

A Brief History of the North Spreader Barrier Controversy

- **1976.** The 7.5 miles of the North Spreader is completed, with the intention of providing Gulf access to residents of northwest Cape Coral.
- **March 17, 1977.** Cape Coral developer GAC Properties bankruptcy is finalized. A provision of the bankruptcy was Consent Order No. 15 between the State of Florida Department of Environmental Regulation and GAC Properties to provide for the construction of a freshwater retention system consisting of a “perimeter spreader waterway” (North Spreader Canal) to serve as a storm water “distribution system for intercepting and releasing discharges of water” into Matlacha Pass and to maintain separation of Cape Coral storm water from state waters. The plan included the construction of the Ceitus barrier/boat lift (barrier) to “provide navigable access to the canals of Cape Coral which do not have access to the waters of the state” (Matlacha Pass.). Excess storm water would theoretically be filtered by sheet flow into Charlotte Harbor through the mangrove areas west of the spreader.
- **1984.** The barrier is completed.
- **1986.** Increased tidal erosion of Ceitus Creek becomes evident, as well as erosion in a least a dozen areas north of the barrier.
- **1993.** Tidally-caused erosion areas are now full-fledged breaches and the northern fourth of the spreader canal is overtopped during high tides; this results in mixing of spreader and canal waters north of the boat lift with seawater. The entire system is converted into a brackish water estuary, complete with daily tides and marine fishes and invertebrates. Plans are proposed to dam all of the breaches.
- **2001.** Construction of the first of these “plugs” is completed in the Ceitus Creek area. The plug fails in a matter of weeks and attempts to construct further plugs are abandoned.
- **2003** Dredging of the channel south and westward of barrier to vicinity of Sun and Moon B&B to remove severe siltation. This heavy siltation occurred while the barrier was in place.
- **2005-2006.** A breach forms at the western abutment of the barrier in 2005, and by early 2006, it becomes large enough that vessels use it to bypass the boat lift.
- **2008.** With state DEP (Department of Environmental Protection) and U.S Army Corps of Engineers approval, the barrier is removed in order to reduce tidal erosion at all breaches, which was shown to be destroying considerable areas of mangrove habitat as well as causing deposition at the Shoreview Canal location. Also in 2008, as part of an amendment to the 1977 consent order and in conjunction with barrier removal permission, the North Spreader Ecosystem Management Agreement (NSEMA) group is formed. The group is comprised of stakeholders representing governments, residents, and any other concerned groups, and scientists and engineers, including scientific and engineering expertise provided by Tony Janicki, PhD (Biology) and Hans Zarbock, PE MSCE (Water Resources) of Janicki Environmental. This group met for 2.5 years to evaluate the wisdom of replacing the barrier and to identify other projects which would have a greater Net Environmental Benefit (NEB) than barrier replacement.
- **2010.** The NSEMA report is released. It recommends against the replacement of the barrier and identifies a number of other NEB projects in lieu of replacement of the barrier. The Cape Coral City Council votes to adopt the findings of the NSEMA. In spite of the wide acceptance of the facts supporting not replacing the barrier, the uncertain timing of completion of some of the other NEB projects causes a majority of the NSEMA stakeholder group to vote against the NSEMA recommendation. This action forces the City of Cape Coral to apply for a permit to replace the barrier, at a cost estimated to be \$4,000,000 (not including any effort to correct the breaches to the north, estimated at \$60,000,000.)

Currently, there is strong local opposition to the barrier replacement. The waters of the north spreader are not polluted and it has been demonstrated that the spreader has not, and never could, function as a pollution-control system. The scientifically proven and economically viable projects identified in the NSEMA are the responsible course of action rather the replacement of a barrier which failed in the past and is expected to fail again causing great harm to the ecosystem.