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A "Do List" to Improve Water Quality

Guest Correspondence

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SATURDAY JAN 16, 2021 |

BY MARK PRITCHETT

SRQ DAILY SATURDAY PERSPECTIVES EDITION



Healthy, beautiful water defines our sense of place here in Sarasota County. I challenge you to find a piece of promotional material for tourism or economic development that doesn't feature a prominent visual of our sparkling waters. Our region's economy, reputation, and quality of life depend on clean waterways.

But when a water crisis comes along—which seems to happen more and more often—we tend to have more questions as a community than responses. Following a harmful algae bloom, sewage spill, or fish kill, many people ask, "Why doesn't someone do something?" or "What can I do to help stop this?"

A new resource published last week answers those questions.

The **Community Playbook for Healthy Waterways** (<https://www.waterqualityplaybook.org/>) is a "how to" manual for transforming the environmental quality of water in our region through coordinated, community-wide action. It recommends 43 specific activities to secure the health of our waterways, wildlife, and lifestyles.

This interactive website, available at www.WaterQualityPlaybook.org (<http://www.WaterQualityPlaybook.org>), addresses everything from wastewater treatment and stormwater management to fertilizer use, landscaping practices, and wetlands restoration. Users can easily access and organize the site's rich information according to their particular interest, role, or expertise.

The Playbook is aimed at decision-makers in all sectors and at all levels of our community: Policymakers and government staff. Business and agricultural leaders. Natural resource managers. Nonprofit environmental organizations. And HOA boards that oversee rules and contracts for things like lawn care and water use in their communities.

Because we all have a part to play, the team that compiled this comprehensive Playbook (over more than a year of intense research, analysis, and discussion) includes experts from science, agriculture, resource management, and more. Gulf Coast Community Foundation's Jon Thaxton chaired this steering committee. You can see who joined him by going here (<https://www.waterqualityplaybook.org/credits/>).

Jon, who has worked for decades on environmental conservation in our region, is quick to note that we aren't starting from zero. He points to Sarasota County's pioneering efforts in fertilizer and stormwater management, seagrass restoration, and watershed land conservation as instructive examples of collaborative success. But for generations, we have created lifestyles, landscapes, and industries that increasingly contribute nutrient pollution, particularly nitrogen, into our waterways. The same natural resource that draws us here and defines our way of life has been pushed to a tipping point of impairment. We must act now to reverse it. The Playbook is our guide for that action.

Gulf Coast Community Foundation's vision in conceiving and creating this resource is that Sarasota County's waterways meet their designated human uses—drinking, shellfish harvesting, swimming, fishing—while sustaining healthy ecosystems that support natural processes and resilient native plant and animal communities. By following the Playbook, we can turn back the hands of time to correct mistakes of the past while also preparing for inevitable new pressures of the future. These actions will create healthier waterways for a healthier economy and healthier wildlife and habitat.

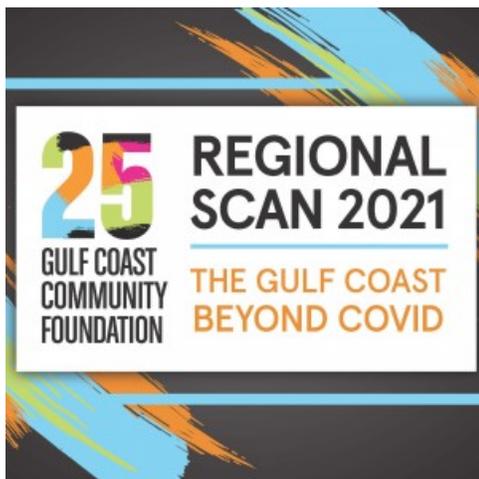
There's an economic imperative to take the actions laid out in this manual. There is also a social obligation. Alan Jones, owner of Jones Potato Farm and a respected statewide leader in sustainable agriculture, is part of our Playbook team. He summed it up this way: "The Playbook is really a broad perspective of concerned citizens and concerned organizations in our community coming together in an effort to achieve a common goal. At the end of the day, I would like to think that all of us want to leave the world a little bit better place than we found it."

Mark Pritchett is president and CEO of the Gulf Coast Community Foundation.

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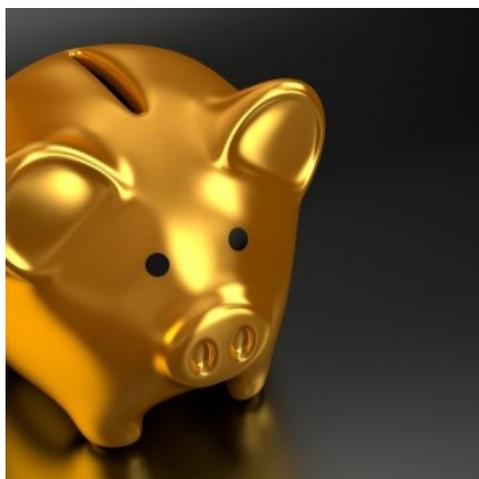


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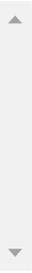
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