

## **Board Policy Statement**

### **MCA's Vision for Water Bodies and Wildlife Management in The Meadows**

The Board of Directors of The Meadows Community Association (MCA) has charged the MCA's Water and Wildlife Committee (WWC) with implementing its vision for the 85 water bodies with 25 miles of shoreline and associated aquatic wildlife in The Meadows community. These water features are a precious and esthetically pleasing environmental resource that attracted many Meadows residents to the community. The vision of the WWC is to enhance the beauty and ecological health of The Meadows' aquatic systems while continuing their essential role in water drainage and flood control.

Most water features in The Meadows are detention or retention ponds created as parts of a stormwater system designed to allow suspended material to settle and be absorbed into the pond sediment. Water slowly drains from each pond through an outflow structure. The stormwater system of ponds and other waterways in The Meadows protects homes from flooding and reduces pollutants in downstream waters, thereby contributing to the health of Phillippi Creek, Sarasota Bay, and ultimately the Gulf of Mexico. The ponds serve their purpose best when their shallow regions, known as littoral shelves, and their shorelines support the growth of native plants. These aquatic plants help to maintain each pond's water clarity and quality, enhancing its ability to serve as suitable habitat for birds, fish, turtles, and other aquatic wildlife.

Most importantly, aquatic and shoreline vegetation plays a critical role in preventing the erosion of pond shorelines. Substantial, damaging erosion has occurred in many ponds of The Meadows. This erosion denigrates the ability of the ponds to serve their vital function as a stormwater system, reduces their support of native wildlife, encroaches on residents' lands, and threatens community property values. The health and proper management of our ponds, therefore, are essential not only for the esthetic beauty and natural environment of The Meadows community, but also for the preservation of residents' home values and mitigation of the costs of pond maintenance.

The most cost-effective and efficacious approach to control pond erosion is through the adoption of natural shorelines. This involves keeping heavy landscape equipment away from shorelines and littoral shelves, maintaining Low Maintenance Zones (LMZs) around all

waterways wherever possible, and enhancing the growth of native aquatic plants along shorelines. LMZs are borders of low or no mowing around water features, which helps to stabilize shorelines and prevent erosion. Sarasota County government encourages all communities within the county to implement LMZs and promote native shoreline vegetation in their ponds. Communities that have waited too long to adopt this sustainable, fiscally responsible approach have had to expend great sums of money to implement costly, engineered erosion-control measures, which sometimes fail.

Additionally, the use of herbicides and other chemicals in the ponds of The Meadows, to control algal growth and other problems, can be detrimental to the health of the ponds and can threaten native aquatic wildlife. By using low-toxicity treatments and a minimum of chemical applications, the community can benefit from a more environmentally friendly and cost-effective approach to pond management. Furthermore, the residency of native wildlife, such as birds and alligators, is important for the ecological health of water features in The Meadows. To that end, the removal of native wildlife or the destruction of their critical habitat should be avoided as much as possible, and the spread of non-native, invasive species should be minimized.

With the support of every association and resident to adopt responsible management of the 85 water features in The Meadows, the entire community will be rewarded with lower-cost pond maintenance, effective erosion control, and a greater abundance of wildlife. These actions will help protect and enhance property values, while keeping The Meadows in the forefront as a community that practices responsible environmental stewardship.

Given these findings, it shall be the policy of the MCA that the following practices be encouraged, adopted, implemented, and conducted by all components of The Meadows community, including the MCA, the Meadows Country Club (MCC), individual homeowners associations, and private residents:

1. LMZs consisting of a border at least 3 feet wide and 10-12 inches high shall be maintained around the shorelines of all water features to the fullest extent possible. No mowing or other heavy landscape equipment shall be allowed in the LMZs, to protect shorelines and prevent pond erosion. LMZs may be cut back once a year to control invasive plant species and maintain an attractive appearance, but only with handheld trimmers and other such tools, not mowers or heavy equipment. At other times LMZs may be trimmed to maintain the >3-foot width and >10-12-inch height to maintain esthetics and reduce the influx of invasive plant species.

2. The growth of native aquatic vegetation along shorelines and on littoral shelves shall be encouraged and promoted to the fullest extent possible in all water features. Plantings of native species along shorelines shall be promoted and practiced wherever possible, by all components of The Meadows community. The WWC and Sarasota County will provide guidance and recommendations as to what plant species are appropriate for this purpose. No new plantings will be done without first obtaining the approval of the MCA.
3. The use of chemical treatments in ponds shall be reduced to the minimum necessary to maintain these water features. Low-toxicity methods of pond management, such as manual removal of unwanted growth, pond aeration, and improvements to pond circulation, shall be adopted to the fullest extent possible, with the understanding that some of these methods, such as manual removal, can be labor-intensive and costly and therefore not always tenable.
4. The WWC shall oversee the management of wildlife in the water features and adjacent areas of The Meadows. The WWC's Alligator Committee shall handle residents' reports of alligators, educate the residents and assess the risks, and make recommendations to the MCA staff as to the need for removal of animals. Other management methods can include removal of non-native, invasive species as well as stocking of native species, such as southwest Florida freshwater fish in the ponds.
5. No critical habitats for native species of wildlife within The Meadows shall be disturbed unnecessarily. County, state and federal rules for this will be followed. In general it will be the policy of The Meadows to protect all wildlife habitat to the fullest extent possible, for the ecological health of the community and the enjoyment of all Meadows residents.

*Water & Wildlife Committee,  
Meadows Community Association*

*February 6, 2019*