



August 2, 2021

Ms. Tammy Soliz
Government Operations Consultant I
Public Information Officer
Florida Department of Health in Lee County
3920 Michigan Avenue
Fort Myers, FL 33916

This letter was sent by electronic mail.

Subject: diminished water quality, reports of cyanobacteria toxin analysis, strong odors and illness in the Matlacha Pass area of Lee County.

Dear Ms. Soliz:

I am contacting you regarding a health related problem occurring in the Matlacha Pass area of Lee County.

Aerial imagery of Matlacha Pass State Aquatic Preserve documents widespread milky colored water in Matlacha Pass. This condition has occurred since at least April and has persisted and worsened through the end of July.

- Floating mats of macro algae (*Dapis* sp.) have occurred since at least April of 2021 (note imagery below).
- Low levels of saxitoxin (Paralytic Shellfish Toxin) were detected in two macroalgae samples collected in April (0.1 and 0.09 ng/ml) and two samples collected on June 14 (0.13 and 0.14 ng/ml). Samples were analyzed by Greenwater Laboratories. Results attached.
- On June 14, I collected matted algae samples at the surface near the Matlacha Fishing Pier located on the east shore of Matlacha County Park. The odor or stench was overwhelming and I had to immediately leave the area. Several anglers with children and tourists were on the pier while I collected the samples. There was no FDOH signage at the pier or anywhere else that I could determine in Matlacha Park or near the boat ramp.
- A kayak guide on Matlacha Pass experienced neurological symptoms and respiratory distress in July and was diagnosed with Toxic Algae Poisoning by her physician (personal communication). She was advised to leave Matlacha Island, her home. She subsequently left the island at her

doctor's urging and is planning to move to another state. She did call FDOH and Poison Control and was advised to see her physician (personal communication).

- CWK volunteer Rangers Melanie Hoff and Sue Oliver and the Matlacha PI Fire Dept Fire Chief and Assistant Chief took hydrogen sulfide readings at nine locations, with two different instruments. Low detection limit approx. 1 ppm. Sampling was conducted on 6-30-21 from 0845-0945. Map of locations sampled available on request. All locations showed no detected H₂S on either meter.
- FDEP took three samples from Matlacha Pass on July 21. Algae blooms were reported observed at two of the three sites. The three locations on Matlacha Pass sampled were Matlacha Avenue Canal, Matlacha Pass Near Bert's Restaurant and the Matlacha Park Fishing Pier. Sample results for toxins from Greenwater Labs are still pending.
- Another woman and her husband living on a sailboat in Matlacha Pass exhibited similar symptoms of confusion and disorientation like being drugged or stroke like symptoms about July 24. Both have left the Matlacha area. She indicated she was hospitalized with the same symptoms after traveling to North Carolina (personal communication).
- Most recently two boaters complained of waking up with confusion or disorientation during an extended boating trip on Matlacha Pass (video testimonial shared on social media).
- During the April thru July period, numerous print, broadcast and social media reports were made, documenting the problem. During this period I am not aware of any response from FDOH.

I am requesting that FDOH begin regular monitoring and reporting results for potential environmental toxins or contaminants in the greater Matlacha Pass area. With the information available to date, it would seem appropriate that FDOH would be issuing public health alerts and informing Matlacha residents of the related risk of toxins or contaminants especially at public access areas with appropriate signage.

It is my understanding that a Lee County Commissioner arranged to have a FDOH HAB Caution sign installed at the Matlacha Fishing Pier during late July. I do appreciate the Commissioner's concern but how and when did FDOH inform the Commissioner that a FDOH Caution sign was needed and on what public health information was the sign issued?

Please respond to my request by August 10, 2021.

Sincerely,

John Cassani
Calusa Waterkeeper

PS: Please note the imagery documentation below.

Photo chronology of milky water and surface algal mats in or associated with Matlacha Pass State Aquatic Preserve.



04-15-21



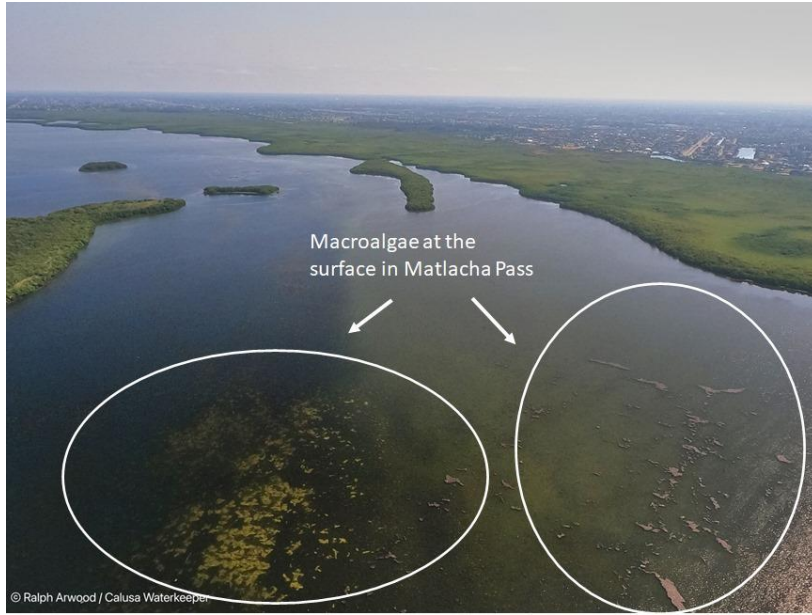
4-15-21



5-18-21



5-31-21



5-31-21



6-25-21



6-25-21



7-13-21



7-13-21



7-13-21



7-18-21



7-18-21



7-18-21



6-14-21 Matlacha fishing pier looking SE



6-14-21 Matlacha County Park looking SE



6-14-21 Matlacha County Park eastern shore



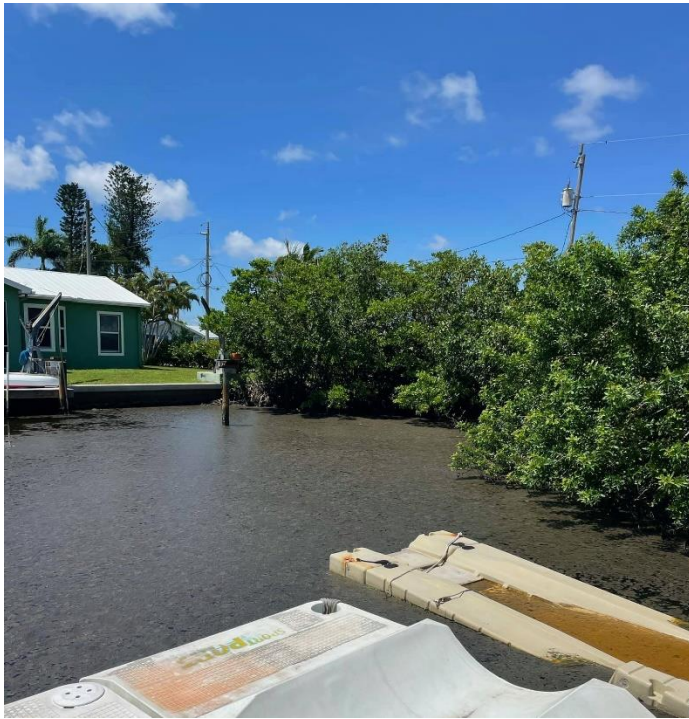
7-16-21 Matlacha Pass



Olde Fish House Marina, 7-29-21



Lee County Park, Bat House Park, Matlacha 7-29-21



Matlacha canal, May Street with floating macro algae, 7-30-21



Matlacha Canal, May Street with floating macro algae, 7-30-21