



## BRIDGEWATER CDD | CITY OF LAKELAND | POLK COUNTY, FLORIDA

### Aquatic Areas 101

This information is provided to answer frequently asked questions about the stormwater management system located within the Bridgewater community. A unit of local special-purpose government called a “community development district” or “CDD” operates and maintains the public improvements, including the stormwater ponds, sumps, jurisdictional waters, and conservation/wetland areas, within the community. The Bridgewater CDD requests your help to ensure that we are good stewards of our resources to ensure the beauty and functionality of our community for years to come.



#### **What is the purpose of the aquatic areas?**

Stormwater ponds are designed to manage the runoff from rainfall by preventing flooding and removing pollutants from the water before they can drain into the groundwater. Conservation/wetland areas preserve natural areas to promote proper drainage and flood control. Sumps are dry retention areas meant to pre-treat runoff prior to outfall into lakes and ponds. They may collect water during rainy seasons. Jurisdictional waters (lakes) are environmentally conserved areas that also serve a stormwater management function.

**Who is responsible for maintenance?** After construction, aquatic areas are turned over to the CDD for operation and maintenance pursuant to a permit from the Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD). The CDD will consider one-time maintenance for new areas. Unless a special exception applies, homeowners are responsible for maintaining the banks between their property and the water line. Otherwise, the CDD maintains the aquatic areas in accordance with permit requirements.



#### **What does maintenance entail?**

Please note that aquatic areas are subject to permit requirements from the SWFWMD, including a requirement to maintain aquatic buffer vegetation. Homeowners are not permitted to mow vegetation between the top of the lake bank and the water line, but may remove invasive plants or install additional native vegetation. The CDD employs various professionals, including an engineer, aquatic maintenance professionals, and landscaping professionals, to ensure the aquatic areas remain in compliance with applicable permits. You may see these professionals treating the pond water with chemicals, maintaining the shoreline vegetation, taking water samples, evaluating the pond banks, and undertaking other activities. From time to time, more extensive work, such as pond bank restoration, may be needed. SWFWMD permits strictly protect aquatic buffer vegetation. Clearing is prohibited except in very narrow circumstances, such as removing invasive species, and in many cases aquatic areas are meant to be left in a natural state.



# Easements

Homeowners should be aware that some lots have easements along their edges to allow the CDD to access its property and provide essential maintenance. Although the lot is owned by the individual homeowner, an easement is a **legal right** that allows the CDD to use the property for these purposes.

## How do I know if my property has an easement?

Homeowners should consult the applicable plat and survey for their property. When in doubt, contact the District Manager using the contact info below.

**What does this mean for me?** Homeowners should take care NOT to obstruct easements by installing fences, patios, pools, or other encroachments. Doing so may prevent the CDD from accessing the ponds for essential maintenance and may result in fines from the SWFWMD. You will be responsible for the cost of moving your obstruction if the CDD needs to use its easement areas for access.

## What if the HOA/POA approved my application?

The HOA or POA may approve aesthetics but does not have authority to grant a variance to permit encroachments in CDD easements, because the legal right belongs to the CDD.

## What if my neighbor has an open easement?

Homeowners cannot obstruct easements even if other access points exist, because doing so may result in overburdening the remaining easements and you may have underground drainage infrastructure within your easement.

## Prohibited Actions



- Do not drink the water or swim in the stormwater ponds/lakes. The water has been treated with chemicals and is not safe for consumption or swimming.
- Do not remove vegetation from CDD property (other than invasive species directly behind your home), especially around the water's edge or in wetlands. The vegetation helps stabilize the banks, prevent flooding, and in some cases is required by permit.
- Do not allow pool runoff or gutter discharge to create erosion.
- Do not throw grass clippings, yard debris, trash, or any foreign substance into the aquatic areas.
- Do not block access to CDD easements. The CDD may take legal action to enforce its rights, and you may be held responsible for any fines or costs incurred as a result of the blockage.
- Do not approach, disturb, or remove wildlife. Only catch-and-release fishing is allowed. If you are concerned about a nuisance alligator, contact FWC at 866-FWC-GATOR (866-392-4286).

For more information on stormwater ponds in general, please visit the website for the Southwest Florida Water Management District at <https://www.swfwmd.state.fl.us/>. For more information about the CDD's operations and maintenance or to report an issue, please contact the District Manager, Christina Newsome, using the contact information below.



Website:  
<https://www.bridgewatercdd.org/>



Contact:  
813.533.2950 Ext.: 6582



Email:  
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*Note that any correspondence to District Staff may constitute a public record and that under Florida law, e-mail addresses are public records. If you do not want your e-mail address released in response to a public records request, do not send electronic mail to this entity. Instead, contact this office by phone or mail.*