

What about? Hurricanes in Florida and the research by Chad Boda?

- The onus is on me to tell the whole story, says Chad Boda.



In October 2016, Hurricane Matthew destroyed parts of a scenic coastal road in the City of Flagler Beach, Florida. USA. The event intensified a long-standing public debate on how to rebuild the road and its beach again. The options presented by Florida Department of Transportation: a sea wall, and the Army Corps of Engineers: a beach nourishment project, prompted LUCSUS researcher Chad Boda to join the debate.

In January 2017, Chad wrote three opinion pieces for three local papers in the Flagler County area: FlaglerLive, The Palm Coast Observer and the Daytona Beach News Journal.

Why did you join the debate?

I felt that I had a duty to create a more informed debate. As a sustainability researcher I have more knowledge about these issues than the average citizen. I wanted to share my knowledge with the citizens of Flagler so that they have a more accurate picture of what the different options mean for their city and the environment in the long-run.

From my research perspective, I could see that the agencies main focus was on ensuring that the road would not be destroyed again, not on preserving both the road and the beach. Yet, both of the agencies, in different ways, stated to the public that their option would address citizens' environmental concerns.

I wanted to highlight how these statements were based on selected facts – which do not give an accurate picture. So for example, in my opinion articles, I have illustrated why the Florida Department of Transportation's option of building a sea wall is not beneficial for the environment. A sea wall can seriously harm the local environment, in particular the population of federally protected, endangered sea turtles in which nest in Flagler Beach. This is because a seawall accelerates erosion which causes the beach to shrink, and when the beach shrinks, the sea turtle nesting habitat eventually disappears.

I have also pointed out why the project to nourish the beach put forward by the Army Corps is only a band-aid solution – and therefore not a viable long-term solution. For example, beach nourishment encourages further development in areas such as Flagler Beach-- which increases the number of people and amount of property that is vulnerable to erosion through sea level rise and coastal storms. Nourishment can also harm the beach and near shore ecosystem during construction, and nourished beaches have to be re-nourished every few years which can harm these ecosystems in the long-term.

Finally, I wanted to join the debate to put forward another possible solution for both the road and the beach. My suggested option, which many coastal scientists agree, would be to relocate the road completely. This would allow for the beach to expand – a measure that would make it is easier to adapt to rising sea levels and also provide more habitat and recreational beach.

What do you hope to achieve with your opinion pieces?

I want to create a more level playing field – where the citizens become more informed about what the different options actually mean for their beach and their city. As it stands, both of the agencies present their options in a very specific way which doesn't always include all the important details. I want to counter that partiality with fact-based scientific information. My hope is that my contribution will help the citizens see the broader picture – since this issue is about more than just the road – it is about the survival of the beach in the long run.

What are your broader thoughts on the relationship between research and social impact?

For me research and social impact go hand in hand. Part of my research is about actively advancing more sustainable solutions - in this case, informing the citizens about the good and bad of the various options presented to them. This perspective, I think, is quite special for sustainability studies, where social impact related activities are an integral part of the research field. I'm glad that I can use my knowledge as a researcher to actually impact on a topical debate – where the decision made can make a real difference on the future of the restoration of the beach and the quality of life for citizens.



[Chad Boda](#) is a researcher at LUCSUS. He is currently working with the City of Flagler to develop a beach management plan and implementation strategy to restore and maintain their local beach which has been severely degraded after years of using so called hard measures to control natural erosion.

Read his articles

PalmCoastObserver.com

FlaglerLive.com

DaytonaBeachNewsJournal.com