

BSI Canal Committee

1/16/23

This is only my second note since “IAN”.

I, like many of you have been dealing with IAN associated damage, which has taken away from many of my more normal activities. There is still a long road ahead but the way I see it, life goes on and I will continue along that path. For better or worse, I will have done everything possible to maintain my home in the same condition as before IAN. Nothing more is expected and nothing less will be accepted. – enough said—sorry for the rant!

Many of you have asked about canal clean up. I know many have taken on the task of canal cleaning as best they can and I will say “thanks” from all of us to you for your help, contributions and hard efforts. It seems to be a daunting task, with few seeing significant results, but trust me, every time you pick up a bit of floating debris, or haul a stump to a collection point, our community is better because of you.

As I mentioned in my last note, the city of Punta Gorda has applied to FEMA for funds to help and assist with cleanup efforts. I know it hard for you to believe, but FEMA is a government agency—and has this thing called “red tape”—which is a polite way of saying lots of forms, lots of time and lots of efforts to prove to them --there really was a hurricane. --- I know—but apparently its not good enough to think they --FEMA-- know we actually lived through one---go figure!

Moving on--- In order for the City to hire a contractor (using FEMA funds) to remove waterway debris they needed locations and quantities. Councilman Kuharski knew the city did not have the staff or equipment to locate waterway debris, so he suggested recruiting volunteers. Bob Hickey and John Welsh, Representatives from the Punta Gorda Boaters Alliance organized the effort to rally volunteers willing to go out on their boats and located potential debris in the canals using their sonar devices and documenting the location using GPS. Over 30 volunteers attended a public meeting held on December 15, 2022, they were assigned zones and trained on how to locate potential debris

More specifically, In Burnt Store Isles approximately 33 locations were identified as potential debris sites and are currently being assessed. It took approximately 95-man hours to assess 24 zones. The City is currently reviewing the data collected and in the process of advertising a contract to remove the debris.

As you can see from the above paragraph, the city and FEMA are focused on sunken debris and similar hazards. This does not include floating debris. It is my understanding since floating debris moved with the currents and wind, there is no way to effectively identify and have contractor or other city contingent go to the identified site and expect the debris to still be there. So this is where “we” collectively enter the picture, with several options:

- We can pick up and carry with us back for proper disposal
- We can pick up and carry to a city identified spot—the best know is the open lot across from the lock.
- Items too large to lift, but are floating, -- we can attach a rope to it and tow it to a city identified spot, again, the lot across from the lock has a small dock, where such debris

can be tied. Once done, call the city and let them know it is there and they will send someone out to pick it up.

The final item to be discussed is the debris stuck in the mangroves. This is especially controversial. The city can only touch mangroves with proper permitting -- which they do not have. In this case, one would think it would be possible to just go up to the mangroves and remove specific debris—but the city says that is strictly forbidden and if they tried to do anything like this, they would not only incur steep fines but be restricted (let's not call it blacklisting) from future endeavors. The suggested way around this would be for individuals (the "We" previously mentioned) to pull debris from the mangroves and either then haul it to a collection point or if it is too big, tow it to one of the aforementioned docks, etc.

As always, there are caveats with any of these efforts, -- i.e., the BSIBC organized such an effort late last year, but was concealed once learned of the level of bacteria in the water at that time, and concern for anyone getting in the water for better access or even having canal water splashed on them. It is hoped the members of the BSIBC will re-schedule in the near future, since the cooler weather has brought contaminations back to normal levels.

Rick Daugherty, Chairman, BSI Canal Committee