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DEP Deputy Secretary Clark Tours Keys Canals Impacted by Hurricane Irma



Gus Rios- DEP official, Cynthia Hall – Monroe County attorney, Monroe County Mayor David Rice and DEP Deputy Secretary David Clark view an impacted canal in Marathon.

The Florida Department of Environmental Protection’s Deputy Secretary David Clark traveled from Tallahassee recently to meet with Florida Keys’ officials to tour local canals impacted by Hurricane Irma and discuss storm marine debris removal.

The Department of Environmental Protection has agreed to lead marine debris removal efforts throughout Florida, including the Keys. Monroe County and the Keys’ municipalities have agreed to be local partners, offering local knowledge and coordination for prioritizing canals and nearshore waters for cleanup.

“Show me the most impacted canals you have,” Clark asked County staff.

Monroe County Mayor David Rice and local staff from Monroe County, Marathon and DEP took Clark to hard hit canals in Big Pine and Marathon that were clogged with battered docks, destroyed vessels, propane tanks and other debris that is blocking navigation and causing environmental damage.

Rhonda Haag, who is leading the County’s marine debris removal effort, showed Clark how the county’s \$7 million investment in restored canals has been negatively impacted.

“These demonstration canals will be at the top of the list for debris removal so the County’s investment can be preserved and the temporary negative impact from the storm can be reversed,” Haag said.

Residents from each neighborhood welcomed the group, and commented about the poor water quality and how much they looked forward to the debris being removed and the canal waters returned to normal.

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The tour wrapped up in Marathon, where Marathon City Attorney David Migut discussed how the City had been deeply impacted by the storm.

Clark pointed out the necessity of public sites for temporary staging areas for the marine debris, and asked local officials to increase their efforts to locate as many as possible. Several such sites already are in use for land debris. Other potential sites are waterfront parks that may become necessary to use temporarily.

The County and City of Marathon are working out the final details on separate Agreements with the State DEP that outline the responsibilities of the cleanup.

Marine debris removal is anticipated to begin in December. Vessel removal in County waters and canals has been taking place for weeks and will continue.

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