

Subject: Director's Report from Dave Guilliams for the November 4th, 2015 Saratoga Condo Association Board of Director's meeting

Mr. President, Members of the Saratoga Condo Association Board, and fellow residents, our President has declared that Saratoga is in imminent danger from an infestation of cottonmouth snakes since one of our landscape crew had a snake strike at him and they have seen a few other snakes.

Safety of our residents is priority one for me so I personally followed up with our landscaper to get more facts about the incident and ensure his worker was ok. Here are the facts from that discussion. The issue appears to stem from the report of an encounter back in Jul. The newest member of the landscape crew forgot his training to always stir the brush and vegetation with a garden tool or stick before starting work. He basically surprised a snake who struck at his pant leg. It did not break the skin and the worker is fine, and also a bit wiser. Our landscaper said snake sightings are common occurrences for them. He has also seen several others in the Saratoga community over the past year but nearer the water, not around the dirt mounds. He said that snakes are ever present and really just want to be left alone so if his workers adhere to their training it is not an issue. He said they do see an occasional snake in all the communities they work in, but no more in Saratoga than anywhere else.

Our President has proposed that we immediately remove all the berms and low grass plantings and re-landscape. His estimate for removal and new plants is \$10-12 thousand dollars plus labor. As this is an unforeseen expense funds will have to be found in the current budget.

This Director's report is presented to provide an alternate approach for the Board to consider. Given our President's concerns, the only prudent emergency action must be to immediately hire a snake exterminator to remove any imminent danger and to advise us on the extent of our problem. We should not panic and attempt to address the longer term landscape fix without first doing this. To do anything less would be negligence on the part of this board. Assuring the safety of residents must come first.

Our Landscape Committee Co-Chair, John Ruscito, promptly reached out to a Collier County Extension Office expert to seek advice on the snake issue and ask if specific plantings that might contribute to the problem. An email containing her expert advice is attached to this report.

If we find that this major re-landscaping effort is necessary, we must of course do it. But I am proposing that we take a more measured approach. Residents expect the board to do the appropriate amount of due diligence in addressing issues and major expenditures of their funds we are entrusted to manage for them. That has not yet occurred and we must take the time to do that after the immediate issue is resolved by the exterminator. While

each of us can research snakes on the internet, none of us are experts on snakes or specific plantings. We must avail ourselves of the experts that are resources for us to ensure we do the right thing.

If the board starts taking piecemeal actions like ripping out berms and grasses, whatever might be lurking in them will scatter and move to other shrubbery and perhaps our buildings. We will then have compounded the problem and increased the cost to remediate it.

So I propose we have the experts determine and deal with any immediate danger first. Then the next logical step is to have the county experts and any private sector experts work with our Landscape Committee to determine exactly what plantings and other architectural features such as the rock bank around our pool deck (a snake habitat), should be removed or altered. If low lying grasses need to be removed, they are all around both lakes, not just the berms. We need the facts to get this right the first time.

We need to take the time to get the experts involved so we know the extent of the problem and develop appropriate cost options to correct it. Landscaping gets expensive fast. Our owners' money has already been spent re-landscaping Saratoga after the whitefly infestation 2 years ago that killed many of the hedges. We subsequently spent even more money revising those plantings (specifically the berms) several more times to appease some residents that wanted taller plantings. Snakes, alligators and Cane frogs transit our property routinely but are rarely seen and more rarely become involved in confrontation with humans. Before we spend in excess of another \$10 thousand dollars of the owners money for a rush re-landscaping we need to have all the facts.

Bottom line –

Step 1 - Remove the dangerous snakes immediately and have the professional exterminators assess the extent of the problem.

Step 2 – Landscape committee to work with the county experts to develop a plan for removal/replanting and determine the cost.

Step 3 – Brief the plan to the Board and all interested residents

Respectfully,

Charles D. Guilliams
Board Member

Message From: **Way, Isabel Cristina** <iway@ufl.edu>

Date: Mon, Nov 2, 2015 at 7:19 AM

Subject: RE: Cotton Mouth Snake Water Moccasin

To: John Ruscito <jruscito@gmail.com>

Cc: Bob Kelley <rkelley1114@aol.com>

Dear John,

Regardless of what your community decides to plant around the retention pond, even if you have a bare littoral zone, we are in snake country and attracting them is unavoidable.

I think you can minimize the risk by exercising caution and supervising children closely. Realistically, you cannot kill every snake or eliminate risk altogether unless you contemplate moving to an urban center or up North.

The best advice is to....

1) Leave snakes alone. Many people are bitten because they try to kill or handle a snake or get a closer look at it and,

2) Keep hands and feet out of areas you can't see.

For what it's worth, most bites occur to adult males (usually when handling or attempting to kill snakes). I wish there was a sure way to eliminate risk altogether so snake and humans could both live without fear, but risk is a part of life in snake country, though a far less dangerous risk than neighborhood dogs, traffic and unsafe food--all things we are probably less concerned about even though they entail greater risk than snakes.

Fortunately cottonmouths are not nearly as aggressive as their reputation and they tend only to get aggressive if strongly provoked. Have you seen any in your community already? Although they are common in our area, they are reclusive.

There are several non-venomous water snakes that can easily be mistaken for the cottonmouth. In the water, the cottonmouth floats very high, with most of its body visible above the water line. The non-venomous water snakes are less buoyant, swimming with little more than the head and neck exposed. Behavior is a good key to distinguishing the water snakes from the cottonmouths. When a cottonmouth feels threatened, it will most often cock its head up to a 45° angle. It will also vibrate the tail, which is not done by the water snakes. Upon further provocation, they will often assume a tight coil and throw the mouth open wide, showing you whence the name cottonmouth, as the inside of the mouth is nearly snow-white.

Kind Regards,

Isabel Way-Soto

UF/IFAS Collier County Urban Horticulture Agent

Florida Yards and Neighborhoods and Master Gardener Coordinator

14700 Immokalee Road, Naples, FL 34120 Extension Office: [\(239\) 252-4800](tel:2392524800)