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Dr. Ryan Gandy Selected as New Sarasota Bay Estuary Program Executive Director

Please join us in welcoming our new Executive Director, Dr. Ryan Gandy! Dr. Gandy holds a Ph.D. in Wildlife and Fisheries Science, a M.S. in Mariculture from Texas A&M University, and a B.S. in Marine



Biology from the University of Charleston. Over his 15-year tenure as a Research Scientist and Research Administrator with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), he led and supported the development of scientific programs focused on research, monitoring, stakeholder engagement, citizen science, fisheries management, and the restoration of shellfish resources statewide.

For the last year, he has served as the Science and Restoration Manager for SBEP, where he successfully advanced the program's library of restoration projects and ensured key initiatives are informed by current science. A fifth-generation Floridian and 21-year resident of Sarasota County, Dr. Gandy has witnessed the region's ecological challenges and transformations firsthand.

He is committed to protecting and enhancing the natural resources of Sarasota Bay so that future generations can continue to connect with and benefit from Florida's unique coastal environment. **"While we've made significant progress in restoring bay health and increasing marine habitat, our coastal ecosystem still faces challenges. I look forward to working with our partners and the community to strengthen the estuary's resilience for the benefit of all,"** said Dr. Gandy.

2025 SBEP Annual Report Explores Current Events and Major Accomplishments

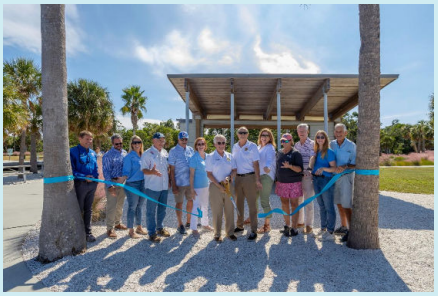


Our Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2025 is hot off the press! This report highlights key programs and accomplishments from **October 1, 2024, to September 30, 2025**. Also featured are deep dives into current events and reflections from our incoming and outgoing Executive Directors. We hope you enjoy the read!

View Report

Habitat Restoration Milestones





Longboat Key Living Seawall

On October 29, SBEP hosted a ribbon-cutting ceremony to celebrate the completion of a new Living Seawall at Bayfront Park in Longboat Key. **The living seawall consists of approximately 300 feet of three-dimensional, modular concrete panels designed to attach to the park's fiberglass seawall**, which replaced an older concrete seawall heavily colonized by marine organisms. Oysters and other filter feeders are known to attach to concrete surfaces, but it remains unclear if newer construction materials, like vinyl and fiberglass, offer an equivalent opportunity for organisms to settle. The living seawall panels reintroduce concrete while enhancing habitat value through surface textures that mimic natural marine environments such as mangrove roots, oyster reefs, and shell piles.

Learn More

Sarasota Baywalk

More than three decades ago, a small 4.5-acre patch of shoreline along Sarasota Bay became the site of a pioneering effort, the first of several habitat restoration projects SBEP would undertake across the watershed. With funding from the Federal Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), SBEP was able to return to this historic site and restore both its natural beauty and its educational value. The project, completed in September 2025, focused on three major components: **removing the deteriorated boardwalk, replacing degraded sections with a new, more resilient structure, and installing updated interpretive signage**.



Learn More

GT Bay Park: One Year Later

In September 2024, SBEP and its partners completed $900,000 worth of environmental enhancement projects at GT Bray Park in Bradenton.



Both projects, including a pond restoration and a stream retrofit, serve as stormwater treatment areas, benefiting the public, water, and wildlife. Within a year of completion, **over 10,000 native plants were installed at the pond**, thanks to the help of local partners and nearly **100 volunteers**. Regular treatment of exotic vegetation also helps keep the site in tip-top shape.

Learn More

Events

Manatee 360: A Night Beneath the Surface



Tuesday, November 18, 6:30 PM-8:00 PM- Join us for an immersive evening celebrating one of Florida's most beloved marine mammals, the manatee! Hosted at The Bishop Museum of Science and Nature's Planetarium, this special event will feature Manatee 360, a dome video experience produced by Just Float Films, offering a breathtaking view of manatees in their natural habitat.

Following the screening, experts from SBEP and Mote Marine Laboratory will share insights into current manatee conservation efforts, including **local research, monitoring,** and **vital seagrass restoration efforts** that support these gentle giants. This event is free, but a ticket is required. Register on Eventbrite.

Kayak Trips for Veterans



SBEP is partnering with Wayne Adventures to offer free, therapeutic kayak tours for local veterans. This program is currently seeking **volunteers** (non-veterans included) and **participants.** To sign up or learn more, contact wdouchkoff@aol.com.

Past Events

It was a busy summer! Some **from-the-field highlights** included two rounds of volunteer plantings at GT Bray Park, two field trips to FISH Preserve with Big Waters Land Trust for their "Bay Explorers Summer Experience," and a day of seining with students from Ringling College of Art and Design.





Events in 2026: Save the Date!

The annual Whitaker Bayou Cleanup, known as **ECOmmunity Day**, is scheduled for **January 17, 2026**. Stay tuned for more information. **See last year's recap**.

Our annual **Full Moon Paddle** is scheduled for **February 1, 2026.** We will be partnering with Big Waters Land Trust and launching from the Bay Preserve in Osprey. Registration opens on January 5th at **sarasotabay.org/events**.

Gear Up for Bay Partners Grants



Sarasota Bay Partners Grants are competitive awards for projects in the Sarasota Bay watershed that **promote habitat** and **water quality restoration**, **environmental education**, **community involvement**, and **stewardship** to improve the overall quality of Sarasota Bay and its tributaries. We welcome applications from non-profits, for-profits, schools, and government organizations located within the Sarasota Bay watershed.

It's time to gear up for the 2026 cycle! Visit our grants webpage to **learn more**.

Macroalgae, Seagrass, and Fisheries Data



Macroalgae & Seagrass

In 2025, **42 volunteers** contributed a total of **168 hours** to our **Eyes on Seagrass Citizen Science Program**, which helps document trends in macroalgae across the bay.

What did they find this year? **Macroalgal coverage decreased in four of five bay segments**, with Roberts Bay showing a significant increase, likely due to altered flow patterns following the opening of Midnight Pass.

SBEP monitors seagrass health using maps provided by the Southwest Florida Water Management District. Their most recent (2024) maps showed that Sarasota Bay had **19% (1,913 acres)** increase in seagrass since 2022.

These trends suggest that, overall, our bay system demonstrated resilience, withstanding the multiple extreme and historic 100-year weather events of 2024 without showing the degradation observed during less severe events in the past.

Learn More.

Photo credit: Stacey Mazza



Fish Populations

Since 2009, SBEP has funded the Florida Fish and Wildlife Research Institute's **Fisheries Independent Monitoring** (FIM) program to sample fish and invertebrate populations across all five bay systems within the Sarasota Bay estuary. This long-term dataset is essential for assessing the health of fish and invertebrate populations throughout the region.

The 2024 assessments for regional management of **snook** and **redfish** abundance in Sarasota Bay, as well as the **seatrout** population assessment throughout the region, indicate **healthy populations** that have rebounded from the mass mortality events caused by the severe red tide events. Importantly, FIM data collection is not limited to sportfish—it encompasses all organisms caught in their nets. This broad-based approach provides a comprehensive profile of the estuary, enabling researchers to observe changes across multiple species in relation to environmental conditions, water quality, climate, and habitat shifts.

Learn More.

Partner Happenings



Little Sarasota Bay Watershed Plan Update

Sarasota County Government Stormwater staff recently joined forces with a team of experts and the community to update the **Sarasota Bay Watershed Management Plan**. Update efforts employed modeling techniques to identify **flooding** and **water quality hotspots** in the **Little Sarasota Bay** and **Blackburn Bay Watersheds**, then developed a list of **potential conceptual projects to mitigate the identified issues**. This assessment of existing stormwater system design complements separate efforts underway by the County to address maintenance issues. The Sarasota Bay Estuary Program Executive Director, Dr. Ryan Gandy, Technical Advisory Committee, and members of the Citizens Advisory Committee participated in the public engagement process and provided valuable input during the update. The Program also provided aerials of Little Sarasota Bay to the project team.

Throughout the update process, a series of five two-hour Community Workshops were hosted for the public to learn about the update and to follow its progress. Participants provided valuable input to the consultant team and engaged in productive feedback and discussion. Once projects were identified, a series of one-hour Neighborhood Workshops were hosted to share general findings and focus on potential project concepts developed for specific neighborhoods.

Project materials are available to view and download on Sarasota County's Little Sarasota Bay **Watershed Management Plan update webpage**. Materials include Community Workshop agendas, minutes, and presentation slide decks, and the **Neighborhood Workshop presentation slide deck**. **Learn more**.

Living Shoreline Course

Do you want to learn about living shorelines, their functions, and importance? Then join **UF/IFAS Sarasota County** for a **2-day living shoreline course**. This hands-on 2-day course (8:30 am to 4:30 pm each day) is designed for those looking to gain knowledge of how to **permit and install living shorelines**, including marine contractors, landscape architects, municipality staff, property owners, and others interested in promoting living shorelines. Topics covered range from the benefits of installing a living shoreline to permit applications and include a field visit to a living shoreline site. **Learn more**.

Wastewater Wins



Sarasota County

In October, the SBEP Citizens Advisory Committee toured Sarasota County's newly upgraded **Bee Ridge Advanced Wastewater Treatment Facility**. The project will expand capacity from 12 to 18 million gallons per day and convert the plant to Advanced Wastewater Treatment standards, dramatically reducing nitrogen levels in treated water from roughly 16–18 mg/L to just 2–3 mg/L.

This 80–90% reduction in nitrogen will greatly **decrease nutrient pollution**, **eliminate problems from high-nutrient reclaimed water**, and help restore Sarasota Bay's health. Unlike older systems, the upgraded plant will have no surface water discharge, matching the high standards of the City of Sarasota's facility, which has benefited Upper Sarasota Bay. The Bee Ridge upgrade is the most significant project yet in meeting regional pollutant reduction goals and preparing our wastewater infrastructure for future growth. It represents a

major step toward long-term water quality restoration for Sarasota Bay. **Learn more**.

City of Bradenton

The city of Bradenton has committed over **$100 million** to modernize its aging wastewater system by **relining pipes**, **rehabilitating manholes and lift stations**, **expanding treatment capacity**, and **constructing a deep-well injection facility** to manage excess wet-season flow. These projects will reduce high-nutrient discharges, protect against flooding, and build resilience against rising seas and stronger storms. This is an important and impactful next step for the City that our program is proud to support. **Learn more**.

Explore More Community & Partner Events



Check out upcoming green events from over **100 local organizations** on the **Green Living Toolkit Community Events Calendar**.

CAC Spotlight: Lou Newman



Lou Newman has served on the SBEP Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) for decades. He has degrees in veterinary medicine from Cornell University and veterinary

pathology from Michigan State University. His early years were spent as a large animal cowboy vet and rancher in Montana; his later years were as director of veterinary diagnostic laboratories at the University of Kentucky and the University of Georgia. In addition to teaching on cruise ships following retirement, Lou has served as a volunteer veterinarian at Mote Marine Laboratory, Pelican Man Bird Sanctuary, and in Great Britain during the Foot and Mouth Disease outbreak.

On top of his impressive career, Lou is known locally for his **stunning wildlife and bird photography**, which you may have unknowingly seen in many of SBEP's materials. Lou was recently profiled in the Observer, in an article titled: ***Photography has done more than keep Lou Newman busy. It's kept him young***. **Read the article**. *Photo credit: Lou Newman*

In Case You Missed It

Director's Notes

- November 6, 2025: **Tracking our bay's health - what about bacteria?**
- October 29, 2025: **What would it look like if Melissa hit us?**
- October 10, 2025: **Hurricane Milton's one-year anniversary**
- October 7, 2025: **Sea level rise and wastewater treatment – is there reason for concern?**
- September 23, 2025: **City of Bradenton's efforts to reduce wastewater issues**
- September 3, 2025: **Potential sources of bacteria along Palma Sola Bay**
- August 20, 2025: **Bacteria Source Identification Efforts**
- August 7, 2025: **What's the big deal with seagrass coverage, anyway?**
- July 17, 2025: **Is rainfall trending in our region?**
- July 2, 2025: **Does Florida believe in climate change, or not?**

Field Notes

- October 8, 2025: **Autumn's Quiet Arrival**
- August 21, 2025: **Monitoring Fish Populations in Sarasota Bay**

Lights, Camera, Action! SBEP in the News



FISH tackles preserve invasives with $10K estuary grant



Living seawall solution to help Sarasota Bay as concrete seawalls

"The Florida Institute for Saltwater Heritage is advancing restoration work in its **95-acre preserve** through the removal of invasive species, native plantings, and infrastructure improvements. FISH, a nonprofit dedicated to promoting, educating and preserving the Cortez fishing village, manages several key properties in the area, including the FISH Preserve, a boat shop, Fishermen's Hall and the old Cortez fire station..."

are replaced by vinyl, other materials

At Bayfront Park, a living seawall stretches **300 feet long**, and this isn't an ordinary seawall – it's a vinyl seawall with concrete panels installed on top. "One of the things we've seen is about 80% of shoreline is hardened with seawalls and over the last couple of years we've seen the older aging concrete seawalls be replaced with plastic seawalls," said Dr. David Tomasko with Sarasota Bay Estuary Program.

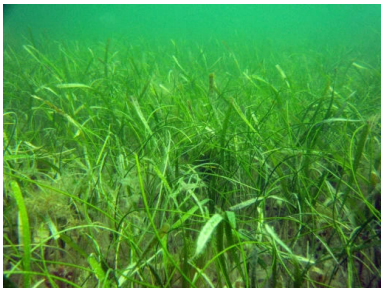
Read More SBEP in the News

Bite Sized Bay News



Restoring Habitat, Bolstering the Economy, and Supporting Jobs in Florida

A new analysis evaluates the impact of community-led habitat restoration projects in Florida. **It finds that 12 projects are estimated to support more than 1,000 jobs and increase economic activity**.



Seagrass Mapping—Your Questions Answered

Seagrasses are sensitive to environmental change and therefore make very good indicators of estuarine health. For this reason, District **scientists have been mapping seagrass habitat along the west-central and southwest Florida coast since 1988** to "take the pulse" of the estuary...



Beach Communities Hit by Major Storms Search for Ways to Reclaim Lost Sand

Gulf Coast counties are exploring **sustainable solutions** to restore impacted beaches.

Follow us

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