News from around Sarasota Bay. View this email in your browser

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BAY REFLECTIONS

News from the Sarasota Bay Estuary Program

Fall 2021

Water Quality Restoration Workshop Highlights Plans for Wastewater and Stormwater Upgrades Expected to Cost Hundreds of Millions of Dollars over the Next Decade



Earlier this month, SBEP held a virtual Water Quality Restoration Workshop in partnership with local municipalities and environmental organizations in Sarasota and Manatee counties. The goal of the workshop was to highlight diverse approaches for improving water quality with a focus on implementing solutions. As Dr. Dave Tomasko puts it, “We want folks to know what’s wrong with the bay, what we need to do to fix it, and what it’s going to cost.”

Over 100 people tuned in throughout the day. During the morning sessions, staff from utilities and public works departments in Manatee County, Sarasota County, City of Bradenton, City of Sarasota, and the Town of Longboat Key discussed initiatives already taken to reduce nutrient loads and improve water quality over the past 10-20 years as well as planned projects over the next 5 to 10 years. Based on these presentations, local governments plan to spend over $600 million to reduce nutrient loads to the bay via upgrades to wastewater and stormwater infrastructure over the next 5 to 10 years. These costs are above and beyond the hundreds of millions of dollars that are budgeted to operate and maintain existing and planned future infrastructure. These planned projects will go a long way toward protecting Sarasota Bay’s water quality as the region’s population continues to grow. (*Read and watch: As red tide lingers, Sarasota County officials say they’re committed to upgrading water quality infrastructure*).

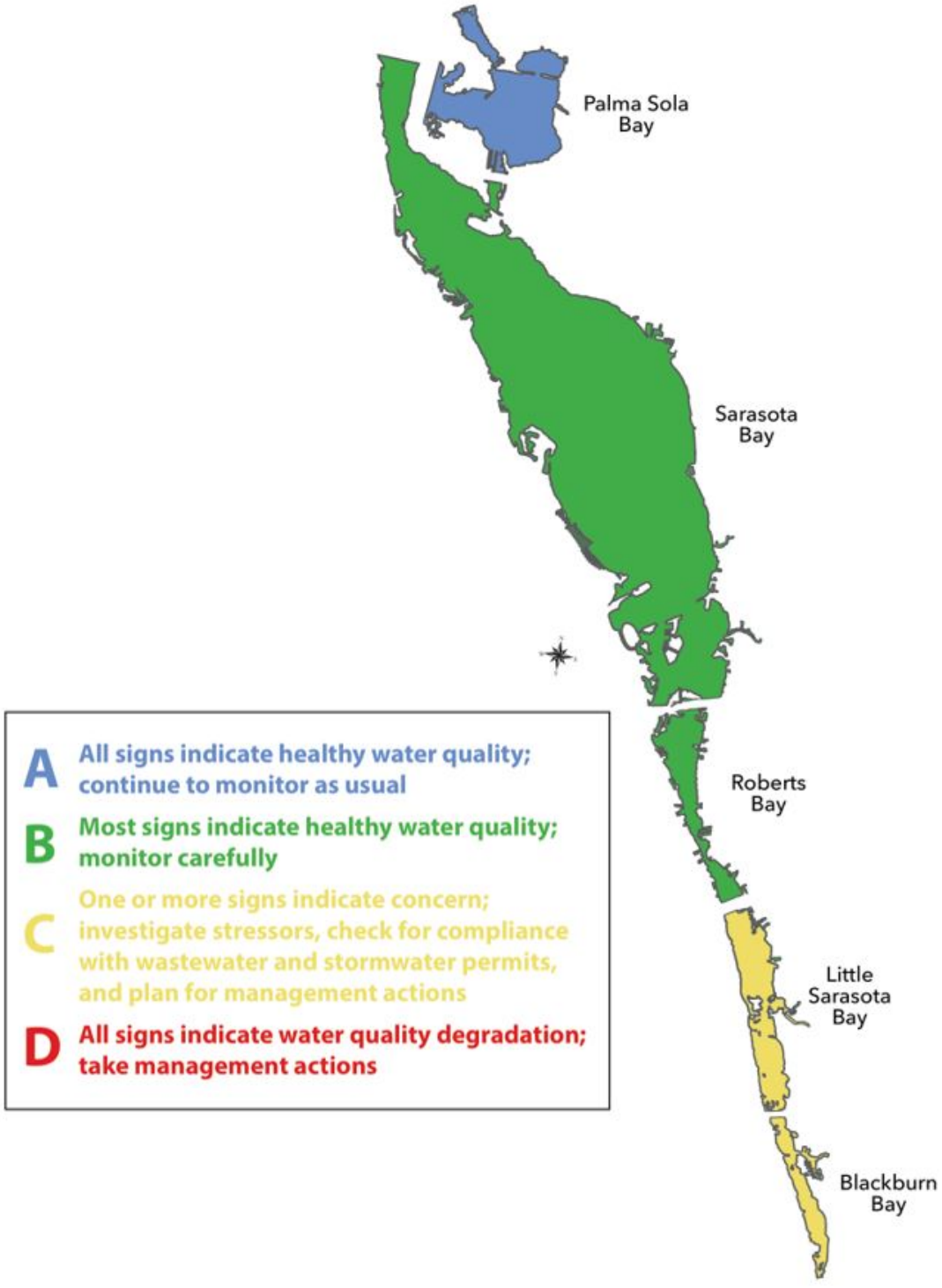
The second session highlighted innovative solutions to wastewater and stormwater management from environmental organizations and consulting firms. These topics explored denitrification systems, stream restoration, stormwater pond restoration collaboratives, and tools to reduce nutrient runoff from landscapes receiving both fertilizer and reuse water inputs. The final session of the day covered in-water approaches to water quality improvement including oyster and artificial reef restoration, fishery habitat enhancement around seawalls, Manatee River oyster habitat restoration, and clam deployment. Thank you to the attendees, presenters, moderators. We'd like to extend a special thanks to U.S. Congressman Vern Buchanan and his staff, who coordinated a workshop welcome address highlighting the Congressman's support for local water quality improvement efforts.

Watch the workshop recordings and download presentations >

Sarasota Bay Water Quality Report Card

As part of the workshop and larger monitoring effort of Sarasota Bay health,

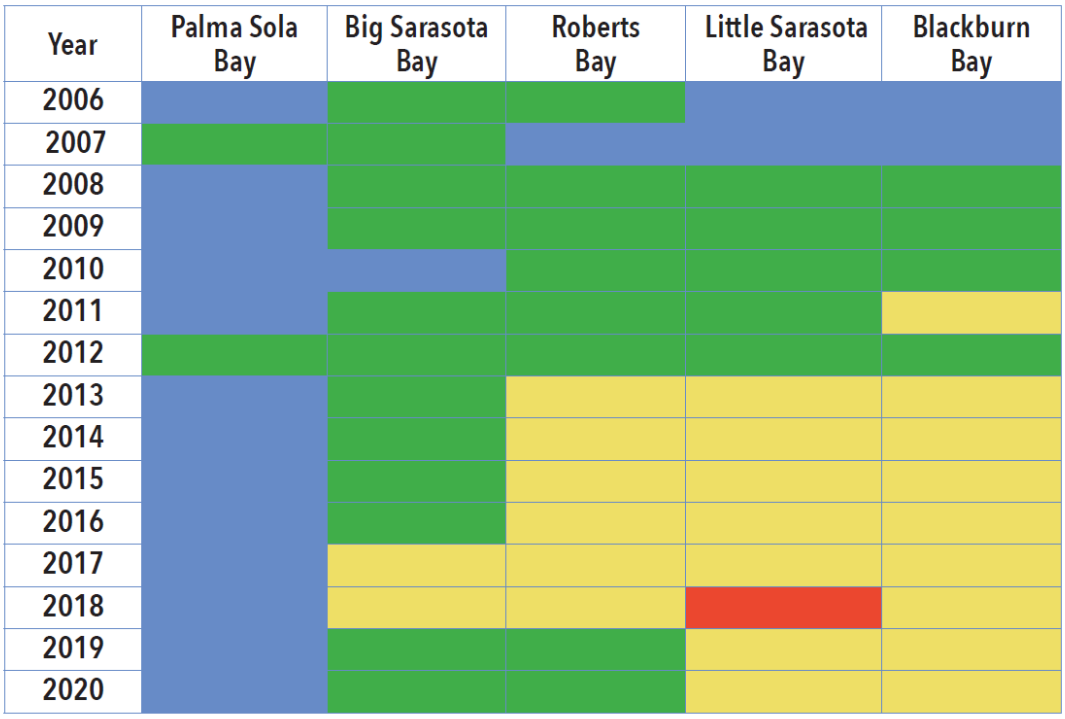
SBEP presented the Sarasota Bay Water Quality Report Card, which signifies the water quality status of the five bay segments in Sarasota Bay: Palma Sola Bay, Big Sarasota Bay, Roberts Bay, Little Sarasota Bay, and Blackburn Bay. To determine the water quality health of each segment, data on total nitrogen, chlorophyll-a (the amount of phytoplankton, or microscopic algae, in the water), seagrass acreage, and macroalgae (seaweed) were combined into a single score from A to D.



2020 water quality report card map for Sarasota Bay segments

The report card also shows scores for each bay segment over time from 2006 to 2020 to offer a wider view of water quality trends.

Sarasota Bay Estuary Program Water Quality Report Card



Year	Palma Sola Bay	Big Sarasota Bay	Roberts Bay	Little Sarasota Bay	Blackburn Bay
2006					
2007					
2008					
2009					
2010					
2011					
2012					
2013					
2014					
2015					
2016					
2017					
2018					
2019					
2020					

Read more about the water quality report card >

Ways to Support Bay Health at Home

Take action by evaluating your nutrient footprint, learning how to reduce it, and encouraging your families, friends, and neighbors to do the same. Here are some resources to help you get started:

- 8 Simple Ways to Reduce Personal Nutrient Pollution
- 10 Ways to Improve Water Quality in Your Community

Adopt a Vertical Oyster Garden!



Vertical oyster garden with common species, Credit: Dawn Witherington

They may not be soft and cuddly, but they need homes! Vertical Oyster Gardens, or VOGs, are oyster shells strung together with lengths of rope that are intended to hang below docks. VOGs help add more habitat for sessile organisms – oysters, sea squirts, and other critters that grow attached to surfaces – to our bays. Many, if not most, shorelines in the greater Sarasota Bay area are “armored,” meaning that they have been engineered with seawalls, bulkheads, and riprap. This armoring reduces the habitat that is available for marine critters. While oysters might settle on older concrete seawalls and wooden pilings, vinyl and other newer construction materials and coatings can prevent oysters and other sessile organisms from settling. These materials might extend the life of the seawall, but they severely reduce the amount of habitat available to oysters.



Vertical oyster garden adoption station at the Robinson Preserve NEST.

SBEP, Manatee County Parks and Natural Resources Department, and the Tampa Bay Estuary Program, with materials from the Gulf Coast Oyster Recycling and Renewal Program, have teamed up to make **Vertical Oyster Gardens available for free to homeowners with docks. Manatee County staff installed an adoption station at the Robinson Preserve NEST (840 99th St NW, Bradenton, FL 34209).** Anyone can visit the adoption station to pick up a VOG. All we ask is that you take a short survey to let us know where you'll install your VOG. We'll also ask if you're willing to help us out with some easy community science follow-ups. You can take the survey from your phone using the QR code on the adoption station sign. Or, you can fill out the survey in advance. You'll need to take the survey to get the combination for the lock on the VOG box.

Click here to learn more about adopting a vertical oyster garden >

Healthy Pond Collaborative



Shoreline and aquatic plants at Mira Lago. Credit: Mira Lago Ponds Committee.

Hundreds of stormwater ponds dot the landscape in portions of the Sarasota Bay watershed that were developed or redeveloped after about 1982, when state law began to require stormwater treatment in new developments. Those ponds play a critical role in removing nutrients from the fertilizers, pet waste, and other pollutants in stormwater before it reaches Sarasota Bay. However, for ponds to do their jobs well, they must be maintained properly, and the burden is on property owners to do so. Until recently, little education was available to property owners on how to care for their ponds, and many ponds fell into disrepair, leading to aesthetic concerns and declining water treatment capacity.

A new collaboration called the Healthy Pond Collaborative aims to assist Sarasota County neighborhoods with pond care. Funded by a $250,000 grant from Charles & Margery Barancik Foundation, the Healthy Pond Collaborative includes local nonprofit Solutions to Avoid Red Tide (START), the Sarasota County Neighborhood Environmental Stewardship Team (NEST) Program, University of Florida IFAS Extension Sarasota County, and the Science and Environment Council of Southwest Florida. The Healthy Pond Collaborative will use 70% of the grant funding to help local neighborhoods buy the aquatic plants necessary for a healthy pond enhancement, 9% for educational communication including a Best Pond Practices Guide to assist HOA leaders in planning how to effectively manage their ponds, 11% to hire an intern who

will assist with monitoring pond performance, and 10% for administration and supplies.

If your neighborhood or organization is having trouble with algal blooms or erosion in your stormwater ponds, contact the Healthy Pond Collaborative for assistance:

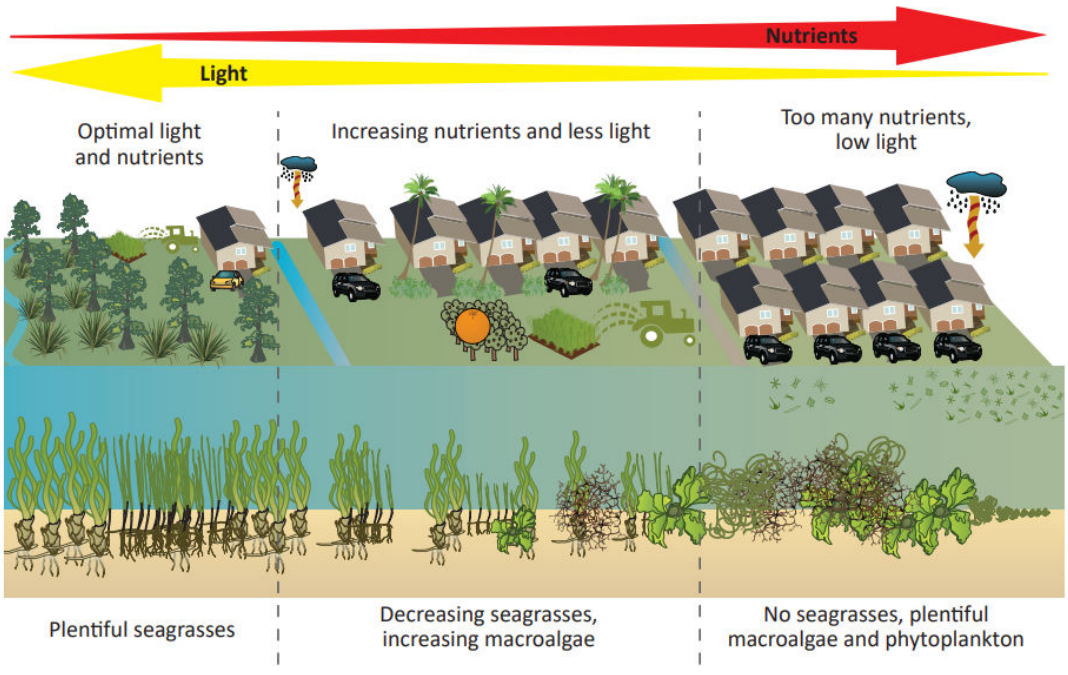
- Abbey Tyrna, Water Resources Agent for Sarasota County UF/IFAS Extension at atyrna@ufl.edu,
- Mollie Holland, Neighborhood Environmental Stewardship Team Coordinator for Sarasota County at mkholland@scgov.net, or
- Sandy Gilbert, CEO of START, at sandem133@aol.com.

Read more:

- SRQ Magazine - Solutions to Avoid Red Tide (START) Launches Regional Healthy Ponds Collaborative
- Sarasota Herald Tribune - New pond program aims to improve water quality in Sarasota Bay, reduce red tide

Check out local HOA success stories for inspiration! >

Focus on Florida seaweeds



Macroalgae, commonly known as seaweeds, are components of healthy Florida estuaries, but excessive blooms create negative consequences for ecosystems. In recent years, multiple blooms of macroalgae in Florida estuaries have raised concerns about poor water quality and damage to seagrasses. In spring 2021, a group of scientists and managers convened a set of workshops to share information, identify gaps in data and knowledge, facilitate future collaborations, and guide management actions. The workshops brought together close to 200 people from government, private industry, academia, nonprofits, and the public to share information and gain knowledge about macroalgae in the boundaries of four Florida National Estuary Programs.

Workshop participants showed strong support for new and continued monitoring of macroalgae, highlighting the need to understand drivers and trends related to its abundance. The final report from the workshop, as well as all speaker presentations and the full recorded webinar, are available on the SBEP website.

Want the short and sweet low-down on Florida seaweeds? Check out our new 2-page fact sheet.



Click here for the final report, fact sheet, & workshop recording >

Citizen Science Efforts Contribute to Journal Publication on Soil Carbon Storage



Tea bag index volunteer

A group of staff, faculty, and students from SBEP, New College of Florida, the Tampa Bay Estuary Program, and Florida State University recently published a peer-reviewed article in the journal Restoration Ecology titled “Restoration objectives create surface carbon cycle tradeoffs in coastal habitats.” Most of the data in the paper originate from a 2018 community science project in Manatee County preserves that engaged volunteers to measure soil activity and carbon storage potential in different coastal habitats. The authors conclude that providing public access to coastal habitats leads to a tradeoff with carbon storage, where areas with trails, kayak launches, and other access points tend to have lower carbon storage potential than inaccessible sites. The authors hope that the paper will help inform natural areas managers who aim to balance access with preserving ecosystem services.

Read the article abstract here >

Seagrass Scarring Pilot Helps Determine Effective Boater Outreach Methods



Seagrass sign with maps at New Pass Grill and Bait Shop

Sarasota Bay is shallow, and much of it is covered in seagrass. Seagrasses are aquatic flowering plants that grow in meadows teeming with wildlife. These habitats are very important to our economy and fishing industry, and they provide protection from storms. When boaters run too shallow over seagrass beds, they can rip out grasses and cause propeller scars, or prop scars. Florida is the boating capital of the U.S. There are over 40,000 boats registered in Sarasota and Manatee counties. Therefore, it's important that new and experienced boaters are aware of these habitats and know how to avoid damaging them.

In the fall of 2020, SBEP initiated a seagrass scarring education campaign in Sarasota and Manatee counties. The purpose of this effort was to educate boaters about where seagrasses are in Sarasota Bay, how to avoid scarring them, and what to do in the case of a grounding. To determine the most efficient rollout strategy, a smaller pilot test was done to compare various outreach materials and delivery methods.

Read more about the seagrass scarring pilot test >

SBEP Staff Updates: Welcome Heather Moody!



Please join us in welcoming SBEP's new Finance and Grants Manager, Heather Moody, who joined the team in August.

Heather has a wide range of experience in the public and nonprofit sectors that includes water policy and planning, program and facility management, and environmental outreach. She began her career as an animal keeper and educator in zoological parks and progressed to become Director of Environmental Education at a natural history museum in Atlanta. She then took the plunge into water conservation and protection through positions

working for a large water utility in Georgia and the South Florida Water Management District in West Palm Beach. Most recently, she worked for Palm Beach County Parks and Recreation as manager of a nature center and preserve.

A Florida native, Heather grew up in Brevard County on the central east coast. She has a bachelor's degree in Biology from the University of Central Florida and a Master's in Public Administration from the Andrew Young School of Policy Studies at Georgia State University. As the Finance and Grants Manager for SBEP, she is responsible for grants management, financial accounting, budgeting, and coordination with the EPA and other grantor agencies. As time allows, she enjoys assisting with outreach events and field work to support our programs and projects. Heather is excited to be living on the Florida Gulf coast for the first time and is getting to know the Sarasota Bay watershed through her hobbies of hiking, kayaking and wildlife photography.

Volunteer Corner

Seagrass Survey



Join the 2021 socially distanced Seagrass Survey November 8th - 22nd! Boaters, snorkelers, kayakers, and waders welcome! Located Sarasota Bay to Lemon Bay, choose your own zone and survey seagrass with your close family and friends.

- Free t-shirt and lunch for registered survey volunteers

- Students can earn community service hours

Register for the Seagrass Survey Nov 8-22, 2021 >

Give a Day for the Bay

November 20, 2021 from 8am-12pm at Perico Preserve



Looking for a way to give back this Thanksgiving season? Join the Tampa Bay Estuary Program, Sarasota Bay Estuary Program, and Manatee County Parks and Natural Resources for a Give-a-Day for the Bay event at Perico and Robinson Preserves. To help jump start restoration at Robinson Preserve, we will be harvesting seeds from Perico Preserve. We will then travel to the Robinson Preserve expansion to disperse the collected seeds!

Register for Give a Day For the Bay Nov 20, 2021 >

Volunteer Shout-Outs



Marine science students from Sarasota Military Academy helped us clean up our living shoreline project at Bayfront Park in the City of Sarasota. Their teacher, Captain Jeanette Marks, will encourage the students to reflect on the experience for their upcoming class project to identify more locations for living shorelines around Sarasota Bay.



Thirty volunteers spent the last day of National Estuaries Week 2021 on Tidy Island, helping plant eight native species into a large-scale, long-term restoration experiment led by researchers at New College of Florida. Click here to read more about the project.

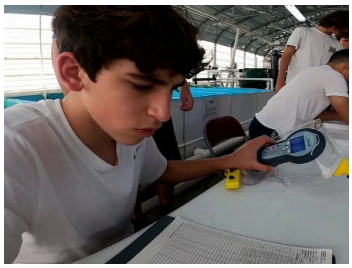
Bite-Size Bay News



NCF students engage in grad-level seagrass research

"Every summer since 2018, Toro-Farmer has directed a group of New College interns in an ongoing study of the health of the bay's seagrass."

Read more about New College of Florida seagrass research >



Teens help snook population rebound after cold snaps, red tide

"For the past eight months, Riverview High School students have taken on the big responsibility of measuring, weighing and preparing snook to be released."

Read more about Riverview High School helping snook >



CAC member Wayne Douchkoff joins Apalachicola RiverTrek

This November, SBEP's Citizens Advisory Committee member Wayne Douchkoff will be embarking on a 107 mile paddle to raise funds for the protection, restoration, and stewardship of the Apalachicola River and Apalachicola Bay. Good luck Wayne!

Read more about the Apalachicola RiverTrek & support Wayne >

Get Involved

Community Sound Baths at Bay Preserve

Conservation Foundation's Bay Preserve

Nov 3 and Nov 10



5:30 PM



Walking in Wonder

The Bay Sarasota and Around the Bend Nature Tours
Wednesdays now through December 8th
9:00 AM - 10:00 AM
10:00 AM - 11:00 AM



Halloween Food Truck Friday Night at Bay Preserve

Conservation Foundation of the Gulf Coast
Friday, October 29, 2021
5:00 PM - 8:00 PM



Native Plant Sale at the Sarasota Farmers Market

Stocking Savvy
Saturday, October 30, 2021
7:00 AM - 1:00 PM



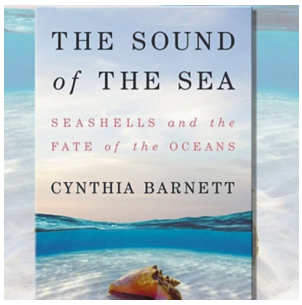
BLVD Bike Rides: Mobility Week

City of Sarasota
Tuesday, November 2, 2021
5:15 PM



Community Garden Workdays

Sunshine Community Compost
Limelight Garden - 3rd Sat of the month 8:00-11:00 AM
Orange Blossom Garden - 1st Wed of month 4:00-6:00 PM
Questions/RSVP to info@sunshinecommunitycompost.org



"The Sound of the Sea," with Florida author Cynthia Barnett

UF/IFAS Extension Sarasota County & Southface Sarasota
Saturday, November 6, 2021
4:00 PM – 6:00 PM

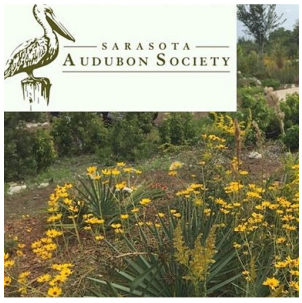


Robinson Preserve Expansion Paddle

Manatee County Parks & Natural Resources
Tuesday, November 9, 2021
4:00 PM – 6:00 PM

Sustainable Communities Workshop

UF/IFAS Extension Sarasota County
Wednesday, November 10, 2021
9:00 AM – 4:30 PM



Celery Fields Sustainability Day

Sarasota Audubon Society
Thursday, November 11, 2021
9:00 AM – 12:00 PM



HOA Tours

Southface Sarasota
Fridays, November 12, 2021 and December 10, 2021
10:00 AM - 11:00 AM



Audubon Adventures: "What's in Your Pond?"

Sarasota Audubon Society & Around the Bend Nature Tours
Saturday, November 13, 2021
9:00 AM – 11:00 AM



Beach-Nesting Wildlife and Their Challenges

Conservation Foundation of the Gulf Coast
Tuesday, November 16, 2021
10:00 AM - 11:00 AM



Youth Ocean Conservation Summit

Youth Ocean Conservation Summit & Mote Marine Laboratory
Saturday, December 4, 2021



Audubon Adventures: "Birds Take Flight!"

Sarasota Audubon Society & Around the Bend Nature Tours
Saturday, December 11, 2021
9:00 AM – 11:00 AM



Adopt a WaterGoat

Sarasota County NEST Program
Help Sarasota County prevent marine debris in Sarasota Bay by volunteering to remove floating trash from its WaterGoats.



NOAA's Favorite Catch Photo Contest

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
Now through December 31, 2021

Ocean Awareness Contest

Bow Seat Ocean Awareness Programs
A creative challenge for teens worldwide
Now through June 13, 2022.



Opportunities to Share Your Feedback

- Survey on plastic bags, auxiliary materials, and wrappings - University of Florida and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection
- Sarasota County American Rescue Plan Act Coronavirus Local Fiscal Recovery Funds Community Survey - The results of this survey will narrow the project and program list and prioritization of funding, to be paired with funding support efforts related to Sarasota County recovering response and recovery expenses from the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Sarasota County Penny Sales Tax Survey - Whether it's fire stations, bridges, roads, sidewalks, libraries or parks, Sarasota County wants your input on the next phase of improvements for our community.

Upcoming University of Florida/IFAS Extension Webinars

Sarasota County

Manatee County

Jobs & Funding Opportunities

- Senior Environmental Specialist - Manatee County Parks and Natural Resources – closes Nov 2
- University of South Florida Water Institute Web Developer
- Around the Bend Nature Tours - Paid Nature Guide - contact John at atbnature@gmail.com and Operations Mgr/Guide, Kat Giguere, at ATBKatG@gmail.com
- VoLo Vista Award - $10,000 to U.S. based graduate students working on climate solutions - closes Nov 30

Water Reading from Around the Web

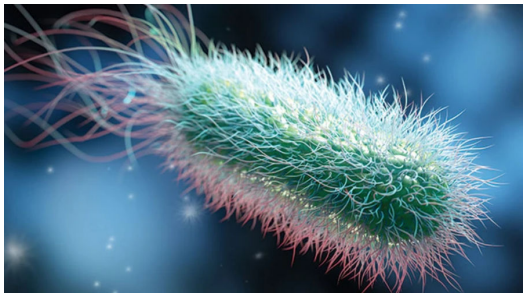
Devastating disease in dolphins linked to extreme downpours, researcher says



“The Gulf of Mexico is home to thousands of bottlenose dolphins...But in recent years, a devastating skin disease has afflicted some dolphins in the Gulf and around the world."

Read more on Yale Climate Connections >

Bacteria: The miracle microbes that could fix planet



"We get inside the labs that are growing beneficial bacteria to gobble up pollution, harvest waste, generate energy and help keep us healthy."

Read more on Science Focus >

Scientists in Sarasota are concerned red tide may have long term effects on the human brain



"When a red tide bloom gets close to the coast or even in Tampa Bay, it’s impossible to miss...If it’s bad, it can irritate your respiratory tract. But doctors don’t think it stops there. Now they're looking at the side effects red tide might have on the human brain."

Read more on ABC Action News >

Request a 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 spring 2022. 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 >

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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