

**Charlotte Sun**  
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## **All should shoulder sewer upgrade costs**

It has been determined by a study conducted by Florida Atlantic University that the Peace River and Charlotte Harbor are suffering from an overdose of nutrients. The study determined that this overdose of nutrients can lead to “algae blooms” and potentially contribute to “red tide.”

The river waters and the bay have recently experienced an extensive fish kill which has been attributed to “red tide.”

This fish kill results in dead fish washing up on shore and floating in the canals leading to an acrid smell and potential health hazard. It also is detrimental to wildlife which ingest the dead fish, potentially resulting in the death of that wildlife. The same FAU study determined that one of the primary sources of these nutrients, nitrates and phosphates is septic tank effluent that enters the Peace River directly from adjacent properties and from properties along canals that eventually empty into the Peace River and Charlotte Harbor.

The septic tank effluent can enter the river and canals in different ways. The effluent from the septic tanks can leach into the water table and migrate into the canals and river directly.

It can also leach into the water table and enter storm sewer pipes by infiltrating through the storm sewer joints. Some of these storm sewers eventually empty into the canals or rivers.

The fecal coliform, which can occur in septic system effluent, could pose a health problem should the effluent rise to the surface over drain fields or reach local beaches. The other source of nutrients is run off from fertilizer applied to lawns and agricultural runoff.

There is no question that this problem needs to be solved.

Charlotte County is in the process of developing a “Charlotte County Sewer Master Plan.” The objective of this “master plan” is to develop a sewer system that will collect wastewater from properties in Charlotte County and deliver it to plants where it can be treated.

The effluent from these wastewater treatment plants will then be converted to an inert liquid, some of which will be delivered to users such as golf courses to be used as irrigation water.

The effluent that is not used for irrigation will be injected into deep wells as prescribed by the Florida Department of Environmental Services.

The solid waste from the wastewater treatment plants will be land applied or deposited in landfills. Pathogens will be destroyed through the use of a halogen such as chlorine or through the use of ultraviolet light treatment.

Who is responsible for the large number of septic tank systems that exist in Charlotte County? One can blame General Development Corp., which subdivided much of Charlotte County into small lots and did not provide a sewer system to collect the wastewater. But who approved the division of the property into small parcels and allowed those lots to be served by septic systems?

It was the County Commission of that period, elected by the citizens of Charlotte County. The real problem then becomes who is responsible for correcting the problem and financing the solution of a county-wide sewer system?

The cost of correcting the problem should not fall entirely upon the property owner who has a septic system. As it was the county commissioners who approved the septic system, then it would appear that it is a county-wide responsibility to correct the problem.

Therefore, the system should be financed by a combination of ad valorem taxes and utility rates. What should not be done, is placing a large assessment on vacant property which would result in those property owners not paying property tax and allowing the property go back to the county, thus removing them from the tax rolls.

The county should not “staff-up” for this effort, but should consider hiring a “general engineering consultant” to engage and oversee the design and construction engineering consultants. Utilizing a consultant will result in the county not having excess staff when the sewer system is completed.

The county also should consider using maintenance contractors to perform the maintenance on the resulting large sewer system, instead of hiring additional maintenance staff. The Florida DOT does not use its staff to perform maintenance on U.S. 41 or Interstate 75.

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