

The Importance of Our Wetlands and Stormwater Ponds (Lakes)

*Taken in part from a letter to the Manatee County Commissioners
who unfortunately voted to reduce protection of Wetlands in the County*

Heritage Oaks is privileged to have 25 Stormwater Ponds (known to us as Lakes) and 9 Wetlands (considered as Preservation Areas and certified by the Audubon Society). The proper management of these two aquatic resources is important to our Heritage Oaks Community in many ways from the environmental improvement aspect to the aesthetics to attract new incoming residents and to retain existing ones.

Wetlands act as a natural water purifier. They purify stormwater runoff by filtering out sediment providing us, as a growing population, with an increased and improved municipal drinking water supply. They also filter out certain elements that are not safe for drinking water like nitrogen and phosphorus. The more we degrade wetlands, and the areas around them, the less efficient this water system will be. This will obviously lead to contaminated drinking water as well as companies looking for other resources for clean drinking water and therefore, destroying other habitats. Stormwater Ponds function in the same capacity as Wetlands. While these waters are not directly used as drinking water resources, their contribution to our watersheds and entry into our bay systems are much improved if our ponds are maintained properly.

Wetlands and Stormwater Ponds act as a sponge and protect us from the severe effects of storms, like flooding. Living in Florida, we are more prone to flooding. Wetlands and Stormwater Ponds hold the excess water and return it to the ground or to the watershed rather than water flowing into our streets and homes. This would cost the state a lot more money in the aftermath of a bad storm as well as be a huge financial burden to the residents. The average number of flood events is upwards of 900% since the 1960s and the average annual property damage from floods is over ten times greater. Degrading our Wetlands and Ponds will surely add to this unwanted cost.

Wetlands provide habitat for over 1,000 different species of wildlife. An immense variety of species of microbes, plants, insects, amphibians, reptiles, birds, fish, and mammals can be part of a wetland ecosystem. They are actually known as "biological super systems" and are one of the most productive ecosystems in the entire world. Stormwater Ponds, while not to be transformed to Wetlands, can be maintained in an ecological status to increase shorebirds and an improved aquatic ecosystem. Their combination of shallow water, high levels of nutrients, and high primary productivity (the amount of biomass produced) is ideal for the development of organisms that form the essential base of our planet's food web. Degrading Wetlands and Stormwater Ponds will not only affect the myriad of creatures mentioned but also us as humans as we are a direct part of the food web.

Wetlands contribute to climate regulation by being an excellent and efficient way to store carbon. They store carbon in their vegetation and soil. They store as much as 20-30% of the Earth's total carbon. When Wetlands are degraded, this carbon gets released and goes into the atmosphere which accelerates climate change and global warming. Increasing the vegetation along the littoral zones of our Stormwater Ponds assists Wetlands in carbon transfer.