Bay County Fee Funds Stormwater Projects

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By: Elizabeth Cate

Bay County, Fla:

Workers are drilling to fix a drainage problem on a dirt road. Their progress determines if drivers can pass through.

"I've been living here since about 2000 and its always been a mess, every time it rains," said Bay County resident, Dent Tullis Jr.

Tullis pays to ensure paths near his home are clear. As long as he sees improvement, he doesn't mind dishing out the money.

"I hope it works out the way they say it is," said Tullis.

In fact, all residents in unincorporated Bay County have a financial interest in it. The work across the county is funded by a storm water impact fee. The annual cost to individuals is $40 and commercial properties pay $200.

"I think we got a lot of bang for our buck out of these dollars in impacting the storm water systems of the county," said Public Works Director, Ken Schnell.

Schnell created a list of all the improvements completed with money collected from the fee. In the past five years, since it's inception in 2006, more than 30 projects were completed with a bill totaling more than$5 million.

"Well when you're talking about making improvements, $5 million is a heck of a lot of improvements we can make and if you look down that list, you'll see where you know, paving 42 miles of roads of doing major projects like the Jenks Avenue box culvert project, those a fairly substantial projects," said Schnell.

The dollars pay for more than construction costs, they also pay for maintenance. Schnell says all the dollars that come in, eventually get dolled out, that same year. Arguing, it's a successful program.

We couldn't have done all of these projects that we've done without the storm water utility fee," said Schnell.

It's considered predictable funding. Each year, the county rakes in a little under $2 million from the fee. For example, this year the county collected $1.6.

Click here to find out more about the fee. (http://www.co.bay.fl.us/engineering/sw-utility.php)

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