

WHAT CAN PRIVATE INDIVIDUALS DO TO PROTECT THE HARBOR'S RESOURCES?

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This synopsis suggests ways an individual can take the lessons learned from the Public Conference, and use them to protect the Harbor's resources.

There are at least three ways that a citizen can significantly help protect the harbor's resources. These are: to become an involved citizen, to become an informed citizen, and to communicate your view to your elected officials.

Three different sessions offered ways an individual could be involved. These were environmental education, personal responsibility while boating, and participating in organized environmental groups.

An individual can volunteer at one of the local environmental education centers. In the third public session, examples were given on how citizens could be involved in environmental education by Mote Marine Laboratory, Calusa Nature Center, Ostego Bay Foundation, and the Charlotte Harbor Environmental Center.

Boat owners have the opportunity to take personal responsibility for their actions on the water. There are guidelines showing safe anchorages that don't damage the environment, and a "Pilot Study" for a non-regulatory approach to boat operators. This approach asks boaters to avoid damaging the harbor's seagrass beds by boat propellers, especially in shallow water. In Charlotte Harbor, propeller-scarred seagrass beds are the worst in the state.

An individual should consider being active in environmental organizations. We had excellent examples given in the fifth public session by organized citizens who are helping to protect the wetlands, rivers and the harbor. Remember, you can express your views on any subject as an individual, but you can gain "power" when you are part of an organized group of citizens expressing the same views.²

The second way an individual can help protect the harbor is by being an informed citizen. First and foremost, keep an open mind until you can gather enough information about an issue to decide whether you support or oppose it. Don't let someone else decide for you.

Participate in environmental-oriented organizations, workshops, public hearings, and conferences and symposiums such as this one, to be better informed about the environmental issues concerning the harbor's resources.

Industries utilized our natural resources for the good of the citizenry. These industries provide jobs, income and tax revenue that improve the general economy. The first public session gave examples where the agricultural, the phosphate and the electrical power industries are producing products with less impact on our natural resources, and are providing jobs, food and tax revenues that are improving our lives. An individual should monitor the progress of environmental safeguards made by the industries. You may be surprised, as I was.

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²For a list of environmental organizations within the study area, contact the Charlotte Harbor National Estuary Program, 4980 Bayline Drive, 4th floor, N. Fort Myers, FL 33917; phone 941/995-1777, fax 941/656-7724; e-mail chnep-upton@mindspring.com.

Finally, communicate your informed view on the issues to your local county commissioner and to your state and federal representatives. Remember the Policy Committee for the Charlotte Harbor National Estuary Program includes our local elected representatives. They will need your support to successfully accomplish the goals of this program.

Participate in your representative's workshops on environmental issues. They need your input and will appreciate your views, especially on controversial environmental issues involved in this national estuary program.

Don't be a member of the silent majority. All

too often, we hear only from those who oppose an issue. It takes courage to stand up and express your view in favor of a controversial issue.

In summary, I believe an individual can help protect the harbor's resources by personally practicing sound environmental uses of the resources, by getting the facts about the environmental issues, and by using this knowledge to promote sound environmental decisions by your local representatives.

I close with a quote from Margaret Mead, "... Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it is the only thing that ever has ..."