

Water

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Mean green

First off, the St. Lucie River and Indian River Lagoon in and around Stuart are out.

A blue-green algae bloom sampled Aug. 23 at the St. Lucie Lock and Dam, where Lake Okeechobee water empties into the river, was nearly 50 times more toxic than what’s considered safe.

No doubt a lot of that algae-laden water has made its way into the river, and possibly out to the Indian River Lagoon.

Samples throughout the summer mostly have been below the hazardous level, and the water is nowhere as bad as the guacamole of 2016; but do you really want to chance it?

The lagoon is 156 miles long, and only the area immediately around the St. Lucie River is affected by the algae blooms.

Go north toward the Fort Pierce Inlet and Sebastian Inlet or south toward the Jupiter Inlet, and your experience on and in the water should be algae-free.

And if you’re thinking about fishing on Lake Okeechobee, consider that satellite images from Aug. 21 (It was too cloudy to get good pictures this week.) showed an algae bloom covering about half the lake’s open water.

Reach the beach

Since this is Florida, there’s always the beach.

A blue-green algae bloom Aug. 22 closed Bathtub Beach; and Martin County’s other beaches with lifeguards at Stuart, Jensen Beach and Hobe Sound were closed last weekend.

But the beaches have been given the all-clear since then. (And the toxicity in the bloom at Bathtub was nearly low enough to drink.)

Before you pack the ice chest, fold-out chairs and surfboards, call Martin County’s beach hotline — 772-320-3112 — for an updated report.



An aerial view shows a foamy St. Lucie River on a windy day Thursday at Loggerhead Marina in Stuart. Toxic blue-green algae blooms have affected water recreation this summer, most recently closing Martin County beaches last weekend before they were reopened. LEAH VOSS/TCPALM

Beaches in St. Lucie and Indian River counties are, and have been, algae-free.

Bad bacteria

Algae may be getting all the attention right now, but there are other possible dangers lurking in Treasure Coast waters.

Enteric bacteria, a sign of fecal pollution, sometimes shows up both on ocean beaches and in inland waters, especially after heavy rains.

Contact with bacteria-infected water can cause upset stomach, diarrhea, eye irritation and skin rashes.

As of Thursday afternoon, there were no Treasure Coast beaches or river sites closed because of high bacteria. There were, however, a few places with moderate levels:

- River Park Marina on the North Fork of the St. Lucie River, Port St. Lucie
- Leighton Park on the South Fork, Palm City
- South Beach Causeway on the Fort Pierce Inlet
- Carlin Park on the ocean, Jupiter

Keep vibrio in mind

And everyone heading to the water, particularly the Indian River Lagoon, should be aware of — but not frightened by — *Vibrio vulnificus*.

The naturally occurring bacteria is not caused by pollution or Lake O discharges and isn’t found in the ocean; but it thrives in brackish water such as the lagoon.

Vibrio can cause infections and, in very rare cases, death.

Chances of contracting vibrio are about the same as being struck by lightning; and “normally healthy people” are not at risk, the Florida Department of Health says.

The highest at-risk group: men over 50 with underlying health issues that could compromise their immune systems.

The bacteria usually enters the body through an open wound, so people with cuts or scrapes shouldn’t get in the lagoon.

Editor’s note: *Weather permitting, TCPalm Environmental Reporter Tyler Treadway will be kayaking and/or paddleboarding at an undisclosed site on the Indian River Lagoon over the Labor Day weekend.*

Algae

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Private meeting

Neither the public nor the media was notified of the meeting in advance because Rubio was uncertain which memorial service he’d attend for the late Sen. John McCain.

The meeting was arranged “at the last minute, almost on the fly,” Rubio told TCPalm. “I didn’t want to schedule a public event and then have to cancel it. It would look like I was backing out.”

Gov. Rick Scott was criticized when he scheduled an Aug. 10 tour of the algae on the St. Lucie River in Stuart, but stayed on a boat to avoid protesters and the media, who were forced to follow in another boat.

Stalled in Senate

Rubio said he’s “cautiously optimistic” the Senate will approve legislation this fall authorizing a reservoir south of Lake Okeechobee to cut discharges to the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee rivers.

The U.S. House approved the bill, called the Water Resources Development Act, in June.

Rubio said “a single senator,” North Carolina Republican Richard M. Burr, is holding up the Senate vote.

Burr won’t allow a vote on the water bill until he gets a commitment for a vote on his own legislation to permanently reauthorize a program to protect national parks, water resources and wildlife areas, according to Roll

Call, a Washington, D.C., newspaper and website published when Congress is in session.

To speed up the process, Rubio said, legislative leaders are working on a compromise version of the water bill so when the Senate approves it, it will be something the House can live with. That way, a compromise won’t have to be negotiated after the Senate vote.

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NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING

Notice is hereby given that the Board of County Commissioners of Martin County will conduct a public hearing on September 11, 2018 to consider the adoption of an ordinance related to the Martin County Land Development Regulations. The hearing will be conducted beginning at 9:00 AM., or as soon thereafter as the following item may be heard. The title of the proposed ordinance is:

AN ORDINANCE OF MARTIN COUNTY, FLORIDA, CREATING ARTICLE 11, PLANNED MIXED-USE VILLAGE, LAND DEVELOPMENT REGULATIONS, MARTIN COUNTY CODE. PROVIDING FOR APPLICABILITY, CONFLICTING PROVISIONS, SEVERABILITY, FILING WITH THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE, CODIFICATION, AND AN EFFECTIVE DATE.

All interested persons are invited to attend and be heard. The meeting will be held in the Commission Chambers on the first floor of the Martin County Administrative Center, 2401 S.E. Monterey Road, Stuart, Florida. Written comments may be sent to: Nicki van Vonne, Director, Martin County Growth Management Department, 2401 S.E. Monterey Road, Stuart, Florida 34996. Copies of the items will be available from the Growth Management Department. For more information, contact Peter Walden, Principal Planner at (772) 219-4923.

Persons with disabilities who need an accommodation in order to participate in this proceeding are entitled, at no cost, to the provision of certain assistance. This does not include transportation to and from the meeting. Please contact the Office of the ADA Coordinator at (772) 221-1396 or the Office of the County Administrator at (772) 221-2360, or in writing to 2401 S.E. Monterey Road, Stuart, FL, 34996, no later than three days before the hearing date. Persons using a TDD device, please call 711 Florida Relay Services.

If any person decides to appeal any decision made with respect to any matter considered at the meetings or hearings of any board, committee, agency, council, or advisory group, that person will need a record of the proceedings and, for such purpose, may need to ensure that a verbatim record of the proceedings is made, which record should include the testimony and evidence upon which the appeal is to be based.

August 31, 2018

TR-2101086