

STATE MOVING FORWARD WITH POLLUTION PLAN



Steve Peene, left, and Janet Hearn, engineers with Applied Technology and Management, and Lisa Kreigler, of the Lee County Division of Natural Resources, discuss pollution in the Caloosahatchee River on Wednesday at the South Florida Water Management office in Fort Myers. KINFAY MOROTI/NEWS-PRESS.COM

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A state agency charged with protecting Florida's waters is moving closer to finalizing a plan to reduce the amount of pollution flowing into the Caloosahatchee River and its estuary.

The Florida Department of Environmental Protection met with local water quality experts and advocates

Wednesday to discuss how to best implement the science and data that has already been gathered to target pollutants like nitrogen and phosphorus.

More than 11 million pounds of nitrogen flow down the river each year, clouding waters and sometimes feeding algal blooms that can cause fish and marine

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mammal kills and beach closures.

Called Total Maximum Daily Loads, or TMDLs, these plans are developed by the state to help clean up polluted waters and are based on a variety of data and models used to predict how systems will change when pollution loads are reduced.

"These allow us to explore the dynamics of the estuary to make sure we can address the right parameters," said Amie West, with DEP's TMDL program. "We have new and updated, better tools than there were in 2009, and they include more recent data and a more refined target."

The original TMDL for the tributaries and the estuary were set in 2009 and then revised in 2014. Now DEP hopes to have the finalized version released for public comment by summer of 2018.

Florida DEP first developed the TMDL program in 1999 and has since finalized 409 plans across the state.

"It's never going to be perfect because it's a model," said Erin Rasnake, also with DEP's TMDL program, "but we have to use this as a tool to get where we need to go."

Rae Ann Wessel, with the Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation, said she'd like to see more data about water quantity as well as quality.

"One of the big challenges upstream of (the Franklin Lock and Dam) is we get really big pulses of water, even when it's not from the lake (Okeechobee), and we can't determine where it came from," Wessel said. "So there are questions about inflow from the north that might have higher flow and from the south where it may be slower but may have more broad dynamics."

Some people at the meeting expressed frustration over the length of time it's taken to adopt the pollution loads.

"It's a TMDL we didn't like, so that's why we're doing this," said Pine Island resident Noel Address.

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