

## **Help the Refuge: Solve the Problem of Septic Systems**

As we have discussed in several newsletters, improving the quality of the water that surrounds the Refuge requires a series of actions on the part of both the state of Florida and the federal government. We sometimes overlook, however, the importance of actions by local governments, such as replacing septic systems with effective sewer systems.

Nearly 40% of Floridians rely on septic tanks instead of sewer systems. Some experts blame septic tanks for the rise in Florida's recent environmental problems, including algae blooms and foul-smelling rivers. There is also serious concern that climate change and rising sea levels could exacerbate the problem even further. See [more](#).

Unfortunately, installing an effective sewer system is expensive. Realizing that, Governor DeSantis recently signed an executive order that requires the Florida Department of Environmental Protection to create a septic conversion and remediation grant program. His executive order includes a local government match requirement, to help people convert from septic systems to municipal or county utility systems. See [more](#).

The city of Sanibel has been out in front of this issue. The centralization of Sanibel Island sewer services began in 1974 by the private sector. After several transitions, the City acquired the consolidated wastewater system in 1991. To date, the program has expanded a centralized sewer system to more than 99% of existing ERC's (Equivalent Residential Connection).

So, while septic systems on Sanibel are not causing harm to the Refuge, the septic systems of many communities within the Caloosahatchee watershed are. To respond to this situation, we will closely monitor DeSantis' executive order to see if it drives needed change. In addition, we encourage each of you to talk with your friends who live in cities and towns that don't have an effective sewer system. Urge them to let their local officials know that this situation needs to change and that, if the DeSantis' executive order lives up to expectations, there is a cost-effective way to do that.

These actions, however, will only speak to part of the problem with septic systems. They will not address failing septic systems in rural areas along the watershed that are unlikely to ever be on a centralized sewer system. We will address this problem in a future newsletter.

**In case you missed it:** Some people are encouraging the Army Corps to not consider the impact of red tide or blue green algae when they establish a new release schedule for Lake O. See [more](#).