



Three Simple Truths About Stormwater.

Guest-authored by **Mollie Holland**, NEST Coordinator,
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[Woodlands Word – October 2021]

Managing stormwater is complicated. Sure, we have these handy dandy ponds, lakes, and swales that collect it for us, but what then? How does one deal with erosion, algae blooms, fish kills – and where did all the wildlife go? Along the path of finding solutions to those questions, there are three simple truths:

- 1.) Inactivity exacerbates consequences
- 2.) There is not ONE product, practice, or technology that is the remedy
- 3.) Communities must lead the way to protect their own best interests

1.) Many communities in Sarasota, both large and small, are all seemingly dealing with similar pond/lake issues. And, almost without fail, **the older the community, the more pronounced are the issues with water quality and erosion.** That is the First Simple Truth to stormwater management: **Inactivity exacerbates consequences.** Failing to address the issues of erosion, algal blooms, or some other maintenance concern is almost always a guarantee for a costlier remedy later. Installing geotubes to combat shoreline erosion is the result of not dealing with erosion for years, if not decades. Having those hard **discussions about rules, practices, and funding mechanisms when the concerns are first brought to light (or soon thereafter) usually reduces financial expenditures and is also typically easier logistically.**

2.) Researching solutions for your issues will uncover a myriad of technologies, practices, products and advice out there to pick from, all of which seem to be the magic bullet. I can tell you for a fact, there is **not ONE practice, product or piece of advice that will solve an issue** (Truth Number Two). **It can take time to find the correct combination to achieve your goals.** Aerators are an effective way to improve water quality but work even better when paired with shoreline plantings and a nutrient reduction plan. **Each community must develop a plan that works for them, as each is unique.** Thankfully, there is a growing number of communities that are developing a similar plan, **so we can learn from our neighbors' trials and errors.**

3.) I am often asked for rules, laws, or other regulatory guidance that can help with stormwater management at the community level. There are quite a few regulations out there that provide specific guidance on how a stormwater management system is to be built. However, with few exceptions, once that pond/lake and swale is built, there is very little on how to keep these features intact and functioning. There is even less information on how to make this often-large portion of your community an amenity to enjoy. Quite a few industries and agencies give recommendations and guidance in the form of Best Management Practices, but implementation of those practices is still voluntary. It is still up to communities to seek out these Best Management Practices and institute them. Truth Number Three is a result of there being few rules to guide the process; communities simply must lead the way and protect their own best interests even if it is not mandated by a rule or regulation.

Editor's Note: The Ponds and Preserves Committee thanks Mollie Holland for sharing her expertise and helping Rivendell with our pond health. [Learn more about NEST here.](#)



Mollie Holland, who has 14 years of landscape and horticulture experience, is the **Sarasota County Neighborhood Environmental Stewardship Team (NEST)** program coordinator.

Prior to joining the county five years ago, Holland, who has her bachelor's degree in biology from the University of South Florida, previously worked at the Southwest Florida Water Management District as an engineering and environmental compliance technician, permit reviewer and project manager.





Rivendell Respects These Three Simple Truths.

By the Rivendell Ponds & Preserves Committee.



1.) Inactivity exacerbates consequences. Rivendell recognized that erosion on many pond shorelines was visible - negatively affecting our stormwater systems, water quality, and wildlife habitats. The Ponds & Preserves Committee was formed in 2018 to assess the issues and develop an action plan to help control pond erosion and nutrient runoff. Residents were kept informed along the way. Action steps began immediately by eliminating mowing to the edge and installing Low-Maintenance Zones (LMZs) and aquatic plants along pond shorelines – still a work-in-progress. The “**Rivendell Natural Shoreline**” was established as our pond shoreline community standard.

← **Black-crowned Night Heron and Egret.** (Sheila Pies)

2.) There is not one product, practice, or technology that is the remedy. The P&P Committee conducted extensive research and interviewed a variety of experts to develop an effective, lower-cost option compared to allowing erosion to proceed and face expensive engineered remediation in the future. While controlling erosion is key, appearance is also important to our community. The solution had to be beneficial, yet be maintained in a uniform, neat, and manicured manner. Our community landscaper now regularly trims the LMZs.



Native Pickerelweed. (S Remy)



Enjoy the new park benches in Rivendell. (Nancy Dobias)

3.) Communities must lead the way to protect their own best interests. Rivendell’s HOA own and have title to our ponds which are managed in compliance with Sarasota County and SWFWMD, as part of our stormwater control system. Beyond that, how we maintain our ponds is up to us.

Sharing experiences with other communities and learning from subject-matter experts, we believe the combination of LMZs and native aquatic plants helps control erosion and reduce nutrient flow into our ponds. We all benefit with improved water quality, more wildlife habitats, beautiful natural surroundings, and stronger property values.

Taking care of our ponds and stormwater systems is the BEST and ONE thing we can all do to positively affect the quality of our Gulf. Rivendell is playing a beneficial role in helping to keep our waterways healthy, as most ponds and lakes ultimately flow into the Gulf. Working together, we can make a positive impact on the health of our ponds, bays and the Gulf. Good water quality keeps the sea grasses healthy and strong, which are vital to wildlife survival.