

## LMKA Meeting March 12, 2018

President Mark Riley introduced guest speaker Susan Sprunt. There were nearly 50 members and guests in attendance.

Susan provided a little of her impressive background, having grown up in the area, raised by mother Donna who owned the Native Plant nursery on Plantation Key for 20 years and father Sandy, a local environmental activist well known for his research work with the National Audubon Society. Susan's home provided much practical knowledge of our environment and then she furthered that with a degree from the University of Florida (horticulture), a masters from Florida International University (landscape architecture), and a PhD from Miami University in Ohio (botany). She has her own environmental consulting business and serves as the Environmental Resources Program Manager for the Village of Islamorada.

Susan was invited to address three topics: plants suited for our environment, canal remediation, and the restoration of Sea Oats Beach. At the Thursday Mar 15, 2018 Village Council meeting, Susan will be giving power point presentations on canal remediation and the restoration of Sea Oats Beach. Those presentations will be available on our LMKA.org website once available.

### **Plants:**

Susan discussed the plant species best suited for our environment on Lower Matecumbe, reminding us that the island is much like a sand bar in many respects. She broke the recommendations down into three categories, all native: trees, understory, and ground cover.

She emphasized the fact that when purchasing and researching the plants it is important to know the botanical name. Often, the common name can be used for more than one species.

The plants on the list provided are typically drought resistant and salt tolerant. Also on the website is a list of links Susan provided for: collecting supplies, hand lens information, and plant identification.

She also provided a list of reference books that Susan finds useful and recommends for more detailed information about our native plants.

The complete list of native plant species that she discussed, the links, and the reference books will be uploaded to the LMKA.org website for members use. All three lists can be viewed from the Bulletin Board in the LMKA website. ([click here](#))

Susan answered questions from members. Perhaps the most common concern that she addressed – plants, particularly flowers, that iguanas won't eat. The answer – virtually all vegetation is at risk especially since the hurricane destroyed much of their favorite vegetation. The only positive she could report... the state of Florida has recognized the iguana problem in South Florida as something serious that must be addressed. While it may seem a bit inadequate, their concern is at least demonstrated by the fact the state has hired an individual with the sole responsibility being to address the iguana issue.

### **Canals:**

There are numerous issues with canals.

### **Ongoing water quality issues:**

Since about 2005, there has been discussion about the need to address the water quality of approximately 560 canals in the Florida Keys. About 5 years ago, a complete ranking of the canals was done and five technologies were identified that could be used to improve canals... culverts to improve flow, back fill to reduce depth, weed barriers to help prevent seaweed from entering canals and creating additional muck on the bottom, removal of muck from the bottom, and pumping, for extremely long canals with minimal flow. All are expensive with inadequate funding sources to address all the concerns. Within the Village, three of the canals identified have had work done using weed barriers as the selected technology. Two of the projects were completed – Treasure Harbor on Plantation Key and the small canal at Matecumbe Resort on Lower Matecumbe. The canal by Columbus Dr/Cortez Dr on Lower Matecumbe has a project but not completed yet.

Because funding is an issue, the high priority canals with support from homeowners, better access, ease of permitting are more likely to be addressed sooner. The Village sets aside \$100,000 per year for these projects and the village has been able to get some grant funding as well as financial support from property owners. But the funds are not nearly sufficient enough to use all the technologies or address all the high priority canals in the village.

### **Canal issues resulting from IRMA:**

Immediately following IRMA, Susan viewed canals in the village and recognized there were 6 – 10 canals that were top priority to have the debris removed. It has taken months of hurricane recovery efforts to finally get to a point where the canals will now be addressed. \$2 million has been allocated for the canals in the village however the process to receive the money and get the work accomplished is complicated. The plan for unincorporated Monroe County is to have the state select the contractors and pay them, then the county will have two years to get reimbursed by FEMA and repay the

state. The funding made available through FEMA is to be used for debris only and will remove debris to a certain depth only based on the deepest draft boats used in the Keys... based on the Monroe County agreement. Islamorada is still studying this process to determine whether there is a more efficient way of handling the process for the benefit of those using the canals within Islamorada. Islamorada is currently negotiating their own contract for this effort with the FEMA/State partnership.

Top priority for the village: 6 – 10 waterways on Lower Matecumbe – primarily the canals on the oceanside of the island plus Captains Cove across from Sea Oats Beach. Some of the hurricane debris has already been dealt with by private property owners. It is not yet known how much debris there is in the canals so further studies are going to take place.

Specifically discussed were several examples of debris believed to be at the bottom of some canals – an entire palm tree, a hot tub, and significant issues in Captain's Cove, primarily as a result of the commercial fishing paraphernalia that ended up in the Cove from the businesses across from Sea Oats Beach.

Also discussed was the canal along Sunset Dr/Iroquois Dr. Property owners are hoping that the Village can address the more unique problems the storm created at this location and perhaps others. The contract the county has already negotiated for canal debris removal for unincorporated Monroe County addresses only debris. At the Sunset Drive location much sand from the beach has been washed into the canal and virtually blocked the entrance and some sections of the canal, making it virtually impossible for boats to use the canal. Sand is not classified as hurricane debris. It is hoped the village will be able to address this situation in their contract with FEMA and the state.

It was mentioned that there is even a section of the canal where the manatees have problems getting through. Susan suggested that a photo of this (endangered species) could make a difference in getting help.

### **Sea Oats Beach Restoration:**

Susan described how this was once a much wider beach and over the years has eroded considerably.

Following the four consecutive storms that hit our area in 2005, Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) constructed a hard barrier to the highway side of the beach on the narrow right of way. Rather than helping with the beach erosion and protecting the highway, the design actually increased the erosion to the point where at places there is virtually no beach at all.

Much of that narrowest portion of Sea Oats Beach is owned by the Village. To the south is privately owned by the homeowner at the south end of the beach.

Numerous government agencies including the Village, Monroe County, the state, and the Florida Keys Electric Coop (FKEC) had been working on finding a solution to the erosion problem and the protection of U. S. One as well as the turtle nesting beach there. The Army Corps of Engineers had already allocated \$10 million for long term improvements prior to Irma doing further damage.

Irma did wash out a section of the northbound highway and did significant damage to the southbound lane. Temporary repairs have been made, but a permanent repair to the highway is still pending.

The sand that is piled on the bayside of the highway across from the beach is going to be used to restore the beach once a determination is made as to a long term plan for this location. Susan indicated that for turtle nesting, the silica content of sand is critical (or the eggs could roast!) This sand piled up has been cleaned and is suitable and will save \$235,000 in cost for sand once they decide on a restoration plan in the next two years.

The current concern... FDOT is anxious to do a project that they believe will protect U. S. One – and may proceed within the next six months, not demonstrating a willingness to wait and work with the coastal engineers looking for a long-term solution. FDOT believes that boulders piled along the right of way will protect the highway, while the engineers looking for long term solutions are convinced that this hard surface eventually will result in further erosion undermining the power poles along the beach and eventually the highway as well.

Since the storm, there are sections of the beach where vegetation and dunes have been leveled, inviting people to stop and park to use this fragile beach. No parking signs must be replaced to allow enforcement of no parking. The section of beach that is wide is a private section of the beach.

Susan Sprunt invited people to attend the council meetings and/or send their comment to the members of council via the Village clerk, Kelly Toth - [clerk@islamorada.fl.us](mailto:clerk@islamorada.fl.us)

**Announcement:**

Glenn Taylor announced that the Village Fire/EMS usually has a fund-raiser every spring. This year they are having a special event for the community instead of the annual fundraiser. They will be having the event, free food as long as it lasts – 12 noon to 6 pm at Founders Park, April 7. He handed out bracelets that will identify residents.

**Website:**

Sue Miller suggested members check the LMKA.org website for new photos, stories and announcements and encouraged members to provide photos especially of Hurricane damage. Check back often for announcements and new content.

**Next Meeting:**

Mark Riley asked members to suggest ideas for a program for the next meeting. Programs can be a huge help to our residents. Let us know if there is a speaker who can provide information that will be helpful/interesting to our members.

Check the website for details as the April meeting is planned.