HIGHER WATERS
SUNCOAST QUALITY OF LIFE
Folks such as David Tomasko, Randy Wells, Julie Morris, and David and Jennifer Shafer have spent decades observing our region’s marine and land-based environments.

People such as Sara Kane, Jeffrey Vredenburg, and Lea Harper have spent years working on local plans for coping with climate-related changes in our communities.

So, what could the Higher Waters: Suncoast Quality of Life team – none of us experts in this realm – learn about sea-level rise and inland flooding in just one year?

We learned, as reported previously, that:

- The sea level has risen and will rise further at an accelerated pace.
- Hurricane-related storm surge occurs on top of rising seas.
- Inland flooding can cause immense damage.

We also learned that the impacts of higher waters will spread far beyond the coastlines of the Suncoast.

Perhaps most important, we learned there are opportunities to promote broader and deeper public awareness of those impacts – and to enhance collaboration between the people and organizations working on these issues. There is also a need to create connections that foster greater urgency to accelerate adaptation and mitigation strategies to protect housing, businesses, and beloved places and spaces.

In our second year, we plan to continue engaging local experts and explore opportunities to connect them with members of our communities – to prepare together for a future with Higher Waters.

MHI is hosting two events on environmental justice to explore the Florida Suncoast’s environmental challenges and restoration efforts.

April 24, 2023: Exclusive film screening of Dark Waters at Fogartyville Following the screening of Dark Waters, Rob Bilott will lead a conversation to discuss the work that still must be done to protect our environment from dangerous pollutants.

April 25, 2023, 1:00 PM - 5:00 PM: Environmental Justice: Where we are now & where we are going Join MHI at the Powel Crosley Estates where they will continue the conversation with a focus on our Florida Suncoast. Local community members, environmental experts and advocates will join us to dive into the work currently taking place and discuss what still needs to be done. Local community experts including Fredd Atkins, Dr. Kameron Partridge Hodgens, Christine Quigley, Justin Bloom and Tom Higginbotham will lend their expertise for an engaging conversation.
The Climate Adaptation Center recently conducted its annual summit at the University of South Florida Sarasota-Manatee campus.

Climatologists, meteorologists, and others presented detailed information about historic and recent trends and projections covering a wide range of indicators.

Among the many takeaways:

1. Philanthropist Elizabeth Moore, who acquired and preserved the Triangle Ranch in Manatee County – near the northern boundary of Myakka River State Park – reminded the audience that land preservation provides many valuable benefits, including storage and filtration of flood waters.
2. State and local governments should re-engineer infrastructure to accommodate current and future trends in sea-level rise and inland flooding – rather than depending on past measurements.

Sarasota County recently received a grant from the Florida Department of Environmental Protection to conduct a Vulnerability Assessment and create a Resiliency Plan.

The project will examine how public and community-wide assets are vulnerable to sea-level rise and flooding – and then create an adaptation/resilience plan.

According to Sara Kane, "sustainability program supervisor for Sarasota County, the process will develop an inventory of critical and regionally significant assets. The plan will include a detailed list of adaptation strategies and projects ranked and ready for implementation."

County staff members are meeting with representatives of local cities to plan and coordinate this work. Taylor Engineering is the consultant for the process, which began this month and is expected to be completed March 2024.

RECOGNIZE FEAR, OFFER HOPE

Throughout the Higher Waters initiative’s first year, we have heard concerns about our region’s long-term future, as expressed in this piece by one of our team members. This understandable anxiety, combined with the hope that acting decisively based on factual information and community-based willpower, can advance our future – before tides and other waters rise too high.

Tom Tryon, Kiarra Louis, and Rachel Hettinger are leading the Higher Waters: Suncoast Quality of Life initiative for The Patterson Foundation. To share ideas with the team, contact: Thomastryonfla@gmail.com
In early February, The Patterson Foundation’s Higher Waters team presented at the 2023 Florida Philanthropic Network Statewide Summit on Philanthropy. Thomas Tryon and Kiarra Louis, with support from Rachel Hettinger and Michael Corley, presented a session, “Higher Waters: How Funders Can Engage Coastal and Inland Communities in a Hot Topic,” which shared how funders can connect with scientists, governments, nonprofits, businesses, media, and communities to identify the impacts of sea-level rise and the effects that higher waters in bays, rivers, and creeks will have on housing, commerce, and natural resources.

In the blogs below, Tom and Kiarra share nuggets from the summit.

- Presenting Higher Waters at The Florida Philanthropic Network Statewide Summit
- When People Think Deeply About Higher Waters

DID YOU KNOW?

Risk Factor is a tool that provides flood, wildfire, and heat risk data for all to allow individuals and communities to prepare for and mitigate risks before they become a reality. What will climate change cost you? Search your address to see its risk from flooding, wildfire, heat, and wind.
Enroll for
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14 March 2023
10:30 AM to 1:30 PM

Betty J. Johnson
N. Sarasota Library
2801 Newtown Blvd.

WHAT TO BRING*

- SNAP card
- public housing lease agreement
- current internet bill
- name of school your dependent attends if they receive free/reduced lunch
- Medicaid card
- WIC
- TANF
- Pell Grant award
- Veterans pension or survivor's benefit
- proof of Tribal assistance
- proof of Lifeline benefit

*all of these are NOT needed, but if you have more than one bring them with you

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Confidentially meet with a Digital Navigator to discuss your current internet bill, sign up for low-cost home broadband, apply to receive internet subscription discounts, get help with affordable computers, and learn about free computer skills training.

LEARN MORE
Our world is increasingly going digital. Regardless if someone chooses to participate or has the resources to do so, major interactions in education and employment, health and wellness, and government services assume that citizens, workers, and students are connected to the internet, devices, and skills. Think back to Hurricane Ian when various digital communication methods (websites, social media, newsletters, etc.) were used to share hurricane preparedness materials, evacuation routes, and ongoing updates as the storm progressed.

For the past two years, The Patterson Foundation’s Digital Access for All initiative has explored efforts and entities moving the needle on the issue to create an opportunity to strengthen efforts to overcome the common obstacles to digital access. The Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) is an opportunity to ensure everyone benefits from digital technology’s new realities and boundless possibilities — especially those from asset-limited families. ACP is a program that provides a $30 discount per month toward internet service for eligible households.

To foster wide participation in the ACP, the DA4A Team and trained Digital Navigators from Sarasota County Libraries, CareerSource Suncoast, and Multicultural Health Institute are hosting an ACP Enrollment Event to enroll eligible households on March 14, 2023, from 10:30 AM to 1:30 PM at the Betty J. Johnson Library in Sarasota. Trained Digital Navigators will meet 1:1 with people to apply for the ACP program, receive help with affordable computers, and learn about free computer skills. Eligible households are encouraged to register here.

You’re eligible for ACP if any member in your household meets at least one of the following: received a Federal Pell Grant during the current award year; participates in the Free and Reduced-Price School Lunch Program or School Breakfast Program, Medicaid, Federal Housing Assistance, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), WIC, Veterans Pension or Survivor Benefits or Lifeline; lives on qualifying Tribal lands and participates in: the Bureau of Indian Affairs General Assistance, Tribal TANF Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations, or Tribal Head.

PLEASE PASS THIS INFORMATION ALONG AND PROMOTE AWARENESS OF THE ACP PROGRAM!