



# WATER QUALITY 2025 ANNUAL REPORT



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Sarasota County Government remains committed to protecting and enhancing water quality across Sarasota County.

This report showcases the initiatives, projects and partnerships in 2025 to safeguard water quality in Sarasota County. Collaboration between county departments, community members and stakeholders played an important role in these efforts. For more information, please visit [scgov.net/waterquality](https://scgov.net/waterquality).

## EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

In 2025, Sarasota County implemented numerous programs to educate residents and business owners about water quality.

Sarasota County UF/IFAS Extension (Extension) held educational workshops and events throughout 2025, including presenting information about Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ benefits to over 3,300 individuals through classes, field trips and workshops. Plant Clinic help desks, staffed by Master Gardener Volunteers, assisted 10,220 contacts on topics related to landscapes, gardening, insects, and more. Extension also distributed over 275 native trees for replanting at six Arbor Month-related educational events, sharing information about tree selection and care. Three multi-day Florida Master Naturalists Programs focused on coastal systems, invasive plants, and freshwater restoration. Professional training related to best management practices for pesticide and chemical applications continued to be offered in English and Spanish. Extension also provided energy and water saving information and sustainability tools to over 1,600 people at various events, reducing air



*UF/IFAS Extension leads LIFE field trips for students.*

and water pollution. Reaching the next generation, Extension's Learning in Florida's Environment (LIFE) Program provided more than 1,500 of Sarasota County School District's 4th and 5th grade students with an array of natural resource education and hands-on activities at Myakka River State Park and Lemon Bay Preserve, with topics including water quality, mangroves, coastal ecosystems, aquatic organisms, and more.

Additionally, Extension hosted the 19th Annual Plant Sale and EdFest, attracting more than 800 attendees to learn more about the Florida-friendly and native plants, best practices for landscaping and gardening, and more. Extension also launched the "Brewing Ideas" community discussion series,



*UF/IFAS Extension distributes native trees for Arbor Month.*

which drew more than 110 attendees to learn from local experts about issues including water quality, aquatic ecosystems, marine mammals, and more.

Extension also facilitated the 20th Annual Sustainable Communities Workshop, a milestone event that drew more than 200 community leaders, residents, experts, and officials to explore practical solutions for building resilient communities and recognized nine individuals as “Sustainability Champions” for their impactful actions.

Sarasota County’s Public Utilities team continued education on Fats, Oils, and Grease (FOG) to help residents better understand how to help avoid blockages in the sanitary sewer system. In 2025, Sarasota County’s Fats, Oils and Grease Program regulated 886 establishments and met a 90.12 percent compliance rate. Reducing fats, oils and grease from the wastewater systems helps reduce wastewater spills and protect Sarasota County’s water quality.

Planning and Development Services (PDS) coordinated the distribution of 127 rain barrels. Through the Rain Barrel Program, PDS works closely with Extension to make rain barrels available for purchase to the public and provide educational workshops for how to utilize them to collect stormwater and reduce stormwater runoff into water bodies.

Sarasota County’s Stormwater team coordinated the 2025 Neighborhood Environmental Stewardship Team (NEST) calendar youth art competition, with the theme of “Ready When It Rains,” encouraging environmental practices such as picking up trash, starting a rain garden, and reducing fertilizer use to reduce stormwater pollution.

Stormwater also held two community outreach workshops to educate the public on the Little Sarasota Bay Watershed Management Plan, which the team continued work on in 2025.



*Public Utilities performs Fats, Oils and Grease inspection in the Community.*



Stormwater educates the public on watershed management.

Throughout 2025, Sarasota County's Communications Department created monthly videos educating the community on Sarasota County's water quality projects and initiatives. These videos reached nearly 30,000 people and engaged over 6,000 people in conversations surrounding water quality online. View these videos and learn more about our ongoing efforts to support water quality using the links below:

- **January Water Quality Update: Sarasota County Raincheck Rebate Program**
- **February Water Quality Update: Water Quality Annual Report is Live!**
- **Water Quality Annual Report Video**
- **April Water Quality Update: Mangroves at Lemon Bay Park**
- **May Water Quality Update: LIFE Field Trips**
- **June Water Quality Update: Litter Cleanup Events**
- **July Water Quality Update: RainCheck Program Update**

- **Water Quality Consumer Confidence Report is Live!**
- **August Water Quality Update: Water Quality Semi-Annual Report is Live!**
- **September Water Quality Update: Oyster Surveys**
- **November Water Quality Update: 25 Years of Environmentally Sensitive Lands Protection Program (ESLPP)**
- **December Water Quality Update: Bee Ridge AWT Facility Opens**
- **Bee Ridge Update Video: Facility is Treating All Flow**

The Communications Department additionally worked with local media partners to share dozens of stories on water quality. Through media pitches on important water quality events, answering water quality-related queries and providing on-camera interviews, communications helped share our water quality story with over 200 media outlets, reaching their potential audiences of viewers and subscribers, that spans far and wide.

## HABITAT RESTORATION AND WATER QUALITY MONITORING

Sarasota County continued to prioritize habitat restoration and water quality monitoring throughout 2025.

Over the last year, the Parks, Recreation and Natural Resources (PRNR) team removed roughly 2,500 cubic yards of debris from Sarasota County waterways. They also collaborated with Stormwater to complete a county-wide water debris survey to help state contractors with their subsequent removal of any potentially hazardous debris within Sarasota County waterways.

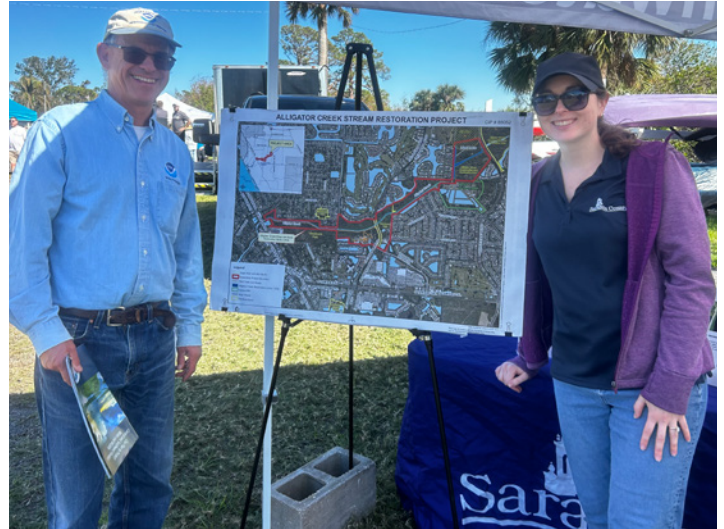
The Stormwater team removed 583 pounds of floatable trash from Sarasota County waterways using WaterGoats. WaterGoats use a buoy system to float on top of the water and collect trash from continuing to move toward our Sarasota County bays.

The Stormwater department also kicked off the **RainCheck Rebate program** in 2025, which encourages property owners to implement small-scale projects on their property to improve stormwater water quality and percolation. Over the past year, the Raincheck Rebate Program received 32 applications with 30 projects completed and all rebates issued.

Additionally, PRNR, in coordination with its partner Reef Innovations, deployed a total of 93 tons of artificial reef material across 11 deployment events. These deployments consisted of various sizes of reef ball structures and were placed at the Lynn Silvertooth Reef, Tom Wallin’s Reef, and the Hart’s Family Reef. PRNR installed two oyster prisms as part of a pilot effort and coir logs at Blackburn Point Park as an effort to promote oyster growth and reduce shoreline erosion.



Stormwater removes litter using WaterGoats in local waterways.



Stormwater shares public education at the 2025 Alligator Creek Festival.

Finally, Sarasota County’s stormwater team continued work on the Alligator Creek Stream Restoration project. The plan review for the project reached 90 percent completion and the team held a community outreach meeting on the project and shared education and awareness at the Alligator Creek Festival on Nov. 22, 2025.

In 2025, Sarasota County’s Stormwater team obtained 26,220 field and lab water quality samples from Sarasota County bays and creeks, which were analyzed and submitted to the Florida Department of Environmental Protection. Staff also continued monitoring scallops (adults and spat) and oysters as a measure of monitoring water quality.

Monitoring seagrass habitats was also a priority to determine information on water quality. The PRNR team completed the annual seagrass survey at South Lido Park. Stormwater completed its annual summer seagrass survey, all bays (eight bay segments and 40 bay sub-segments) were monitored for a total of 160 sites.

The Stormwater team also spent 2025 installing groundwater monitoring wells and beginning the sampling and analysis process for the Groundwater Nutrients Study. This study helps determine the nutrients present in groundwater that may contribute to water quality in Sarasota County’s waterways, bays and estuaries.

Health and Human Services also completed water quality monitoring. In partnership with Mote Marine Laboratory, Health and Human Services also collected 370 beach bacteriological samples and conducted 360 red tide assessments. Samples were laboratory analyzed for *K. brevis* cell counts and results were reported to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, appeared on the statewide red tide map, and were posted weekly on [OurGulfEnvironment.net](https://www.ourgulfenvironment.net).

## LAND CONSERVATION

Last year, conserving land continued to be at the forefront of water quality initiatives. In 2025, Sarasota County purchased over 62 acres of land through the Environmentally Sensitive Lands Protections Program (ESLPP) and Neighborhood Parkland Program (NPP), including parcels of land adjacent to the Celery Fields, Dona Bay, Snook Haven Park and the Myakka River. These acquisitions help protect water resources from contamination from stormwater runoff, recharge the aquifer, provide floodplain, and protect existing waterbodies for wildlife shelter and food source.

Sarasota County celebrated 25 years of ESLPP in 2025 and acquired its 100th land acquisition in November 2025.

In December 2025, the county acquired the 3.59-acre West Coast Inland Navigation District property in the City of Venice through NPP, which will help protect the Intracoastal Waterway, Roberts Bay and Lemon Bay from pollutants and contamination from stormwater runoff.

## STORMWATER

Sarasota County prioritized stormwater maintenance and improvements as a means for improving water quality throughout the past year. The creation of a standalone Stormwater Department included a new Sediment Abatement program to address sediment build-up in tidal creeks for the purpose of improving stormwater drainage and reducing flood risk.

This program first focused on Phillippi Creek, which is approximately seven miles long and part of the Sarasota Bay Watershed. Phillippi Creek plays an important role in the water quality of Sarasota County’s bays as it collects and conveys stormwater to Roberts Bay. As a remedial step within the sediment abatement program, the Stormwater team



Stormwater clears 100,000 cubic yards of sediment from Phillippi Creek.

began its first phase of dredging in Phillippi Creek in December 2025. Through dredging, an estimated 100,000 cubic yards of sediment are expected to be removed, along with significant amounts of nitrogen, phosphorus, and other pollutants. The second phase of dredging in Phillippi Creek is expected to start near the end of 2026.

In 2025, Stormwater also led two drain-marking events in areas draining to Little Sarasota Bay to raise awareness about how pollutants impact water quality and aquatic habitats. A total of 40 storm drains were marked to help prevent pollutants from entering the stormwater system and local bays.

## EXCEEDING REGULATORY COMPLIANCE AND IMPLEMENTING STANDARDS FOR DEVELOPMENT

Exceeding the regulations set and creating new standards was paramount over the last year, and no project reflects this more than the Bee Ridge Water Reclamation Facility Conversion and Expansion project. This plant, which was brought online in December 2025, uses leading technology to remove nitrogen and phosphorus from the water, protecting the water quality of Sarasota County's bays and estuaries. This is Sarasota County's largest capital improvement project to date and shows the county's prioritization of water quality.

Throughout 2025, the Public Utilities team worked with Capital Projects to coat 53 manholes throughout the county and rehabilitate 16 lift stations. These upgrades reduce potential spills in the community by reducing the infiltration of stormwater into Public Utilities' systems.



*Public Utilities brings the Bee Ridge Advanced Water Treatment Facility online.*

Planning and Development Services conducted 16 National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System inspections of industrial operations, construction sites and high-risk facilities and conducted 75 proactive water pollution/stormwater inspections on commercial operations. Finally, the PDS team responded to and investigated almost 150 water quality complaints and concerns from the community over the past year.

In 2025, Sarasota County's departments worked together to continue improving and protecting water quality. With the help of staff, volunteers, and the support of Sarasota County leadership and residents, the county looks forward to continuing to prioritize these projects in the next year.





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Learn more about **Sarasota County's water quality initiatives** when you visit [scgov.net/WaterQuality](https://scgov.net/WaterQuality).

For questions or concerns about water quality,  
call **311** or **941-861-5000**.