

# WATER QUALITY REPORT

**Sarasota County Government** is committed to protecting and enhancing water quality wherever and whenever possible. The health of our surface waters is measured in many ways, including total nitrogen, chlorophyll-a, and biological indicators such as seagrass health and scallop population. The primary pollutant affecting all of these metrics is the amount of nitrogen entering our waterways, which can come from septic systems to fertilizer to wastewater discharges, and more. We can all make a difference in reducing nutrient pollution and protecting local water quality.

This report highlights projects and initiatives related to water quality implemented by Sarasota County in January through June 2023. The activities are organized by the lead department, but there is significant collaboration between departments and the community on many of these projects. For more updates, please visit [scgov.net/waterquality](https://scgov.net/waterquality).

## Communications

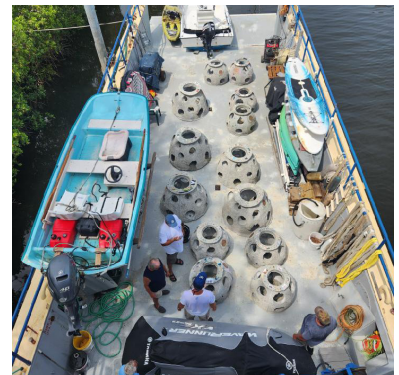
The following metrics highlight the external communications specific to water quality that occurred during the first six months of 2023.

- **Media**
  - Five media releases
  - 69 media pitches (to include red tide pitches)
  - Five media contacts
- **Videos**
  - Five videos totaling 315 views on YouTube
- **Social Media**
  - World Water Day – Reach 2,980; Engaged Users 171
  - February Water Quality Update – Reach 1,021; Engaged Users 34
  - January Water Quality Update – Reach 1,013; Engaged Users 40
  - Water Quality Story Maps – Reach 2,170; Engaged Users 151
  - April Water Quality Update – Reach 1,207; Engaged Users 42
  - June Water Quality Update – Reach 1,212; Engaged Users 18



## Parks, Recreation and Natural Resources

- Four fee simple purchases were completed using Environmentally Sensitive Lands Protection Program (ESLPP) funds.
  - On Feb. 23, Sarasota County closed on the 290-acre LPI property in the Eastern Ranchlands Protection Priority Site.
  - On April 14, Sarasota County closed on the 0.6-acre Friendship Club property in the Warm Mineral Springs Creek Protection Priority Site. This protects Warm Mineral Springs Creek, home to the endangered West Indian manatee.
  - On May 24, Sarasota County closed on the 3-acre Welsh property in the Sleeping Turtles South Protection Priority Site.
  - On June 2, Sarasota County closed on the 32-acre LPI property in the Curry Creek Protection Priority Site.



- In January, the Nokomis Beach Island Feasibility Study was completed.
- Multiple reef deployments totaling 50.5 tons at Silvertooth Reef and M2 Reef were completed.
- As mitigation for oyster bags destroyed by Hurricane Ian, 210 oyster bags were deployed at Blackburn Point Park.
- A pilot program to hang 20 vertical oyster gardens from the dock at Blackburn Point Park occurred.
- TripAdvisor Travelers' Choice rated Siesta Beach No. 2 in the United States and No. 11 in the world.

## Public Works

- The county received a \$14.9 million grant for construction of the Alligator Creek Stream Restoration Project from National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association (NOAA). Design continues for this project with 90% plans achieved in June.
- Phase One of the design of the Phillippi Creek Northwest Tributaries Natural Systems Restoration Project is underway.
- The Healthy Ponds Guide was developed in a partnership between Sarasota County, Solutions to Avoid Red Tide (START), the Science and Environment Council, and Barancik Foundation. It is being used in outreach to neighborhoods and homeowners to help them maintain their stormwater ponds in accordance with Best Management Practices (BMPs).
- Staff and partner agencies hosted an HOA Success Workshop that featured HOA leaders presenting on their successful implementation of stormwater best practices in neighborhoods throughout Sarasota County. The audience of 88 homeowners included HOA pond leaders and others interested in learning how their HOA can improve its practices through the provided information and demonstrations during the four-hour workshop.
- Dona Bay Phase Two construction surpassed 80% completion.
- Dona Bay Phase Three (aquifer recharge) predesign continued, with the consultant conducting surface water monitoring and data analysis to determine long-term water quality trends and beginning to develop a water budget that will determine the number of aquifer wells needed. The county received 90% plans and specifications for the required exploratory well.
- Dona Bay Phase Four (Kings Gate Weir rehabilitation) construction progressed, with shop drawings being approved by the county and fabrication of control gates and catwalk beginning. Rehabilitation of the gated weir structure adjacent to the Kings Gate community will allow for better control of the freshwater input into Dona and Roberts bays, which will help stabilize the freshwater/saltwater dynamics.
- The stormwater capital improvement project portfolio and dashboard was completed. This consolidates prior project lists and allows for filtering of proposed projects including by benefit type, so all projects with a water quality benefit can be viewed at once.
- The Groundwater Nutrients Evaluation Study continued. This project is intended to identify nutrient "hotspots" and propose best management practices and projects to reduce nutrient loading.
- More than 95% of the downed trees from Hurricane Ian have been removed from county drainage canals. Only 12 drainage canals remain to be cleared.
- Two significant applications, per National Pollutant Discharge Elimination



System (NPDES) criteria, were reviewed for new developments that have a site area greater than 300 acres and include areas with changing land use types of development with new stormwater facilities where none existed previously.

- Presented on the Alligator Creek Stream Restoration Project at the Coastal & Heartland National Estuary Partnership (CHNEP) Watershed Summit in June.
- The Stormwater Environmental Utility was awarded the Florida Stormwater Association’s Outstanding Achievement Award.
- Sarasota County was awarded the Tree City USA designation from the Arbor Day Foundation for the 32nd consecutive year.



## Public Utilities

- The county commission approved an ordinance to regulate sources of sanitary sewer inflow and infiltration from private collection systems and to address inflow and infiltration from privately owned gravity sewer systems that flow into the county’s sanitary sewer collection system.
- Resolution No. 2006-182 was amended to establish irrigation days and times for lawns and landscaping relating to landscape watering restrictions.
- The county commission amended the ordinance for Chapter 22, Article VI, of the County Code, the Water Efficient Landscaping Regulations Code.
- The work assignments were approved for the Sanitary Pipeline Infrastructure Rehabilitation in Green Manor Estates Units 2, 3, 4 and 5.
- Engineering services were approved for the county’s Water Infrastructure Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition (SCADA) system at Pump Stations No. 1, 3 and 4 to enhance overall system communication and standardization.
- The Central County Sanitary Sewer Evaluation Survey was completed.
- Staff presented the Septic System Replacement Implementation Program’s initial findings with respect to scope, timeframes and costs to the county commission.
- Venice Gardens Water Reclamation Facility (WRF) design workshops were completed.
- The Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (WIFIA) funding presentation for Bee Ridge Advanced Wastewater Treatment (AWT) was completed. Bee Ridge AWT project is on schedule and on budget at this time.
- Staff completed the National Association of Sewer Service Companies (NASSCO) training.



## Solid Waste

- The county executed an agreement with Garney Companies, Inc. for the design and installation of a pretreatment aeration system within the leachate collection tank to improve the discharge’s water quality. Construction is currently expected to start in the first quarter of 2024.
- Permit application and plans for two approximately 700,000 gallon leachate storage ponds were received. Construction bidding is anticipated to occur in the fourth quarter of 2023.
- Staff initiated the solicitation process for Reverse Osmosis Leachate Treatment Services.

## UF/IFAS Extension and Sustainability

- The Water Quality Story Map, which showcases 10 different strategies being implemented by the county to protect water quality in an engaging and interactive way, was completed. After a county commission presentation, the tool was launched to the public on May 9.
- The freshwater educational module (seven sessions) and the coastal systems module (five sessions) of the Florida Master Naturalist Program were delivered to participants from government, private and nonprofit sectors.
- Workforce training was provided to marine contractors operating in Sarasota County on planning, installing and maintaining shoreline buffers made with natural resources (“living shorelines”).
- Fifteen new participants in the Master Gardener Volunteer Program completed comprehensive training on topics promoting healthy landscapes that minimize detrimental water and ecosystem impacts. This is adding to the existing total 121 active volunteers.
- Staff completed the Florida Waters Stewardship Program workshop series, with participants receiving training and field trips focused on water resources, supplies, quality, coastal habitats and more.
- Stormwater pond sampling and analyses were conducted at five Sarasota County communities to assess water quality and management practices, as part of the multi-agency Healthy Ponds Collaborative effort.
- Information on managing stormwater ponds to optimize water quality and ecosystem health was presented at multiple venues, reaching nearly 200 community members.
- Five homeowners associations and nonprofits were educated on Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ practices that enhance lawn aesthetics while protecting water supplies and other natural resources.
- Staff conducted 34 home irrigation evaluations, delivering information with the potential to reduce nutrient runoff and annually save up to 100,000 gallons of water per 1,000 square feet of landscape.
- Staff delivered water quality education on resources, pollution, microplastics and more to 760-plus youth across multiple settings.
- The online Bay-Friendly Fertilizing Tools (for residential and golf courses) was updated to help individuals assess fertilizer need and application rates and minimize adverse impacts on waters and ecosystems.
- A clothing swap event was hosted to promote the reduced environmental impact and water savings from reusing clothes.

