

## **WHAT YOU CAN DO TO PROTECT THE WATER QUALITY OF THE CALOOSAHATCHEE RIVER**

The Caloosahatchee River is the life blood of Southwest Florida. Southwest Florida's tourism industry, which is the major source of our economy, depends upon its most valuable natural resource, the Caloosahatchee. Southwest Floridians and visitors come to fish, boat, and swim in the Caloosahatchee. Restaurants and hotels, fishing guides and kayak vendors, plus many other businesses rely on the Caloosahatchee's attractions. Waterfront homes and businesses owe their value to the River.

If the water quality of the Caloosahatchee is degraded by harmful algal blooms, our economy, our health and our environment are endangered. Harmful algal blooms like blue-green algae and Red Tide, cause fish kills and manatee deaths, illness to humans, and decline in the tourism industry. No one wants to smell or see "green pond scum" outside their window!

Harmful algal blooms occur when there is excessive nutrient pollution, particularly nitrogen and phosphorus, that runs into the River. Fertilizer runoff, animal and pet waste, pollution from agriculture, and discharges of polluted water from Lake Okeechobee all contribute to the problem.

**Ways you as a homeowner, can reduce the pollution and keep the Caloosahatchee waters clean:**

- **Pick up pet waste and dispose of it in the trash; don't let pet waste wash into the storm drains**
- **Wash your car on the lawn, not the driveway, so the car soap can wash into the grass and not flow into the storm drain**
- **Any chemicals, paints, etc. should be disposed of properly and not dumped onto impervious surfaces where they could be washed into the storm drain**

**Most storm drains do not have filters in them so anything that is flushed down into the storm drain eventually winds up in our river and other waterways**

- **Where applicable, abide by the city or county fertilizer ordinance**

**Lee County and its municipalities; Ft. Myers, Ft. Myers Beach, Cape Coral, Bonita Springs and Sanibel all have fertilizer or landscape management ordinances. Be sure to read their respective ordinances which can be found on their government website page.**

**Here is a summary of the Lee County Fertilizer Ordinance:**

- **Fertilizers containing Nitrogen and Phosphorus shall not be applied June 1 – September 30.**
- **Nitrogen content; no less than 50% slow release nitrogen is required. No more than 4 lbs. of nitrogen per 1000ft<sup>2</sup> per year.**
- **Phosphorus content; 0.25 lbs. P205/1000ft<sup>2</sup> per application nor exceed 50 lbs.**
- **A spreader deflector is required to be used near all waterbodies /wetlands and impervious surfaces.**
- **Mandatory 10 foot no fertilizer buffer zone near all waterbodies and wetlands measured from top of bank.**
- **Homeowners are encouraged to follow the practices outlined and referenced in the ordinance and to seek education with the Lee County Florida Yards and Neighborhoods Landscape Program, however education is not mandatory**

**To learn more about the Lee County Fertilizer Ordinance, contact Karen Bickford, Lee County Division of Natural Resources at 239-533-8706 or [kbickford@leegov.com](mailto:kbickford@leegov.com)**

**For information on the Florida Yards and Neighborhoods Program, contact Tom Becker at Lee County Extension Services at 239-533-7515 or [tbecker@leegov.com](mailto:tbecker@leegov.com).**