

TEAM Punta Gorda

Volunteers For A Better Community

Citizens Partnership for Clean Canals (CPCC) water quality monitoring project

An updated report from TEAM Co-chairs Tom Cavanaugh and Karen McCague



The Citizens Partnership for Clean Canals (CPCC) water quality monitoring project is an alliance between Heal Our Harbor (HOH), Charlotte County, The University of Miami and City of Punta Gorda staff. This project leverages support, services and expertise from these organizations and TEAM volunteers to conduct monthly monitoring of water quality in the Charlotte Harbor estuary and the Punta Gorda canal system. Brandon Moody, the county’s Water Quality Manger was present at a sampling.

Pictured above: The Miami research team helping with the microbial source tracking for CPCC. From left to right, Dr. Helena Solo-Gabriel, University of Miami, Dr. Richard Whitman (HOH), Maribeth Gidley and Dr. Chris Sigalliano (NOAA). This group shares research experience of microbial source tracking over the last 30+ years.

The project was initiated with \$3,000 funding from the Punta Gorda Rotary Club. This grant allowed the project to start in April 2024, ahead of the rainy season, which is important to this study. In May 2024, TEAM was awarded a \$26,000 MAC (Marine Advisory Committee) grant. These funds will be made available in November 2024 to allow the project to expand and extend into 2025. The City of Punta Gorda staff has participated in meetings and offered support in finding grant opportunities to support the project according to Tom Cavanaugh. It was a previous sampling by the FDEP (Federal Department of Environmental Protection) at Alligator Creek that indicated fecal matter and prompted the designation of Punta Gorda canals as “impaired.”

CPCC began collecting samples on Monday, April 1st at Ponce and Alligator Creek and will continue for a minimum of 12 months. Subsequent samples were taken at the rim canal along Punta Gorda Isles. Volunteers met with HOH scientists to receive training, collect

samples and analyze field conditions. Work is being completed in accordance with protocols from the county and the FDEP.

Samples collected in April, May and June were sent to the Charlotte County laboratory for Fecal Indicator Bacteria (FIB) analysis. Samples were also sent to the University of Miami for DNA analysis of Enterococci to help determine its origin (human, bird, cattle, etc.)

CPCC has some interesting data points from early findings, with FIB concentrations detected at significant levels at one of the site locations in the canal system. However, these are only snap shots, and more data are needed to determine the extent, nature and source/sources of contamination.

CPCC will continue to seek resources for this important project and hope to scale upwards to 8-10 sampling locations in late 2024/2025.

The following is summary of accomplishments:

- Received \$29K in grant funding
- Established an inter-organization alliance to provide collaboration, support and pro-bono analytical and professional services
- Developed the CPCC Quality Assurance Project Plan and Standard Operating Procedures
- Trained a core volunteer team of 6 on detailed monitoring, field measurement and sample collection protocols
- Established monthly monitoring and conducted monitoring in April, May and June
- Established a project database
- Presented the CPCC project to the Punta Gorda City Council at the June public meeting

FOX4 News covered the project in a segment which can be seen here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uX0ohZ3KLTc>

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