

Cathy Harrelson, former Chair of the Sierra Club Suncoast Coastal Task Force:

At the end of 2005, as Red Tide ravaged the beaches and intracoastal waterways of Southwest Florida, a group of volunteers from the Suncoast Sierra Club formed a “Coastal Task Force” to begin dealing with the harmful algal bloom problem. What we saw as low-hanging fruit in the fight for better water quality was the reduction of nitrogen-heavy fertilizers used on St. Augustine turf lawns throughout the state. Our initial focus was on Southwest Florida cities and counties and in 2010, after five years of community meetings, we helped enable the passage of the strong Pinellas County urban fertilizer ordinance with a sales ban on non-compliant fertilizers.

After Pinellas County passed its ordinance, the county’s municipalities followed suit, as did the City of Tampa. Why? Because of the science-based evidence presented by the Tampa Bay Estuary Program, the hearty support of the business and tourism community, and the continued focus on the importance of water quality protection as the bedrock issue for all of us.

Unfortunately, in 2011 the legislature and Governor Scott brought further retail sales regulations to a screeching halt when they preempted any new local government control of fertilizer sales.

I urge you to strongly recommend to the state that this preemption should be eliminated to allow each Florida city and county, if they so choose, to craft an urban fertilizer ordinance that can be easily enforced through point-of-sale controls. Please help untie the hands of local governments so they can act to protect the water that when clean provides jobs, recreation, high quality of life and public health, and habitat for our unique Florida wildlife.

One more point: After Pinellas County passed its strong ordinance with a point-of-sale ban on non-compliant urban fertilizers, an unintended but welcome consequence was the rise of local Florida-based fertilizer manufacturers that produced lawn care and garden products that met the new standards. The large, out-of-state manufacturers such as Scott’s Miracle-Gro were removed from the shelves (for months until they finally came up with compliant products) making room for Florida-based companies to prosper and gain a bigger piece of the market in Florida.

Respectfully submitted on December 10, 2019.