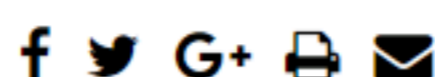



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Solutions to Avoid Red Tide (START) Launches Regional Healthy Ponds Collaborative

Today's News



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Stormwater is the biggest contributor to water pollution in Florida. Building on a successful pilot program that helped about a dozen Sarasota County communities bolster, and beautify, their stormwater retention ponds, Solutions to Avoid Red Tide (START) recently secured a \$250,000 grant from Charles & Margery Barancik Foundation to jumpstart its efforts in reducing the excess nutrients in our coastal waters and increasing public awareness about the importance of preserving our marine environment. The recent grant will go even further—developing a regional initiative the grassroots organization is calling “Healthy Pond Collaborative.”

The effort officially kicked off during a press conference yesterday morning, hosted at Marie Selby Botanical Gardens.

According to Sandy Gilbert, START’s scientist behind stormwater pond management, stormwater contributes 65% of the nitrogen in Sarasota Bay, which feeds red tide and causes other damage to water quality and wildlife. Many mistake 6,000 bodies of water in Sarasota County for lakes, he says. But in reality, they are ponds and 4,500 of them are classified as wet detention ponds. Dr. Abbey Tyrna, Sarasota County UF/IFAS Extension, follows up by noting these manmade ponds cannot manage or balance themselves by only operating at 40% to 60% efficiency in removing the excess of nutrients, nitrogen and phosphorus. “Anything in excess can be toxic,” says Tyrna. “And this case is no exception.” This overdose of nutrients tends to lead to erosion, frequent algal blooms and loss of wildlife. In addition, that water eventually becomes too full to store and ultimately overflows, taken downstream by canals, ditches and pipes to our federal- and state-regulated water. This natural phenomena year after year contributes to water pollution and every Floridian’s anticipatory summer shake-down: red tide.

So what can help combat this from happening on almost an annual basis? “Going straight to the source,” states Gilbert. And, education and plants.

Gilbert and Tyrna shared the key solutions Healthy Pong Collaborative will set forth. Firstly—creating and distributing a step-by-step pond enhancement guide/manual to homeowners and associations encompassing best practices of how to better maintain their neighborhood ponds—including holistic approaches such as reducing the input of herbicides, fertilizer, plan and lawn clippings, and domestic animal fecal matter. And secondly—a group of scientists and volunteers plan to restore and enhance ponds’ littoral zones with the installation of native wetland plants. These species of five or six aquatic plants not only create a low-maintenance buffer around the perimeter of the pond and secure the bank, but they also naturally improve water quality and biodiversity—removing the excess of nitrogen, phosphorus and other non-point pollution before entering the pond—and thus avoiding disastrous drainage altogether.

This effort will help establish state-wide and national models that can be recreated in other communities as well, they mention.

Based on the grant given and existing projects, the collaborative expects to help upgrade 10 to 12 community/neighborhood projects a year and three to five larger, high visibility projects with parks and golf courses.

Partners include START, Charles & Margery Barancik Foundation, Sarasota County’s Neighborhood Environmental Stewardship Team, the UF/IFAS Extension Sarasota County, and the Science and Environment Council of Southwest Florida. The work was in part inspired by Gulf Coast Community Foundation’s ‘Water Quality Playbook.’

Photo courtesy of Charles & Margery Barancik Foundation. [Learn more here.](#)

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