

Q: Are the lakes and ponds in Palmer Ranch natural?

A: No—none of them are natural.

They're man-made stormwater detention ponds, part of a connected system designed to help prevent flooding and remove pollutants from our stormwater water before it drains into creeks, Little Sarasota Bay, and the Gulf.

Stormwater runoff is created when rain lands on roofs, driveways, streets, parking lots, and other surfaces that don't absorb water. This runoff flows directly into our ponds, which are like giant bowls that keep our streets and houses from flooding.

We're in one of the rainiest regions in North America, averaging about 53 inches of rainfall every year, versus 45 inches of precipitation in New York City and 36 inches in Chicago. About 60% of our rain falls in just four months, June through September.

That's a massive load of water in a short period of time. In fact, in an average year, 861 billion gallons of water falls on Sarasota County. Before development, that load was handled by wetlands, which once covered over half the county and allowed rainwater to slowly seep into the ground and travel underground, by gravity, to the Bay.

Development destroyed or altered much of those wetlands. Instead of getting absorbed into the ground, stormwater runoff rushed water into our creeks and Bays, carrying fertilizers, pesticides, motor oil and gas, animal waste, and other pollutants. Runoff is still the number-one source of water pollution in Florida.

Our stormwater ponds are a solution. They're designed to remove pollution through biological, chemical, and physical processes. The water in our system slowly drains from pond to pond, eventually making its way to Little Sarasota Bay. This mimics the natural landscape, which slowly released rainwater to Bay, maintaining healthy saltwater levels that important support wildlife, including oysters.

Our stormwater pond system was state-of-the-art when it was begun, in the 1990s, and is still considered a model in the state of Florida. When properly maintained with a 10-20 year clean out period, low-maintenance buffers at their shorelines, and native wetland plants in their shallows, our retention ponds make Palmer Ranch more livable, while minimizing our environmental impact on the Bay.

For more information on our watershed, stormwater ponds, and how to maintain stormwater ponds near your property, visit

www.sarasota.wateratlas.usf.edu/upload/documents/Stormwater_Neighborhood.pdf and http://sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/media/sfylifasufledu/sarasota/documents/pdf/water/2019_Water_factsheetStormwaterPonds_PRINT.pdf.



Natural Sarasota wetlands.

Written by the Palmer Ranch Watershed / Natural Assets Committee, a group dedicated to maintaining and improving our water, preserves, and common areas.