Playing In/Protecting Paradise
An insider’s look from a reporter’s notebook

High red tide counts along coast of SWFL coast pose threats

Red tide counts along the Lee County shoreline are high enough to cause fish and marine mammal kills as well as breathing difficulties in humans.

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission released updated numbers Wednesday, which shows a bloom stretching from Tampa Bay to Marco Island.

Harmful algal blooms like this can cause adverse impacts to the local tourism and real estate industries. Florida Realtors say property values were suppressed by nearly $1 billion a year because of poor water quality, based on numbers from 2012.

Improved water quality in Lee County would increase property values by an estimated $541 million, the report says.

Any bias, the report says, would make those numbers worse, not better.

Fish kills and respiratory issues have been reported just to the north of Lee County, according to the University of South Florida, and models used to predict red tide movement shows it drifting closer to Lee and Collier counties over the weekend.

Karenia brevis is the organism that produces the neurotoxic red tides. Fertilizers and other pollutants don’t cause red tide, but outbreaks can be fed by extra nutrients running through the Caloosahatchee River and off the local landscape.

Karenia brevis occurs naturally, and blooms have been documented here for more than a century. Recent measurements in Lee County waters have been as high as 150 million cells per liter, which is 150 times more than the state reports.

Large events like these show up on satellite imagery, meaning concentrations are high enough for red tide to be seen from space.

The next report will be issued Friday and can be found at myfwc.com/REDTIDESTATUS.