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BAY REFLECTIONS

News from the Sarasota Bay Estuary Program

January 2021



Director's Note

David Tomasko, Ph.D.

Greetings! For those of you who don't know me, joining the SBEP as the new Executive Director in November was a sort of homecoming for me. Back in the early 1990s, I was the first scientist for the SBEP, after receiving the offer of employment from Mark Alderson. Under Mark's leadership, Sarasota Bay's initial recovery was started, and we all owe him a debt of gratitude for his leadership and passion over the years. The first large-scale habitat restoration projects were started under Mark's tenure, as well as the first diagnostic assessment of the health of the bay. Important efforts to replace problematic septic tanks and under-performing wastewater treatment plants occurred under Mark's guidance, and the bay's water quality and ecosystems started to slowly recover in response to those actions.

However, the health of the bay has slipped over the past few years due to a combination of factors, including population growth, aging infrastructure, and changes in rainfall patterns. As a result, the bay's water quality and ecological health have declined recently. The condition of the bay is not as good as it should be, and not as good as it could be.

Read the Full Director's Note >

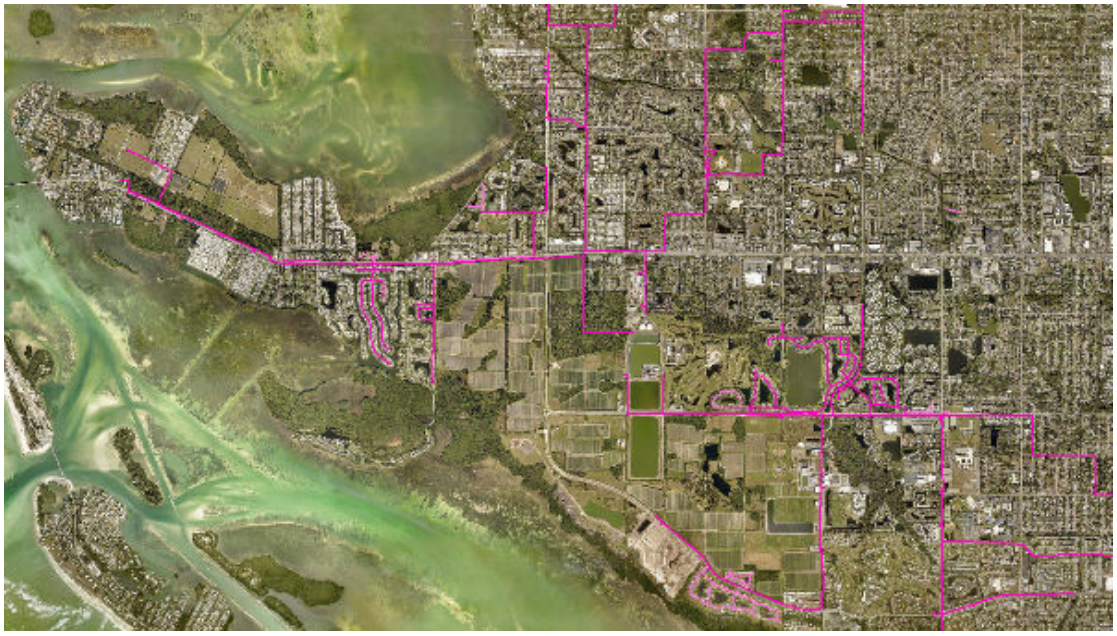
Sarasota County and SWFWMD Groundwater Study to Fill Gaps in Water Quality Knowledge



Most Floridians know that water surrounds us, from the Atlantic Ocean to the Gulf of Mexico to our smallest neighborhood retention ponds. Yet the feeling of solid ground beneath our feet often blinds us to the water lying underground. That groundwater may hold keys to better understanding important connections between land and sea. Sarasota County and the Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD) will embark on a project this year to study how groundwater travels through different landscapes in Sarasota County and what it may be bringing along with it as it flows toward Sarasota Bay.

Read more about the groundwater study >

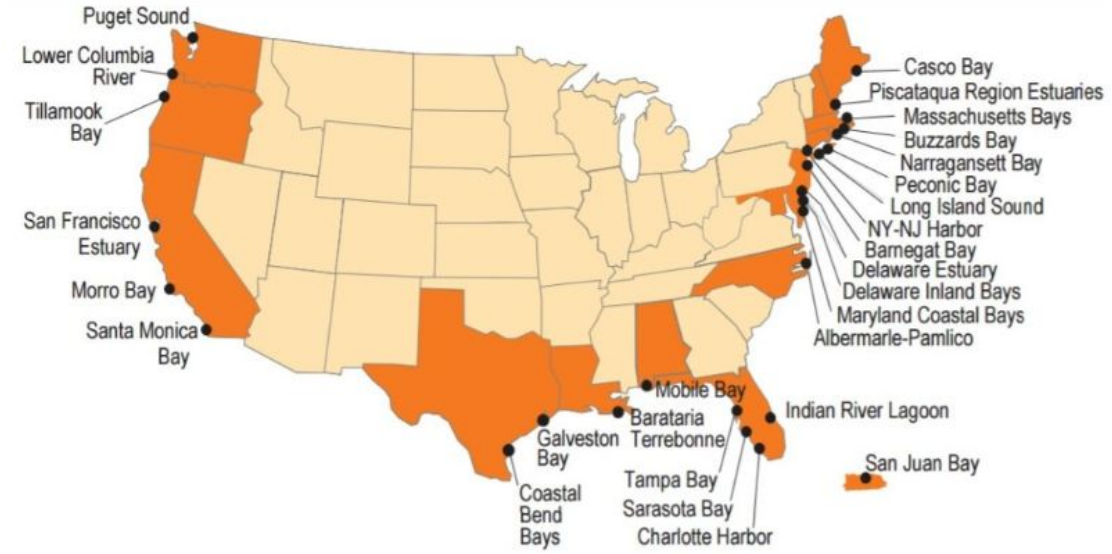
Investments in wastewater treatment help protect water quality in Manatee County



Direct permitted wastewater discharges to Sarasota Bay ceased several years ago, but maintaining this no-discharge status – and keeping up with a rapidly growing population – requires local utility departments to make regular investments in wastewater infrastructure. Manatee County Utilities Department's (MCUD) Southwest Regional Water Reclamation Facility (SWRWRF) is one of the largest treatment plants in the Sarasota Bay watershed, processing about 13.3 million gallons of wastewater per day. As a water reclamation facility, SWRWRF stores the treated wastewater effluent, or reclaimed water, after processing. MCUD then distributes the water to reclaimed water customers, including residential developments, golf courses, schools, farms, and others that use the water for irrigation. Reclaimed water infrastructure reduces pressure on stressed potable water sources by substituting "recycled" water for uses like irrigation that don't require drinking water quality. In some areas of the United States, lawn irrigation accounts for 30 to 50 percent of all drinking water use, so this is no small problem.

Read more about wastewater in Manatee County >

National Estuary Program Reauthorized through 2026 with Increased Funding



Sarasota Bay is a beautiful natural resource at the center of our communities. Its ecological health is critical to our local economy. Proximity to the bay is associated with an economic uplift of property values in excess of $3 billion. Approximately 20,000 local jobs are related to a healthy bay. For thirty years, the Sarasota Bay Estuary Program has built strong partnerships with local, regional, state, and federal agencies, as well as the public at large, to develop science-based management guidance to protect and restore the ecological health of Sarasota Bay.

On January 13th, the Protect and Restore America's Estuaries Act was signed into law. This bipartisan bill reauthorizes the National Estuary Program, to which SBEP belongs, through 2026 and increases funding to address concerns such as seagrass loss and harmful algal blooms – concerns that exist today in Sarasota Bay.

SBEP wishes to thank Congressman Vern Buchanan, one of many co-sponsors of this bill. The bipartisan support for this bill is testament to the interest of the public in preserving and restoring the health of our nation's estuaries. SBEP looks forward to assisting our local partners and stakeholders in re-booting the recovery of Sarasota Bay.

Read more about the Protect and Restore America's Estuaries Act >

Sarasota Bay Partners Grant Applications Due March 1st



SBEP is accepting applications for 2021 Sarasota Bay Partners Grants until March 1st. Apply for up to $4,000 to support restoration and education projects that focus on Sarasota-Manatee bays from Anna Maria Island to the Venice Inlet. Have questions? Call SBEP at (941) 955-8085 or email info@sarasotabay.org. Click below for more information about the grant program.

Learn more about applying for a Bay Partners Grant >

2020 Grant Project Highlight:
Manatee County Water Goat at Portosueno Park

Earlier this month, Manatee County Parks and Natural Resources Department installed a Water Goat in Portosueno Park to prevent floating trash from entering Palma Sola Bay.



Florida Macroalgae Workshops

Florida Macroalgae: Knowledge Gaps and How We Can Fill Them
Virtual Workshops on March 29 & 31 and April 2, 2021



Rusty Chinnis

Macroalgae are components of healthy Florida estuaries, but excessive blooms can have negative ecosystem consequences. In recent years, multiple blooms of drift macroalgae in Florida estuaries have raised concerns about damage to seagrass habitats and water quality implications. Yet frameworks to manage the nutrients that support these blooms seldom include macroalgae as indicators of water quality. Three virtual workshops will convene in March and April 2021 to share information, facilitate discussions, and guide future efforts to manage marine macroalgae. The workshops will feature data from the study areas of four National Estuary Programs in Florida (Charlotte Harbor, Indian River Lagoon, Sarasota Bay, and Tampa Bay).

Want to learn more? Please use the form linked below to sign up to receive more information about the workshops.

Sign up to receive more information about the Florida Macroalgae Workshops >

Free Virtual Sarasota Bay Explorations for K-12 Students on EdExploreSRQ

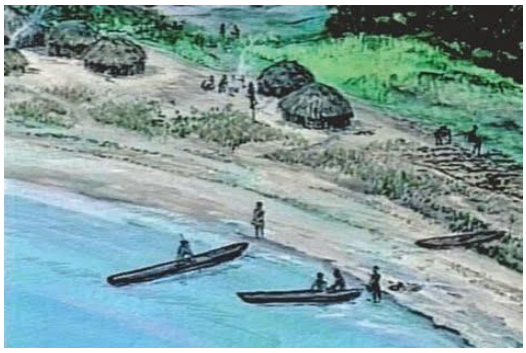
EdExploreSRQ is a local resource hub of experiential learning opportunities for K-12 students in Sarasota County. This year, two free virtual experiences feature our very own Sarasota Bay.

Where Land Meets Sea: Mangrove and Estuary Virtual Tour – Selby Gardens



This exploration will broaden students' understanding of southwest Florida's coastal wetlands, Sarasota Bay, and our interconnectedness with these precious ecosystems. Darcy Young with SBEP leads a stroll through the mangrove boardwalk at Selby Gardens while Dr. Megan Ehlers with the Sarasota County Schools' Carefree Learner boat takes participants on a cruise of the bay that explores its diverse marine life.

Early Native American People and Archaeology at Historic Spanish Point – Selby Gardens



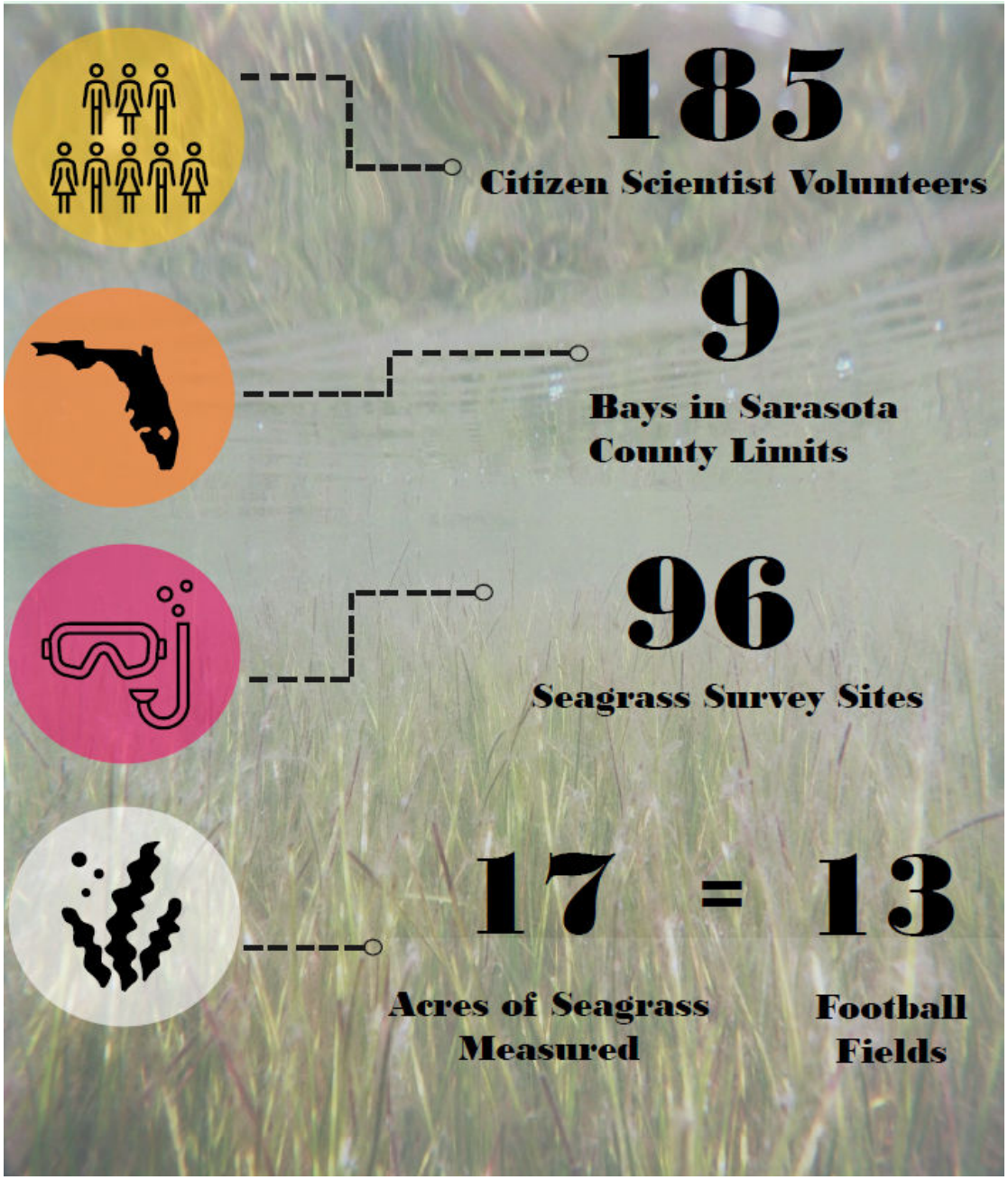
Designed for 3rd – 5th grade students, this exploration introduces students to the First Peoples who inhabited the Sarasota area approximately 5,000 years ago and the archaeological work conducted at Historic Spanish Point that has helped us to understand their culture and lifestyle.

Explore more virtual tours on EdExploreSRQ >

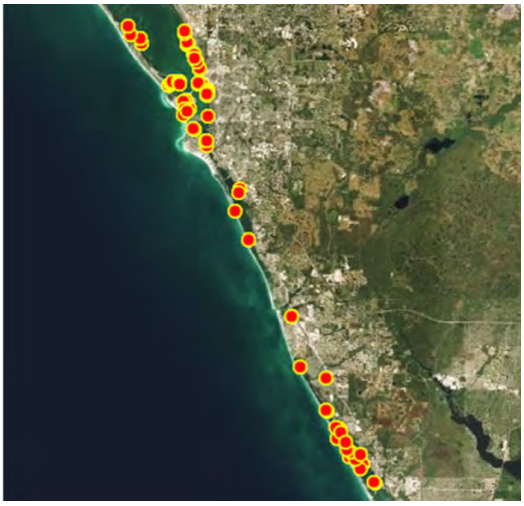
2020 Sarasota County Seagrass Survey Results

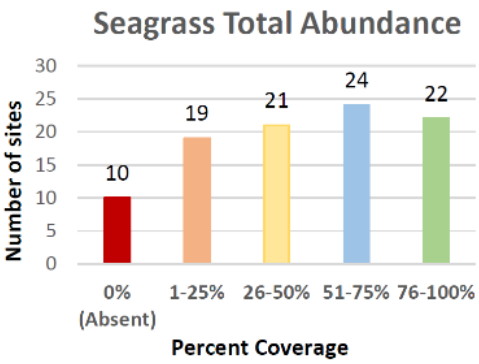
The 2020 Sarasota County Seagrass Survey results are in! Thank you to Sarasota County for coordinating a safe event and to everyone who participated.





Volunteers surveyed 96 sites from Sarasota Bay to upper Lemon Bay and found seagrass present at 86 sites. Most sites showed 51-75% seagrass coverage with two dominant species observed: shoal grass (*Halodule wrightii*) and turtle grass (*Thalassia testudinum*).



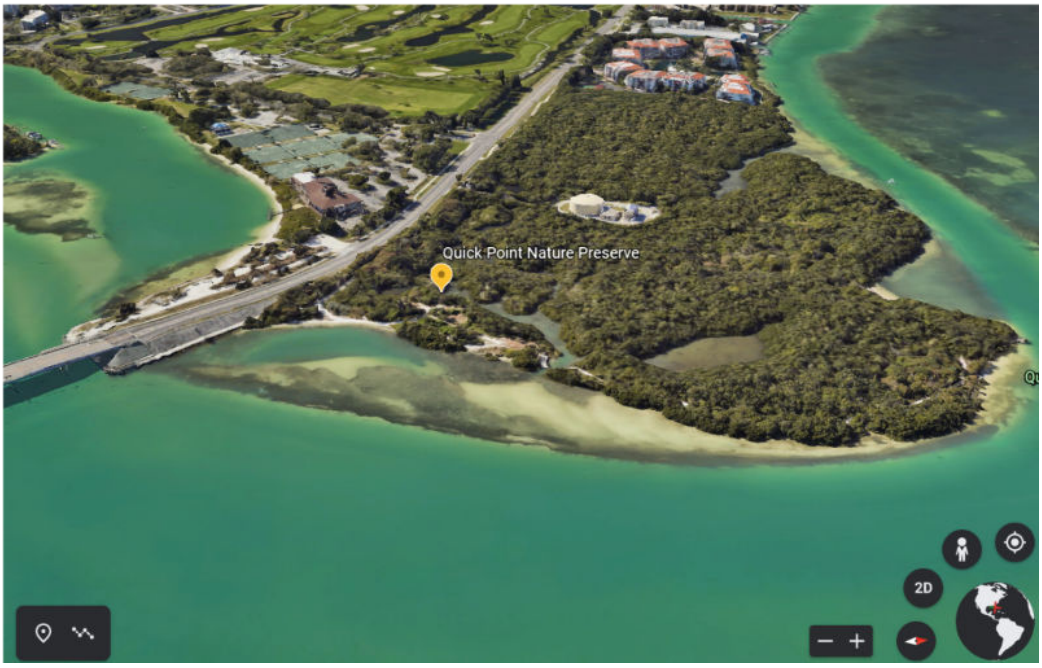


Read the full Sarasota County Seagrass Survey report >

Updated SBEP Website Offers New Resources

Habitat Restoration Map

Fly through Google Earth and explore existing and planned habitat restoration sites around the Sarasota Bay watershed.

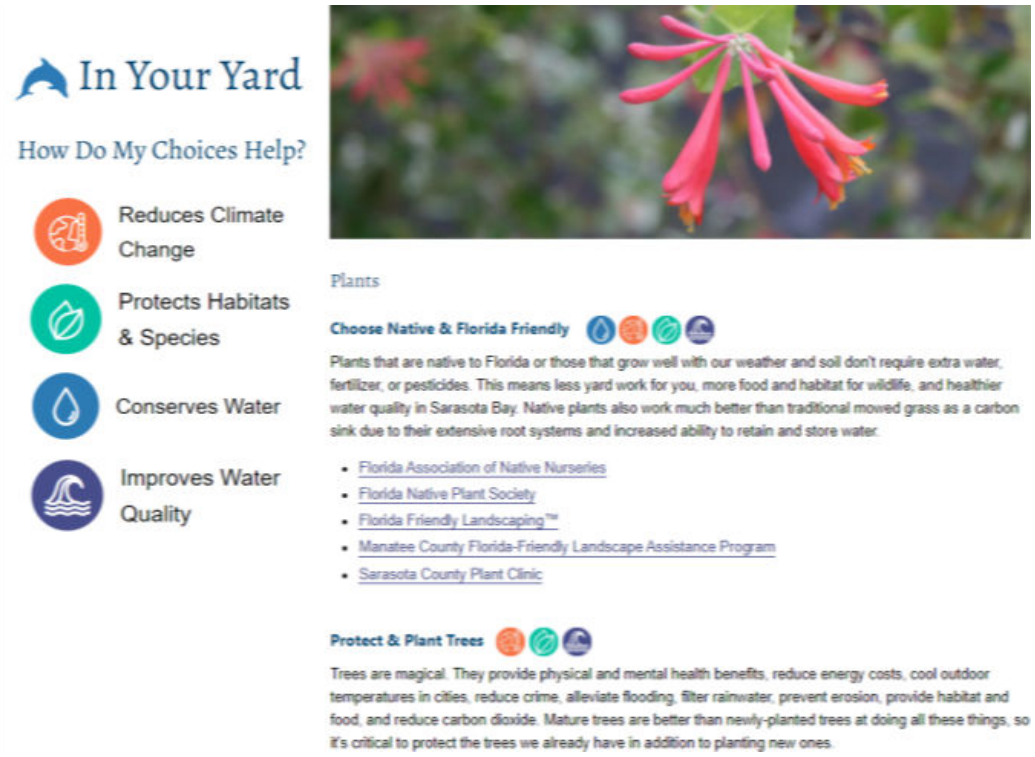


Explore SBEP's Habitat Restoration Map >

Bay Friendly Living

77 ways to protect Sarasota Bay and our environment in your:

Home | Yard | Community | Workplace | School | On the Water



Start living the bay-friendly way >

Bite-Size Bay News



Florida partnerships help save endangered - and lyrical - plants

"A bevy of nonprofit and government agencies, including the North Florida Coastal Program, have banded together to propagate and repopulate the Florida golden aster (Chrysopsis floridana) and the Aboriginal prickly apple (Harrisia aboriginum) in Manatee County."

Read more about rare plant restoration in Manatee County >



'Playbook' from Gulf Coast Community Foundation offers a guideline for healthy waterways, *Sarasota Herald-Tribune*

"The pathway to clean water and a healthy Sarasota Bay ecosystem may be found in a water quality playbook released online Thursday morning by the Gulf Coast Community Foundation."

Read more about the Community Playbook for Healthy Waterways >



All Quiet Under the Algal Bloom, *Hakai Magazine*

"Two and a half years after it was silenced, Sarasota Bay has nearly rebounded to its pre-bloom din. Tyson Moore and Rycyk consider their study a proof of concept for the bay's growing PALS network, now 10 stations strong. They will continue to use the network to establish baseline data, which is crucial for interpreting future changes in the bay.

Read more about listening stations in Sarasota Bay >



Sarasota Urban ReForesters Install Microforest at the Celery Fields

"In November of 2020, a coalition called Sarasota Urban ReForesters (SURF) installed a 0.3 acre "microforest" at the Celery Fields. This system was designed and installed in a way that would be very effective at intercepting, retaining, and purifying rainwater to abate runoff and nonpoint pollution and sequestering as much carbon as possible against climate change."

Read more about the "microforest" at the Celery Fields >

Classes and Events

iCAR Community Climate Change Education Series

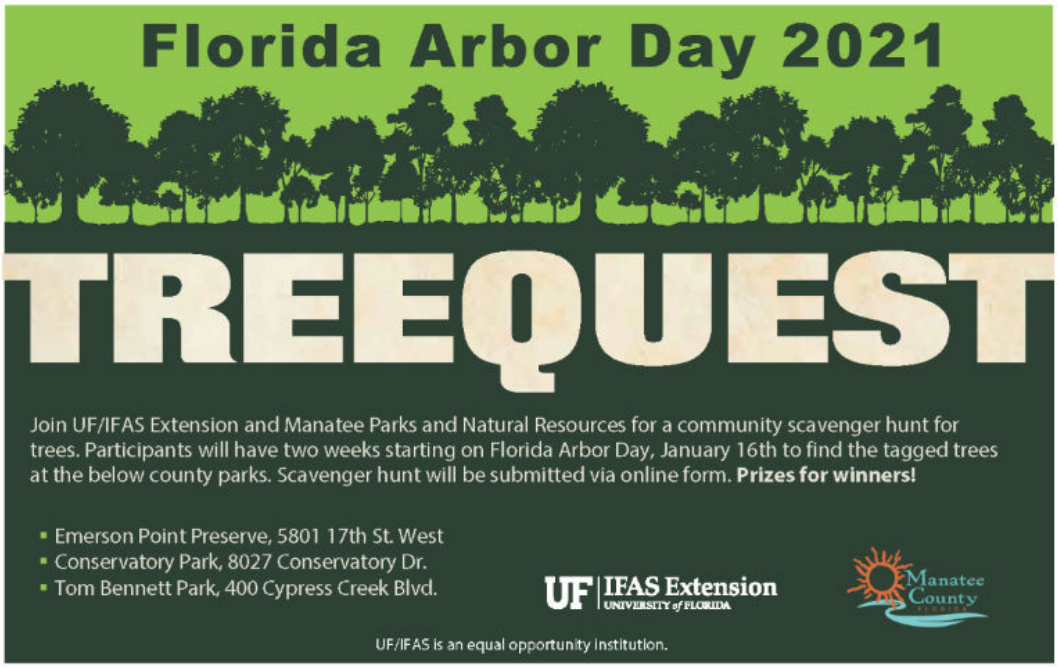
Wednesday, January 27, 7:00 PM



Register for the iCAR Community Climate Change Webinar >

TreeQuest 2021

Community Scavenger Hunt in Manatee County, ends January 31



Learn more about the TreeQuest Scavenger Hunt >

FOG Video Contest



KEEP OUR BAYS HEALTHY
PROPERLY DISPOSE OF YOUR FOGs:



**When we wash fats, oils and grease (FOG) down the drain, they build up in pipes and create blockages that contribute to sewer overflows polluting our bays.*

ENTER OUR VIDEO CHALLENGE

University of Florida IFAS Extension & Sustainability Sarasota County is hosting a month-long video challenge on Facebook to promote awareness of FOGs and their proper disposal.

To enter, post a video to Facebook tagged with **#ScrapeItContainItTrashIt** showing how you properly dispose of your fats, oils, and grease. Get creative, be funny, and teach others how you **#ScrapeItContainItTrashIt.** Participants have a chance to win a Sustainable Life Basket full of UF/IFAS Extension goodies after the January 31 deadline. Multiple winners will be chosen at random.

Got questions? Contact Jackie Leboutiz @ (jlebouitz@ufl.edu) or find us on Facebook **@UFSarasotaExt**

Check out these videos for inspiration:

- UF/IFAS Extension Sarasota County -- https://youtu.be/pZKlxl_ngdM
- JEA Fatberg Invasion -- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VDmBma_ITKI&list=UUm7ZeL-F515ro3HPUhfUcNw&index=85

UF IFAS Extension UNIVERSITY of FLORIDA **Learn more at scgov.net/FOG** Sarasota County

An Equal Opportunity Institution. UF/IFAS Extension, University of Florida, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, Nick T. Place, dean for UF/IFAS Extension. Sarasota County prohibits discrimination in all services, programs or activities. View the complete policy at www.scgov.net/ADA.

Learn more about FOG >

Clam Restoration Workshop

FEBRUARY 9, 10, 11 FROM 9-NOON

SAVE THE DATE



Announcing a Virtual Workshop:

THE SCIENCE OF CLAM RESTORATION IN FLORIDA: IDENTIFY RESEARCH NEEDS TO QUANTIFY ECOLOGICAL SERVICES AND MAXIMIZE BENEFITS

GULF SHELLFISH INSTITUTE
Research for Sustainable Aquaculture & Healthy Ecosystems

Register for the Clam Restoration Workshop >

Audubon Adventures

2nd Saturday of every month

This is a family-friendly, FREE event for elementary aged students and their families. Join environmental educators and naturalists to learn more about Florida habitats, plants, and animals.



Register for Audubon Adventures >

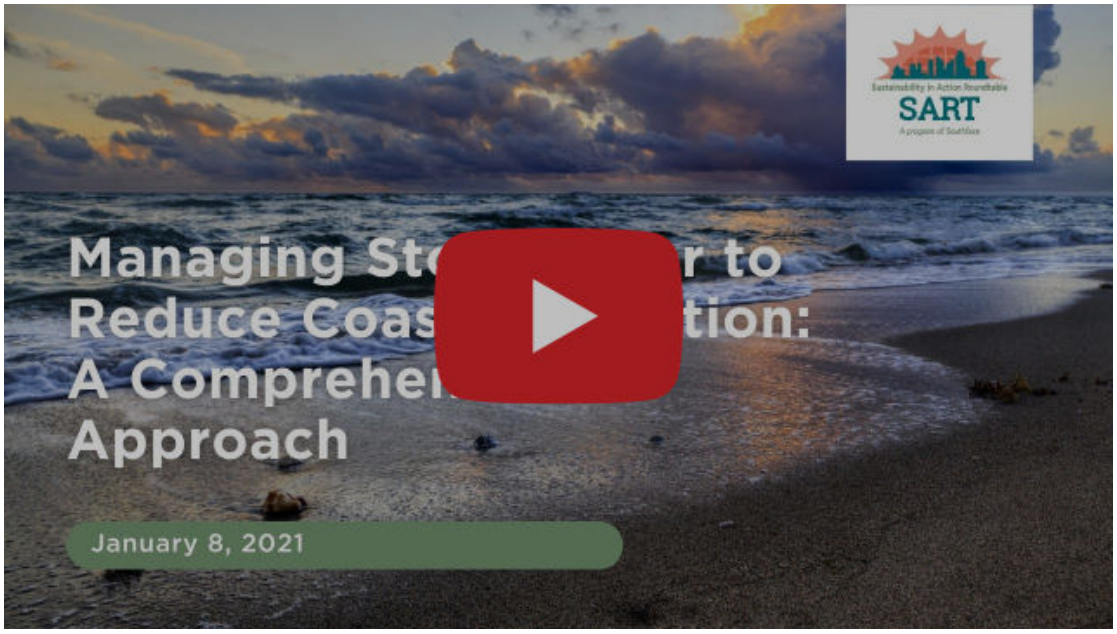
Manatee County Preserve Nature Tours

Join Manatee County Extension Master Gardener Volunteers on an educational stroll of a Manatee County preserve to learn about native plants and indigenous people. Multiple dates & locations.



Register for a Preserve Nature Tour >

WATCH: Southface Institute Sustainability in Action Roundtable



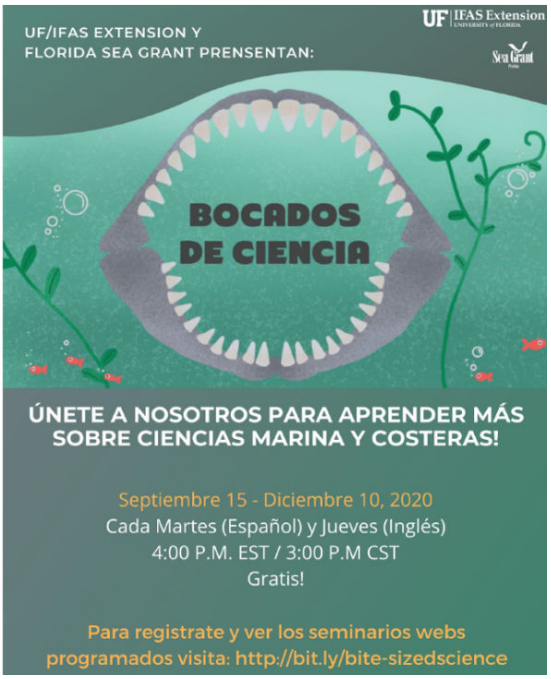
Listen to this panel of experts from the greater Sarasota area and the national stage describe the benefits of a comprehensive approach to stormwater management as an example for coastal cities worldwide.

Watch the Stormwater Management Panel on Youtube >

Florida Sea Grant: Bite Sized Science Bocados de Ciencias

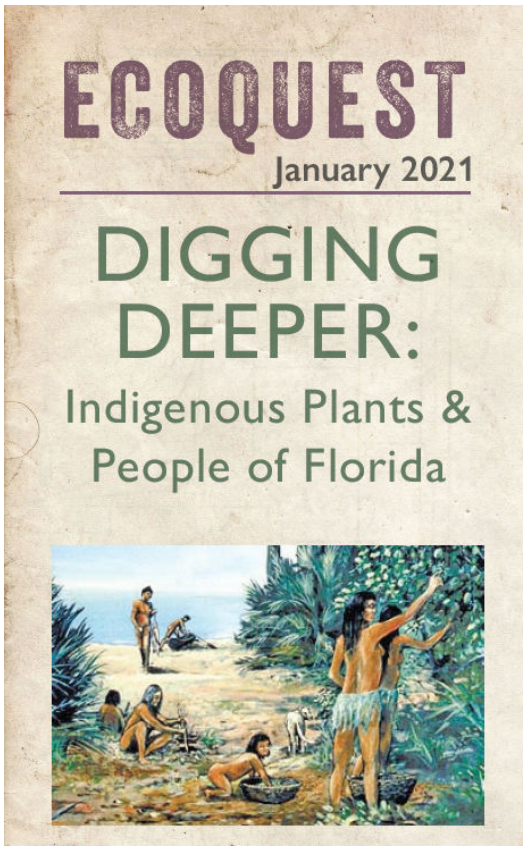
4PM on Tuesdays and Thursdays through May 6, 2021





Register for Bite Sized Science >

Sarasota-Manatee EcoFlora Project



Each month, Sarasota-Manatee EcoFlora will announce a fun new challenge to help document the plants of Sarasota and Manatee Counties by taking and sharing photos via iNaturalist.

These EcoQuests challenge Floridians to become engaged citizens in the observation, study, appreciation, and conservation of the native flora and fauna of Florida.

Learn more about the EcoFlora Project >

Upcoming University of Florida/IFAS Extension Webinars

Sarasota County

Manatee County

Volunteer Opportunities

Youth Environmental Action Committee

Calling all Manatee County High School Students!



Apply for the Youth Environmental Action Committee >

Sarasota County Energy Coach Training



Become an Energy Coach >

City of Sarasota Parks, Recreation & Environmental Protection Advisory Board

1 current vacancy

The City Commission relies on volunteer advisory boards to help shape policy and provide recommendations.

Apply for the Parks, Recreation & Environmental Protection Advisory Board >

Suncoast Reef Rovers Underwater Cleanups

Save the Date

Sunday, May 23rd - Venice Fishing Pier

Saturday, June 19, 2021 - Venice South Jetty

For more information, contact: Ken Lackmann (ken.lackmann@usda.gov)



Learn more about Suncoast Reef Rovers >

Jobs Board

- Environmental Specialist II: Sampling & Outreach Coordinator - Sarasota County
- Environmental Education and Outreach Intern (paid) - UF/IFAS Extension & Sustainability Sarasota County
- Land Management Intern (paid) - UF/IFAS Extension & Sustainability Sarasota County
- Part-Time Program Support Specialist - Tampa Bay Estuary Program
- Adjunct Faculty: Biodiversity Course - Ringling College of Art + Design

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Water Reading from Around the Web

FEMA ends policy favoring flood walls over green protections



“The Federal Emergency Management Agency has taken a dramatic step to encourage communities to use environmentally friendly features such as wetlands for flood protection instead of building sea walls and levees."

Read more on E&E News >

[One-third of America's rivers have changed color since 1984]



"One-third of the tens of thousands of mile-long (two kilometer-long) river segments in the United States have noticeably shifted color in satellite images since 1984."

Read more on the Telegraph >

Read the full scientific study >

Request a (Virtual) Speaker from SBEP

SBEP staff members regularly speak to homeowner, neighborhood, and community groups and upper-level classrooms about Sarasota Bay ecology and restoration. Weekday and evening presentations are now being scheduled through summer 2021. Click the button below to request a speaker for your group.

SARASOTA BAY
ESTUARY PROGRAM
Restoring Our Bays

Visit the SBEP website to schedule a speaker >

Share Tweet Forward

Follow us on Facebook Follow us on Instagram Visit Our Website

Bay Reflections is the quarterly e-newsletter from the Sarasota Bay Estuary Program.

The Sarasota Bay Estuary Program is dedicated to restoring the area's greatest natural asset - Sarasota Bay. We offer special thanks to our partners: Sarasota County, Manatee County, City of Sarasota, City of Bradenton, Town of Longboat Key, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection and the Southwest Florida Water Management District.

Our office is located in the Federal Building in downtown Sarasota:
111 S. Orange Avenue, Suite 200W | Sarasota, FL 34236
(941) 955-8085 | info@sarasotabay.org

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