

REDUCING THE IMPACTS OF

red tide

Let's explore the facts of red tide. We hear so many varied "facts," and often they contradict one another. Many come from sources we want to trust. But many have agendas to promote. How do we determine what to believe?

Common sense is a good gauge here.

We need to balance what we factually know with what makes sense. Consider how human impacts influence this natural phenomenon. After we educate ourselves, we need to decide how to proceed with addressing known sources of nutrients and other contributing factors. Please understand we can't just fix this. The better we comprehend these problems the sooner we can reduce impacts and alga blooms.

We know red tide is an alga, but it's easier to think of try to think of it like cancer: It's bad, and we don't really understand why or how it grows out of control. We certainly do have an impact by feeding it. How can we lessen its impacts? Feed it less. We don't have anything that we can kill it with effectively, at least not without killing everything else.

We can't control it either and certainly need more studies to gain factual knowledge. But we need to aggressively pursue solutions, not simply study it to death.

One issue I'm concerned with is that each independent group works on its ideas. How can we get them to work together? Maybe require sharing under our current funding processes?

I believe we are much of our own problem. Look at where outbreaks occur.

They start around dense population centers.

Our creator balanced things. We have destroyed for profit and pleasure without consideration of the consequences.

We destroyed the natural wetland filters to build waterfront homes. Most have sea walls that further reduce filtering. We dredged the ICW in early '60s, severely impacting natural water flows that flushed our bays. Most of us have green grass and landscaped yards that are fertilized for beauty without consideration of nutrients added to waters. We created thousands, yes thousands of miles of dead-end canals, effectively stagnant pools collecting nutrients. We have Sahara dust, Mississippi River nutrients, aquifer seepage and everything else as possible sources.

Most counties have minimum impact fees to encourage growth for profit. Charlotte County is controlled by pro-growth leaders.

We elected them. We can also educate them about what this has done to cripple the sustainability of our economy. We absolutely need growth — but we also need to balance this with prudent restraints to maintain our environment!

Our property values support government spending and directly effect each owner. We can balance these challenges if we acknowledge and address them. County and regional planners must work together to understand the need to protect what we have left, and to restore what has been lost already. If we don't factor in the real impacts of new developments, it will destroy our property values. Plummeting property values take down the tax base, and then local governments will lack the funds to function. Scary, but something to consider.

What can we do to lessen such natural disasters? First, we must acknowledge that we will have disasters, and then build and plan to minimize human impacts to our land and waters. It's not unforeseeable that hurricanes and floods will occur here. Our infrastructure should be able to handle it.

We need to reduce and filter runoff waters better than we do now. Observe how fast retention ponds cattails grow! This shows us how well they work and how much nutrients we contribute to these waters. Consider the impacts of all the chemicals and medications we flush and introduce to our waters. Sooner or later this to will catch up with us.

We need to look at ways to reintroduce flows to those dead-end canals and remove restrictions on natural water flows to our Gulf passes. Consider cutting a few direct flows from Cedar Point to Stump Pass. It's complicated but some significant improvements could be accomplished with minimum efforts.

How do we pay for all of this? Those impact fees. If we raise them, new construction will cost a little more — but it will also increase the value of existing structures. This is what balancing growth with its impacts and building a sustainable economy means.

Of course, this idea butts heads with big-money developments, but it's absurd that we could allow huge new waterfront projects without mitigating their impacts.

It is to the long-term advantage of people who will buy in those development to be sure they add value to our economy without reducing quality of life. Everyone needs a cleaner, healthier environment — even the people who don't live here yet.

To resolve our problems, we must get the scientific facts, include common sense considerations, and work together to fix things. If not, we all pay the consequences.

Many of us have our life savings tied up in our homes. We are risking everything if we don't educate ourselves and get real answers. We must hold our governing individuals and bodies accountable. We must show them we care and help them understand working solutions. Waving a sign will not solve our problems. Yelling at our leaders is not the answer.

Please understand that only God can just fix this. It's not the fault of any one politician or leader. Big Sugar, agriculture, and Lake O are not the biggest nutrient contributors to Charlotte Harbor and Lemon Bay, as some would lead you to believe. That comes down the Caloosahatchee.

Look instead at what's upstream on the Peace River. Phosphate mining and its water usage, destruction of natural filtering, land destruction, and polluted gypsum stacks and tailing ponds — that's a huge issue that requires our attention. They are trying to dig up as much as they can before we hold them accountable. The fish and wildlife killed by their spills are as bad as red tide or worse.

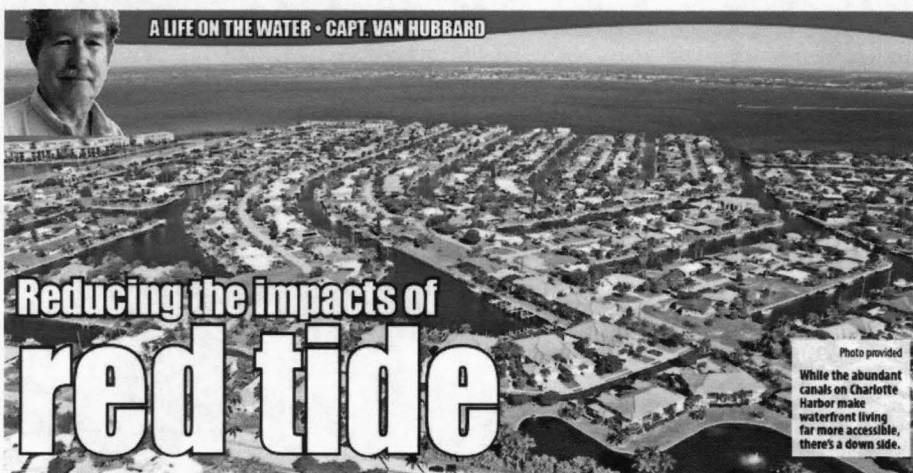
They have killed several rivers, several times. We have no idea what will happen after the last sinkhole mess.

I'm not saying we shut it down, but we can certainly require them to mitigate their impacts. They must pay to clean up leftover ponds and stacks. It will cut into their profits, but we absolutely must protect Florida's natural environments. Again, look for long-term sustainable practices that work for all of us. "Rape, plunder and then move on" is not a sustainable model.

Right now, I'm not seeing any red tide but others are. Let's stay on top of this, but let's try to do it without shutting down our already struggling local beach and waterfront economies. Thank you for caring. Let's work together to help.

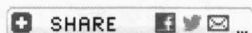
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While the abundant canals on Charlotte Harbor make waterfront living far more accessible, there's a down side.

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