



## Update from Lee County

Monday, August 13, 2018

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### Water quality update from Lee County

Efforts to mitigate water-quality issues throughout Lee County continue under the leadership of the Lee Board of County Commissioners with county staff, contracted vendors and several state entities, including the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, the Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission and the Florida Department of Health.

#### **Board actions:**

The Board at its regularly scheduled August 7 meeting:

- Voted unanimously to ask for federal resources. The Board's resolution urges President Trump to recognize a major disaster exists in Lee County because of the high concentration and prolonged presence of harmful red tide in the Gulf of Mexico and harmful blue-green algal blooms in the Caloosahatchee River and surrounding waters.
- Heard from mayors and representatives the county's six municipalities, who adopted their own State of Local Emergency.
- Extended the existing county State of Local Emergency for blue-green algae and issued a second State of Local Emergency for red tide.

The Board at its August 21 meeting is anticipated to approve several agenda items that will use Tourist Development Tax reserve funds for beach cleanup and marketing (see below under "Coastal" update).

#### **Waterway update (blue-green algae):**

The county has also created a test program to remove the blue-green algae from some of its most impacted waterways using a \$700,000 grant from the state Department of Environmental Protection. It will remove, process, treat and dispose of harmful algae blooms from select test sites in unincorporated Lee County and affected municipalities, most notably Cape Coral. Lee County has mobilized AECOM, one of the nation's largest construction and engineering firms with expertise in environmental cleanup, under a state contract for emergency cleanup deployments.

The week of August 5-12:

- The amount of slurry pulled from Lee County waterways to date totals at an estimated 17 tankers at 5,000 gallons each for a total of 85,000 gallons.
- Recovered material is being processed for disposal at the site of the North Lee County Reverse Osmosis Plant.
- The algae/water mix collected is tested to assist and verify treatment methods being deployed to meet state-imposed water-quality standards.

- This is a pilot program. County staff is in contact daily with the state DEP and the contractor. The county continues to refine the process and evaluate the results.

**Coastal update (red tide and red-drift algae):**

Lee County Parks & Recreation staff has been cleaning county beaches, parks and boat ramps affected by the red tide fish kill. The county has hired CrowderGulf, a debris-removal contractor, to assist in cleaning the beaches and shorelines, using both on-land and boat operations. To date, the red-tide collection totals 1,361 tons.

Areas cleaned on land August 5-12 included:

- Boca Grande
- Sanibel Causeway islands
- Fort Myers Beach (including Access 40 north to Crescent Beach, Lynn Hall Park and Bowditch Point Park)
- Bonita Beach

Areas cleaned by boat August 5-12 included:

- Captiva Island bayside (South Seas to 'Tween Waters)
- Upper Captiva / Safety Harbor canal
- Pine Island's southern canals in St. James City

Public fish waste dumpsters remain in place until further notice.

Note: The City of Sanibel, Town of Fort Myers Beach and Captiva Erosion Prevention District continue their clean-up efforts in their areas.

The Lee County Tourist Development Council met August 9. Actions taken include votes on the following recommendations to the Board to approve:

- Funding necessary to cover emergency beach clean-up expenses through the end of fiscal year, which ends Sept. 30.
- Up to \$1 million for a marketing campaign to launch after current conditions improve.
- Purchase of two Surf Rake (\$61,000 each) machines for beach and shoreline cleanup.

Note: All requests would be funded from existing tourist tax funds.

**Additional updates:**

Tallahassee representatives of the Florida Department of Environmental Protection and the Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission met with Lee County's senior leadership team August 8 to discuss red tide and blue-green algae.

The Lee County Visitor & Convention Bureau participated in a statewide conference call August 9 with Visit Florida, the Florida Department of Health, Florida Fish & Wildlife Commission and MOTE Marine Laboratory and Aquarium regarding the red tide bloom affecting six counties along the Gulf of Mexico.

- VISIT FLORIDA is working with county tourism industry partners, state agencies and other stakeholders to mitigate the red tide's effects from a visitor perspective, and will communicate with visitors when the beaches are clear and back to normal. In addition, VISIT FLORIDA presented an action plan to ensure our partners, stakeholders and consumers are armed with updated information as we work together to manage and minimize the impacts of red tide.

**Website:**

[www.leegov.com/waterqualityinfo](http://www.leegov.com/waterqualityinfo)