



## **Town of Longboat Key**

### **Press Release**

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**CONTACT: Tom Harmer, Town Manager**

**[tharmer@longboatkey.org](mailto:tharmer@longboatkey.org)**

**941-316-1999**

### **Statement from the Town Manager**

The recent leak of the pipe that transports wastewater to Manatee County for treatment was an extremely unfortunate event and one the Town takes very seriously. It is understandable that there is a lot of concern about this incident. The Town has long recognized the risks with this aging pipe and, thus, has spent a number of years assessing the pipe and monitoring its condition.

When incidents like this occur, it is not unusual for there to be a lot of misinformation and speculation about what has occurred, and who is or is not, doing what to address the issue. We have seen some of that misinformation and speculation in what has been reported for this incident.

Town staff discovered the leak on Monday, June 29th. The Town Manager and the Town Commission were notified that day.

Prior to realizing there may be a leak in the pipe, we have been advised that Town and Manatee County utilities staff were investigating potential meter and equipment issues based on anomalous flow readings going back to June 18th. During that time, there were maintenance on pipe and wet well cleaning activities occurring on the Town side that were resulting in variations in flow, and there were also meter change outs and other equipment analyses occurring on the Manatee side being resolved to determine the cause of the variations. It wasn't until Monday, June 29th that the Town and Manatee County were able to identify the issue as a potential leak in the pipeline. Staff immediately began inspecting the line and, within a couple of hours, discovered the location of the leak.

The leak was discovered on the land portion of the mainland in a heavy mangrove, undeveloped area across the Bay from Longboat Key. The leak did not occur in the portion of the pipe that is under the Bay.

Town Public Works staff notified the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) of the leak at 1:17pm on Monday, June 29 and was assigned a State Incident Number.

The Town immediately mobilized an emergency contractor that afternoon to gain access to the leak and start the repair. Because the leak was in a remote area of mangroves, it took additional time and effort to access the actual site of the leak. We were very fortunate how

quickly our emergency repair contractor was able to mobilize, access the remote site, stabilize the area and make the repair.

The leak was repaired and service restored on Tuesday, June 30. The FDEP was notified that the leak was repaired that day.

The Public Works staff reported a preliminary discharge to the FDEP on Tuesday, roughly estimated at 25.8 million gallons based on availability of data from the Town and Manatee County flow meter differentials. Our Public Works team believe that is a high estimate, and an independent testing firm is evaluating the pipe section where the leak occurred and evaluating the flow data to update the estimate.

The Town continues to coordinate with FDEP and an independent environmental consultant to conduct water quality sampling and evaluate the impacts of the leak, and will be taking any corrective actions that may be necessary.

Though the leak was not directly under the Bay and the pipe was not discharging directly into the Bay, the Town staff indicated to the FDEP that it is possible some of the discharge reached the Bay. The Town started testing of the Bay waters on Wednesday, July 1st based on protocols established by the independent environmental consultant and as shared with FDEP. As we receive those results, they are being posted on our website and shared with FDEP. Current environmental testing includes water quality samples from the area of the Bay near where the leak occurred.

According to the environmental consultants, there was no obvious discharge plume or debris in the Bay in the immediate area of the leak when testing began on July 1. The initial testing results have been consistent with our initial observations and assumptions and, so far, confirm limited impacts to the Bay. We continue to test as recommended.

This pipe was evaluated by an independent engineering firm in 2016 and 2017, and that firm reported to the Town that the overall condition of the pipe was good and that the pipe had a remaining reliable service life of at least 20-25 years. At the time, the firm recommended that the pipe condition be monitored and reassessed every 4-5 years. The Town was planning to reassess the line next year in line with the recommendation.

Even though the pipe was determined to be in good condition, as a precaution and as part of a proactive longer-range planning solution, last year the Town budgeted dollars to advance plan and permit a redundant pipe to the mainland. An update on those efforts were provided to the Commission on June 1st.

As we learn more about the cause of the leak, and how that may relate to the condition of the pipe overall, we are also looking at opportunities to advance the redundant pipe project as part of our post-leak plan.

Fortunately, once the leak was discovered, the leak was quickly repaired the next day and water quality testing started the following day.

Rest assured that the Town recognizes the importance of the Bay to not just Longboat Key, but to the overall region. We will determine what occurred, what the impacts are, coordinate with FDEP on any required mitigation efforts, and take action to help enhance our policies and infrastructure to minimize the potential for future incidents.

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