

# Scientist to address Bluffton council Tuesday on the health of the May River

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## Want to go?

What: Bluffton Town Council

When/where: 6 p.m. Tuesday at Town Hall, 20 Bridge Street

A nationally known scientist and author who has long warned local officials of the dangers development poses to coastal waters is speaking to Bluffton Town Council Tuesday.

Dr. Fred Holland, a retired ecologist with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, will present 15 years of research about the consequences of development on tidal creek ecosystems. His book, "Tidal Creek Habitats, Sentinels of Coastal Health," was written with the help of other state and federal agencies.

Bluffton resident Jimmy McIntire requested the town invite Holland and is urging residents to attend the meeting. He hopes Holland's presentation, which addresses how pavement, development and urban sprawl degrade local waters, will encourage a sense of urgency in improving the health of the May River.

The state Department of Health and Environmental Control has closed shellfishing along four miles of the river this season, beginning in September.

"It seems to me every time (the town) raise(s) the subject they just say 'we are going to study it some more,' and from my point of view, we are passed the stage of studying it," McIntire said. "It's time to start addressing what we know the problems are."

Marc Orlando, Bluffton's interim town manager, said staff will recommend Tuesday the town sign an intergovernmental agreement with Beaufort County to "address any and all issues in the May River." He also said the town's top priority is to create specific action steps to improve the river as part of the May River Watershed Action Plan.

Holland, who said he's presented his research to Beaufort County Council 10 times since 1995, said planning smartly can protect coastal waters.

"One of the problems with development is it's society's choice for what they want," Holland said. "It's my job as a scientist to tell them what the consequences are. ... There is no easy answer. People are coming, and they've got to have a place to live. You need to be smart about how you do it or you will lose ecological services. It will ultimately get down to whether you can swim in the water or eat the seafood."