

LETTER TO EDITOR: June 2, 2021

Thirty-four years ago, Florida created a funding source to reduce litter in their watersheds (lakes, bayous and wetlands) by declaring stormwater to be a utility. The goal was to reduce litter by 50 percent, protect tourism and permanently fund it on a utility bill.

This legislative act (FSA 403.0893) set them on a two-pronged approach to manage litter by keeping it off the streets and out of the watersheds.

Fast forward and today over 160 Florida communities have stormwater management programs. Tourism flourishes, their streets and watersheds are nearly litter-free, and we now have a 34-year-old case study on what works.

But there is more to the story. There was an unintended consequence. What began as litter reduction turned into programs that prevent flooding. That's because the programs that funded the sediment and litter grabbing equipment, also worked to reduce flooding. Today when stormwater programs come online, communities across the country now call them flooding and water quality programs.

The unfortunate fact is that people, along with improper garbage handling, litter the streets, but cities without stormwater programs almost exclusively litter watersheds. In effect, cities that don't treat stormwater are litterbugs.

Meanwhile, we know that there are massive "litter dams" in a Baton Rouge wetland because our city doesn't have a stormwater management program. Core samples show litter and flood-causing sediments are between 3-6 feet deep. When litter mixes with sediments, impermeable flood-causing layers are created that cost millions to dredge.

Meanwhile we sit watching stormwater programs bring in millions for other cities that manage stormwater. Miami Dade County brings in \$31 million a year while the city of Miami \$12 million.

Louisiana is most often #1 in rainfall. If we don't strive to be #1 in stormwater management, we will continue to have flooding and litter issues.

We need to pivot. Louisiana needs a two-pronged stormwater approach to reduce litter and prevent flooding. We know this works.

Marie Constantin

Louisiana Stormwater Coalition
louisianastormwater.com