that were echoed by the governing board, to reduce harmful estuary discharges while making more water available to the environment and the Everglades while helping improve water supply reliability in the dry season."

The new LOSOM will be released November 16th and guide lake releases through 2030.



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But the land parcel project and future treatment plans only address cleaning stormwater coming from Golden Gate and pump stations in Eastern Collier that flow into the watershed.

Brad Cornell with Audobon said water coming from urban areas and farms is also problematic, and that pollution source control is needed. "If we can reduce nitrogen and phosphorus [north of U.S. 41], then we can reduce the amount of land needed for the process downstream."

Paul Julian of the Conservancy, also reminded the board that certain conservation lands including Collier-Seminole State Park and Rookery Bay are protected and cannot be considered as potential land sites.

Cornell noted that the Basin board is in a unique position to inspire the dialog necessary to initiate a parallel study.

RESOURCES

[Calusa WaterKeeper](#)

[Clean Water Tips Flyer](#)

[Captains for Clean Water](#)

[Collier County WaterKeeper](#)

[Daily Red Tide Reports](#)

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