

March 5, 2008

County invites residents to discuss Roberts Bay North Watershed

Sarasota County invites residents living in and around the Roberts Bay North watershed to an interactive workshop to discuss solutions to protect and improve the quality of the area's water bodies. The workshop will be held from 9-11 a.m., Saturday, March 15, at the South Gate Community Association, 3145 South Gate Circle, Sarasota.

Sarasota County has two water bodies named Roberts Bay. This workshop will discuss the land and water bodies that drain into the Roberts Bay North watershed, which consists of Phillippi Creek, Matheny Creek and Siesta Key. It is completely separate from Roberts Bay, which is in Nokomis.

Urban development throughout the watershed has brought major change over the past 50 years. "Natural areas were converted to residential, commercial, agricultural and public use," Kelly Westover, project manager, said. "The watershed is almost completely built out now, and very few natural areas remain."

There is little mangrove habitat left, and natural streams have been channelized for agriculture, flood and mosquito control.

"Area residents, builders and developers certainly didn't set out to threaten sea life or water quality," Westover said. "Nonetheless, more people and development have placed greater stress on all our natural systems, including the Roberts Bay North watershed."

Without natural filtration, rainfall streams directly into the bay, carrying with it pollutants from stormwater runoff. New stormwater and landscaping regulations are a major part of the solution.

"Low-impact design manages stormwater on individual lots by capturing rainfall on-site," Westover said. "This approach closely mimics nature by helping control downstream flooding, reducing water pollution and the imbalance of fresh and salt water in the estuaries. The county's landscape and fertilizer management ordinances prescribe appropriate plant materials, as well as fertilizer type and application schedule."

At the March 15 public workshop, county staff will lead a discussion with residents to address these issues and ways they can continue to work together to reverse the trends that threaten sea life habitat and water quality in this watershed.

For more information about the workshop, contact the Sarasota County Call Center at (941) 861-5000 and ask to speak to someone about watersheds.