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Lee County boosts public outreach to help residents make connection between pet waste and water quality

Fort Myers, FL, Sept. 6, 2022 – Lee County Natural Resources is boosting public outreach efforts to help residents make the connection between pet waste and water quality.

More than 75,000 households will receive postcards reminding residents to pick up pet waste, which has high nutrient and bacteria content that may run off into waterways and feed algae, contribute to algae blooms and pose human health risks. The postcards will start arriving at addresses this week.

The county has identified addresses in six different watersheds: Hendry Creek, Whiskey Creek, Deep Lagoon, Yellow Fever Creek, Mullock Creek and Billy Creek. The mailing effort supports the county's requirements under its permit for the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Program. This federal program was established by the Clean Water Act to control point-source and stormwater discharges.

This educational effort also supports county goals to protect and improve the quality of local waterways as outlined in the state-adopted Caloosahatchee River and Estuary and Everglades West Coast Basin Management Action Plans.

Dovetailing off the county's successful fertilizer-ordinance education and outreach, the postcards feature a slime monster walking a dog and tossing a bag of pet waste into a garbage bin. Messaging includes, "Do your duty; pick up the doodie," and "It's up to you to bag the poo." More information is available at www.fertilizesmart.com/pet-waste-info.html. The county will support the mailings with social media posts and other communications efforts.

Lee County Parks & Recreation also is boosting park patrons' awareness by placing flyers, park walkway signs and stickers on dog-waste bins at its parks and conservation land sites that allow dogs and that lie within the six watersheds.

The county launched its pet-waste awareness campaign in 2016 to inform residents and visitors that leaving pet waste on the ground can impact waterways. The county encourages accountability among pet owners to collect waste to protect waters. The county's Animal Control Ordinance also states that pet owners are responsible for removal of excreta deposited on places such as public walks and recreation areas.

Water quality is a top priority of the Lee Board of County Commissioners and water-quality initiatives occur year-round.

In 2021, the county launched a resident resource website called "Our Water Story: Lee County's Water Quality Initiative." The website, www.leegov.com/water, features a story map to take visitors on a tour of watersheds, discussing the challenges and causes as well as the steps Lee County and partner agencies have taken to help improve local water quality. It invites residents to learn more and help shape the future of our waterways.

Water quality affects residents and visitors alike, and everyone has an opportunity to be a part of the solution, even during everyday activities such as walking the dog or taking care of the lawn. To encourage engagement, the site also provides links to partner agencies and organizations.

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